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Combining African-Centered and Critical Media Pedagogies: A 21st-Century Approach Toward Liberating the Minds of the Mis-Educated in the Digital Age

Shani Byard
Loyola Marymount University

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Shani Byard
Loyola Marymount University, drshanibyard@gmail.com

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by

Shani Byard

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Loyola Marymount University
School of Education
Los Angeles, CA 90045

This dissertation written by Shani Byard, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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Date

Dissertation Committee

[redacted]
Yvette Lapayese, Ph.D., Committee Chair

[redacted]
Jennie Spencer Green, Ph.D., Committee Member

[redacted]
Emmett G. Price III, Ph.D., Committee Member

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the beauty in the struggle.

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ABSTRACT

Combining African-Centered and Critical Media Pedagogies: A 21st-Century Approach Toward Liberating the Minds of the Mis-Educated in the Digital Age

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Since the slave trade, African Americans have been the most media-stereotyped race of people. From that time, multiple forms of media have been used to convince Blacks of their inevitable servitude and Whites of their supremacy (Burrell, 2010), as a means of transferring physical slavery to mental slavery (Akbar, 1998). Additionally, African Americans have been the victims of a Eurocentric educational system essentially designed to "mis-educate" (Woodson, 1933)—to further oppress and devalue African and African American contributions to our global history. This qualitative research study aimed to analyze an existing curricular model known as *Rise Above the Noise*, which combines two educational pedagogies, African-centered (Murrell, 2002) and critical media (Morrell, 2008; Thoman, 2003a), and is designed to appropriately educate and mentally liberate African Americans whose ancestors were displaced by slavery. I adopted a critical race methodology (Delgado, 1995a;Yosso, 2006), utilizing video interviews, counterstorytelling, journaling, and a focus group as data collection tools, and analyzed data according to Banks's (1982) model for appropriately educating the mis-educated (as cited and summarized by Akbar, 1998), known as D-R-C

(deconstructionist—reconstructionist—constructionist). Using a convenience sample of five African American young adults (ages 18-30) from Los Angeles, CA who were considered socioeconomically disadvantaged, I attempted to discover how the implementation of a combined African-centered/critical media literacy pedagogy could impel participants to transform their current life circumstances.

CHAPTER ONE

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

"The slavery that captures the mind and imprisons the motivation, perception, aspiration and identity in a web of anti-self images, generating a personal and collective self-destruction, is more cruel than the shackles on the wrists and ankles" (Akbar, 1996, p. v). What Akbar described above is the essence of mental slavery. How does an oppressed race of people—defined by a dominant race of people—attain mental liberation in the Digital Age? I will attempt to answer this question in the coming pages of this dissertation.

The American economy was built largely upon the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade, slavery in America, Black Codes, tenant farming, Jim Crow, and systemic racism; 500 years of death, rape, and oppression were perpetrated first by the African slave trade, then transferred to the African American family. White superiority and the impact of colonialism have played critical roles in America's socioeconomic and educational development since the 1600s. Elite Europeans in America (in scholarly, religious, and medical professions) have made multiple efforts to degrade the historical contributions and intelligence of African people. They replaced African spiritual practices and downgraded the anthropological attributes of Africans in America (Hilliard, Stewart, & Williams, 1990; Leary, 2005). In the 1880s, Sir Richard Burton (as cited in Hilliard et al., 1990), a well-known ethnologist, drew this scholarly conclusion regarding Africans in America: "The study of the Negro is the study of Man's rudimentary mind. He would

appear rather a degeneracy from the civilized man than a savage rising to the first step, were it not for his total incapacity for improvement" (p. xv). Media campaigns enhanced this type of propaganda—flyer postings, newsletters, newspapers, minstrel theatre, and, in later years, film and radio—and were designed to convince Africans in America of their innate inferiority and inevitable servitude to White America so that White elitists could capitalize on it all (Ani, 1994; Burrell, 2010). What eventually manifested as institutional racism sustained itself systemically and continues to thwart healthy identity development (Asante, 1998), as well as limit academic achievement and economic development for African Americans. This tumultuous history has seeped deeply into the psyche of all Americans and has had a detrimental effect on the treatment and education of Black youth. The long-term generational impact of first physical, then mental, slavery has effectively stripped away the essence of indigenous spiritual and cultural beliefs and educational practices within the nationwide Black community (Leary, 2005; Shahadah, 2005). According to the African American Council of Elders (2002), the traditional formulation of elder councils—the assemblage of "collective wisdom charged to mobilize for the betterment and survival of the whole"—has been depleted, and the African American "community has lost their way" (p. 8). When researching the importance of funding culture-specific intervention and prevention programs for African American men and boys, the 21st Century Foundation (2008) discovered institutional racism, inadequate leadership, media reinforcement of negative stereotypes, and lack of unity and accountability to be the primary issues faced by the Black community. In 2007, the NAACP declared a state of emergency in the nationwide African American community.

In 2008, I developed the organization Message Media Ed to introduce critical media literacy (from an African-centered perspective) to the African American community of Los Angeles, as a means to intervene and empower. Core principles of Message Media Ed operate from the position that a Eurocentric, 20th-century approach to an Africentric problem in the Digital Age will not resolve the severe disparities in achievement, the bruised and polluted self-image, and the limited advancement of the African American. I also embrace the African proverb, "It takes a *village* to raise a child," and conclude that it is more applicable to the African American community now than ever before. Historical movement—the Underground Railroad, Marcus Garvey, Civil Rights, Black Power—within the Black community have laid the foundation for future generations to utilize culture-specific education and informal educational settings to cultivate the type of community empowerment needed to reconstruct today's dismantled *village* that the above African proverb references.

Therefore, the intent of Message Media Ed is to empower the *village* members needed to raise a child. Rise Above the Noise (RAN), a program currently offered to African American community members in South Los Angeles, California combines African-centered and critical media pedagogies to intervene in mental enslavement and produce mentally liberated youth, adults, and seniors. "Critical awareness through media literacy can be liberating. Through awareness, choice becomes a possibility . . . individuals can be more effective advocates for themselves and others" (Horn, 2003, p. 300). Goals for this dissertation include (a) documenting, describing, and analyzing the emergence of culturally conscious, media-literate individuals; and (b) analyzing the

impact that combined pedagogies can have on participants deemed historically marginalized and mentally enslaved.

African-Centered Pedagogy

Educators, role models, and leaders cognizant of the issues stifling Black populations and who teach and/or mentor Black youth should adopt transformative and holistic practices that identify the biases in Eurocentric education, and replace the model with Afrocentric education (Hilliard et al., 1990; Nobles, 1990). The mis-education (Woodson, 1933) of African Americans is the result of a Eurocentric American educational system designed to sustain mental enslavement. Africentric education provides the foundation for socially just knowledge, creating equitable education across all ethnic backgrounds based on a truthful account of historical contributions that have been omitted from the classrooms and from American history books (Hilliard et al., 1990; Woodson, 1933). To digest these concepts and step into the 21st century, Murrell (2002) has formulated African-Centered Pedagogy (ACP), a holistic educational model founded on the above-stated principles, designed to accelerate academic achievement for African American students. Similar to Afrocentric education, Murrell (2002) has explained of ACP that "The aim is to link the heritage of cultural practices and learning practices in the African American experience with the immediate school experiences of African American students in ways that promote their development as well as achievement" (p. xxxi).

By establishing authentic African learning environments designed to support Black youth in revolutionizing the educational system, ACP essentially counters

Eurocentric education and emphasizes communalism, social inquiry, and inclusivity. ACP fosters a "collective self definition" (Murrell, 2002, p. 138), in which the individual and the community of learners are united in defining and identifying their interconnected roles toward re-education and mobilization. This holistic approach to instruction produces the ingredients needed for increased self-esteem (Mandara, Richards, Harden, & Ragsdale, 2009), to thrive academically (Merry & New, 2008), and to awaken the mind and transform consciousness (Akbar, 1996, 1998; Woodson, 1933).

Critical Media Pedagogy

Concerned with similar issues related to equitable education for students from all socially oppressed groups, Kellner and Share (2005) and Morrell (2008) have asserted critical media pedagogy (CMP) as an approach toward instruction and education for the whole child in the Digital Age. Critical media pedagogy encourages the development of critical thinkers and, by default, critical viewers and users of television and multimedia. If educators are to meet the needs and challenges of contemporary culture, they will need to expand on their concept of literacy and develop new curricula and pedagogies that include media literacy (Kellner & Share, 2005). The tools of media literacy are the tools for inquiry and production. Learning the language of—and analyzing—media equips students with the skills to question what they see, read, and hear, enabling them to both deconstruct and construct the world around them. Thus, according to Thoman (2003a), "When analysis is combined with creative production, theory unites with application, thereby allowing students to discover and express their learning in a natural and interconnected process" (p. 278).

In our society, television, advertising, and other forms of mass media have become more prominent in children's lives than school (Morrell, 2008). According to Goodman (2003), our media culture "supersede[s] the role of school as a powerful socializing influence on our nation's children, shaping their values, beliefs, and habits of mind" (p. 10). Kellner and Share (2005) have identified this dominating force as a ubiquitous pedagogy. Media producers engage in creating social and cultural structures—unquestioned understandings—that have become normalized in our society and thrive on "inequities and injustices of a society based on gender, race, and class inequalities and discrimination" (Kellner & Share, 2005, p. 370). Because our media-driven society constructs images and, ultimately, our collective understanding of the world, media literacy has become "arguably more important than ever" (Kellner & Share, 2005, p. 370) and is thus an essential component of a critical media learning environment (Morrell, 2008).

Rise Above the Noise (RAN)

Rise Above the Noise is currently implemented in Los Angeles on a quarterly basis as a professional development program under the umbrella of Message Media Ed, an organization I founded in January 2008. It refreshingly combines African-centered and critical media pedagogies in a transformative way. RAN is a six-hour professional development workshop that creates a supportive and creative learning space in which to practice critical media literacy through the lens of individuals of African descent displaced by slavery and now surviving in America. Within a transformative curricular framework, youth, adults, and seniors gather to think critically about and counter media

messages targeting the Black community in this country. They analyze the techniques used by media (images, aesthetics, music, language, tone, etc.) to send a message of Black inferiority, failure, and stereotypes to both Black and White audiences and build the necessary tools to counter those messages.

RAN explores the plight of the Black community, screens "docu-shorts" that highlight media manipulation, and engages participants in critical discourse in order to derive individual and collective meaning. Using the screenings as reference points, participants share how they have experienced the impact of media in similar or different ways. After viewing examples of negative media, participants are introduced to the tools of media literacy and practice answering and discussing key questions and concepts of media literacy (Thoman, 2003a). Participants are then introduced to a brief overview of video production and digital storytelling. Application of new knowledge occurs in real time as they work together to produce digital counterstories (Delgado, 1995b; Morrell, 2008; Yosso, 2006), educational media (video) messages for online podcast. The entire experience is rooted in African principles, language, and educational practices (Murrell, 2002). Participants complete RAN charged to share new knowledge and elicit communal change by utilizing traditional and cyber means of communication, modeling the daily deconstruction of systemic Eurocentric paradigms, and mending their African *village*.

Statement of the Problem

> To handicap a student for life by teaching him that his black face is a curse and that his struggle to change his condition is hopeless, is the worst kind of lynching. It kills one's aspirations and dooms him to vagabondage and crime. (Woodson, 1933, p. 90)

Based on the recent social injustices highlighted in the media by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (2007)—the incarceration of Mycall Bell, Jesse Beard, Theo Shaw, Bryant Purvis, Carwin Jones, and Robert Bailey, Jr., six Black male high school students in Jena, Louisiana; the New York shooting (20 shots fired from five policemen) of 18-year-old Black male Khiel Coppin; and, the brutal beating by police (caught on videotape) of Donavan Jackson-Chavis in Los Angeles—the NAACP declared a state of emergency in the nationwide Black community. According to then-Senator Barack Obama (2007), across the country more than 30% of Black children are poor, two-thirds grow up in a single-parent household, six out of 10 drop out of high school and end up in prison, and the AIDS rate is highest within the Black community. Additionally, "From 2002-2004, African Americans were 58% of youth admitted to state adult prisons" (National Council on Crime & Delinquency, 2008, p. 3).

Since the beginning of the African slave trade, European colonialism has fueled the development of a racism designed to oppress African people in the name of capitalism. Colonialism remains effective today in its ability to reach and grab hold of the psyche, in its normalizing of White culture and European ideologies, its competitive

nature, and its individualistic ideals and oppressive economic practices (Ani, 1994; Murrell, 2002). It makes acceptable those social structures, images, and beliefs that benefit the dominant culture (Freire, 1970; McLaren, 2009). Indeed, slavery has been transferred from a physical state to a mental one (Asante, 1998; Akbar, 1996), and racism is institutionalized. This ideology is the essence of Eurocentrism.

Eurocentrism has been infused in our educational framework, the implications of which are what Woodson (1933) has identified as the "mis-education of the Negro," a strategic and systematic method of extracting authentic accounts of African history and contributions, and replacing them with European history, ideology, religion, and economic practices. Eurocentric education has served as a means of perpetuating mental slavery, normalizing the production of mis-educated African Americans across the nation (Akbar, 1998; Woodson, 1933). Asante (1998) has argued that the African's displacement from Africa to America was involuntary and that issues related to the African American's capacity to develop a self-concept in the 20th century stem from colonial acts of mental and physical enslavement since the 1600s. Asante asserted that Europeans have always had a stake in the way Africans, and now African Americans, "see themselves" (p. 41), a critical factor supporting the ability to oppress and enslave a people.

According to a recent study of African and African American students in a Philadelphia public high school, students were frustrated by the egregious lack of African studies and interest in Africa throughout their schooling (Traore, 2004). Merry and New (2008) added that White teachers and school leaders often view Black youth as inferior

and incapable of learning at the same level as White children. Taken together, I draw the unfortunate conclusion that in order for African American youth (descendants of African slaves in America) to obtain a critically and culturally conscious, media literacy-based education in the 21st century and the Digital Age, there must exist an informal learning space in which to appropriately re-educate this mis-educated population.

Educational and Digital Divides

In addition to institutional racism and the systemic normalization of failure for African American students (Gregory, Nygreen & Moran, 2006; Murrell, 2002), disparities in school district spending efforts in underserved communities and statewide funding cuts in critical human service areas are key issues stifling our public school system. These issues also contribute to what has been labeled "the achievement gap," creating a national need for school and pedagogical reform (21st CF, 2008; Noguera, 2008; National Urban League, 2007; Cummins, 2006; Gregory et al., 2006; Noguera & Wing, 2006; Murrell, 2002). In the Los Angeles Unified School District, only 48% of African American and Latino students who enter high school in the 9th-grade complete 12th-grade four years later (Harvard University, 2005). In the 2002-2003 school year, 72% of US students received a high school diploma and 50% of African American males dropped out (Martin & Halperin, 2006). Additionally, as our society adapts to a new global economy, and as we transform into a media-driven (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, & Weigel, 2006) and technologically-driven culture, Black youth and families with limited resources are becoming highly susceptible to the dangers of media influence (Boles, 2007); moreover, due to the lack of access to computers and skilled use of them

(Sahay, 2006; Eamon, 2004) the existing digital divide is expanding. According to Fairlie (2005), 50% of Black households have computers, as opposed to 74% of White households. Without the support of a skilled and knowledgeable cultural community, Eurocentric American culture is currently propagating the absorption of negative media influences by Black youth.

A Proposed Solution

The 21st century and the Digital Age are critical timeframes for igniting social change and promoting community advancement for African Americans. As Wyatt, the 21st Century Foundation (2008) Board Chair, has suggested, collective outrage is due. Just as the Twenty-First Century Foundation launched an initiative to fund organizations that address the root cause of issues facing the Black community, community leaders, role models, educators, seniors, parents, and youth must tap into the traditional African approach toward education and collectively participate in the digital landscape in order to mend, rebuild, and strengthen the support network needed to halt further dismantling of the African American community.

As educators, we must analyze our own pedagogies to ensure that we do not perpetuate the Eurocentric pedagogies currently in place that blind us from seeing and igniting the innate brilliance that African American students have to offer in all learning environments. "To understand the social-cultural context of schools in relation to the achievement of African American children is to understand the human systems that make up school practices" (Murrell, 2002, p. xxxi). This research study is dedicated to introducing a culturally conscious, media-literate learning environment for mis-educated

African Americans in the Digital Age in order to discern truth and motives behind media messages and to counter oppression.

Purpose of the Study

Essentially, the purpose of this study is to document, measure, and analyze the impact of a contemporary intervention pedagogy and curriculum designed specifically for African Americans whose ancestors were displaced from Africa to America through slavery. I have observed and facilitated the curriculum and combined pedagogical design (African-centered/critical media), analyzing its ability to build self-efficacy and liberate the minds of African American participants from Los Angeles. By producing digital counterstories (Delgado, 1995b; Morrell, 2008; Yosso, 2006), I have documented the process by which participants become advocates for themselves and take action toward creating a positive self and communal definition (Murrell, 2002).

Significance of the Study

Essentially, Rise Above the Noise creates a space for cultural healing and skill building in media analysis, a combined experience foreign to the majority of mis-educated (Woodson, 1933) Africans in America. Many existing schools and programs across the country utilize an African-centered pedagogy (Murrell, 2002) as a means toward re-educating or appropriately educating African American youth (typically under the age of 18), and to counter Eurocentric education. Existing informal programs and current formal curricula integrate critical media and media literacy concepts (Morrell, 2008; Thoman, 2003a) into instruction in order to expose youth (throughout the K-12 academic path, and beyond) to the harmful effects of media influence and to build skills in media analysis and production.

However, no existing schools, programs, or curricula for young adults (ages 18-30) combine African-centered and critical media pedagogies in high quality, informal learning environments for achieving mental liberation. For this very reason, this research study on RAN is innovative and significant for the field of education.

Informal evaluations of RAN, prior to this research study, have allowed me to draw the conclusion that the curriculum is effective. Postevaluations from previous RAN participants included such statements as "I am awakened"; "I realized I am in the system. I am not free"; and "I think this could become a very important touchstone for LA's African American community". This research study is my attempt to find out *how* RAN works—essentially how participants reach these conclusions. To this end, I have documented and analyzed the experience of each individual. The data collected and analysis from this study can serve as a model for attaining cultural empowerment for Africans throughout the Diaspora and for other oppressed cultural groups affected by generations of colonialism and Eurocentrism, and who now live in the 21st century and Digital Age.

Research Question

The research question guiding this qualitative research study is:

> How does the implementation of a combined African-Centered/critical media literacy pedagogy impel participants to transform their current life circumstances?

To answer this overarching question, I implemented the RAN curriculum, analyzed participant self/collective perceptions and learning, and assessed how African-centered

pedagogy and critical media pedagogy inform each other throughout the implementation process.

Limitations/Delimitations

Generally, participants who fit the demographic criteria in this research study can be difficult to reach. Sometimes, even with the help of social workers and counselors, individuals facing challenges in life have a tendency not to show up for studies like these. It was helpful to gain referrals and incorporate incentives. However, I did encounter a challenge with one participant. Although I proposed to have six participants in this study, only five of them were able to participate. A delimitation for this type of research study relates directly to qualitative studies in general. Utilizing a small sample size allows for more in-depth data collection, but limits the potential for generalizability; however, because this research study commences a longitudinal study, my hope is that, eventually, the data collected over time will be translatable to a larger population, and therefore will become generalizable.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Around the 1950s, my uncle (my mom's youngest brother) was five years old and came running in from playing outside, in the small city of Trenton, New Jersey. He was complaining that "those mean Black kids" took his ball and wouldn't give it back. To everyone's astonishment, my mother, her other two brothers, and my grandmother and grandfather were shocked and just stared at my uncle for a bit. My grandmother was the one who broke the silence and said, "Michael, what do you mean *those* Black kids? Baby you are Black too. We all are." My mother remembers my uncle looking quite stunned and confused. My mom added, "We're light skinned, but we are Black." My uncle understood and was devastated. My mom says he cried for a very long time that day. At the dawning of the Civil Rights Movement, moving out of Jim Crow, and transitioning from radio to TV, it was clear that some part of society or multiple parts had shaped my uncle's perception—even at the age of five—about the superiority of one race over another. My uncle clearly preferred to separate himself from being Black in America. Black images, through TV, print, radio, and film have been demeaned, degraded, and stereotyped for hundreds of years (Ani, 1994). As Woodson (1933) has said, "The thought of the inferiority of the Negro is drilled into him in almost every class he enters and in almost every book he studies" (p. 2).

In 2008, I developed an organization called Message Media Ed., a culture-specific, media literacy-based professional development organization dedicated to

academic, social, and economic advancement for youth and families of African descent. The vision of Message Media Ed is to develop culturally conscious leaders equipped with the new media and technological skill-sets that match the needs of the 21st century community, classroom, and workplace. Through Message Media Ed, I have designed multiple programs aimed to empower participants to transform existing regressive frames of reference within the Black community from 20th-century thought to 21st-century action. In a country where Eurocentric corporate American media has replaced the traditional role of the African Elder—as teacher, mediator, leader, value shaper—for Black community members, Rise Above the Noise (RAN) challenges program participants to disconnect themselves from what has become the normative perspective of African Americans in the media and to produce authentic media messages of empowerment for themselves and their community. The set of tools Rise Above the Noise uses to achieve its mission, combines critical pedagogy, specifically critical media pedagogy, with African-centered pedagogy within an informal, transformative learning environment.

The purpose of this literature review is to codify and discuss existing research that provides a scholarly foundation for answering the following research question: How does the implementation of a combined African-centered/critical media pedagogy impel students to transform their current life circumstances? To answer this overarching question in this research study, I analyzed the learning experiences and perceptions of participants, and assessed how African-centered pedagogy and critical media pedagogy informed each other throughout the implementation process of Rise Above the Noise.

To prepare for the study, this literature review defines Eurocentrism as it relates to the current life circumstances of African Americans, explores media influence as a tool for sustaining mental slavery, and introduces and discusses critical theory and pedagogy, critical media pedagogy, critical literacy and media literacy, and culturally relevant and African-centered pedagogies. My premise was that, when combined, African-centered/critical media pedagogy has the potential to facilitate mental liberation and community advancement in the Digital Age for African Americans. By developing Message Media Ed, I have attempted to translate this theory into practice. Therefore, this hybrid pedagogical formula, designed to appropriately educate the mis-educated and to mentally liberate a race of people who have essentially lost their way, was under investigation in real time. Additionally, I assumed that because systemic educational reform is and will continue to be a time-consuming process that involves encountering many bureaucratic hurdles, and because the disparities among Black youth and Black communities continue to widen academically, socially, and economically, informal educational environments for intervention (like learning spaces provided by Message Media Ed) are the most radical and effective means of transforming Black communities across the nation. Eger (2008) stated that a radical shift is needed; for my part, I argued that in our technological and media-driven society, all members of the Black community need immediate intervention. The hybrid pedagogical formula introduced in this dissertation is a 21st-century beginning.

Eurocentrism

> I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented… I can easily buy posters, post-cards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys and children's magazines featuring people of my race… I will feel welcomed and normal in the usual walks of public life, institutional and social. (McIntosh, 1988, pps. 2-3)

Extracted from a working paper, these assertions by McIntosh (1988) enumerate the ways that White privilege works to her advantage. By listing tangible, relatable examples, she paints a clear picture of a social phenomenon that has become the norm in American culture. In order to survive and thrive in society, a thorough understanding of modern-day privilege should be taken into consideration when identifying, designing, and refining pedagogy that will support the navigation of hegemony in the Digital Age. According to Delgado (1995a), what McIntosh identifies as White privilege is produced and sustained by a "white supremacist consciousness." Mezirow and Taylor (2009) have asserted that although the US consists of people from multiple cultural and ethnic backgrounds, the dominant cultural norm reflects the systemic colonial mindset of British and European conquerors from hundreds of years ago. This White supremacist consciousness refers to a system of thought that is ubiquitous in nature and which manifests as attitudes, cultural messages, and institutional practices sustaining a White advantage (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). This consciousness constitutes central European ideologies, also known as Eurocentrism.

"European world supremacy is part of the definition of European ideology [and] in this world view, the universe is there to be conquered" (Ani, 1994, p. 296). Burrell (2010) has asserted that White supremacist consciousness has been embedded in the psyche of all Americans through the skilled use of media and propaganda. The impact of White supremacist consciousness strengthens the social construct of Black inferiority, and media has been the 500-year-old tool to ensure its effects. Ani (1994) has referred to this phenomenon as "image control," and says that European cultural supremacy survives only if others are portrayed negatively: "The European self-image has always been based on the implicit perception of cultural/racial difference… the positive European self-image *is* a negative image of others" (Ani, 1994, p. 265). Regarding our Eurocentric educational system, "In the absence of a framework that critically interrogates the hidden but harmful instructional and curricular practices, [educators] are certain to continue to harm African American children" (Murrell, 2002, p. xxx). Characteristics of Eurocentric education draw upon an ideology of individualism—relying on the self to succeed. If you have the right genetic make-up, progress is possible; and if you succeed, only you should receive opportunities over others (Murrell, 2002). So to begin confronting this deep-seated consciousness as African Americans, our first step is creating a new consciousness by questioning and challenging this ubiquitous Eurocentric ideology (Murrell, 2002) and reprogramming Black thought (Burrell, 2010).

Media Influence as Mental Slavery

Hunt (2005) has asserted that the fundamental goal for TV programming is to attract viewers, sell a product, and convince consumers that purchasing that product will

ultimately make them feel better about themselves. Connecting with the emotional need to feel good is often why media advertisers include actors, music, familiar environments, and editing that mirror the latest societal trends so that the viewer can immediately relate to the product being promoted. Often, this strong attraction to the product is part of an emotional connection that leads the viewer to feel an obligation to purchase it. Advertising, a significant aspect of media, is a strong influencing tool and appeals to the human need for instant gratification, but it can also override the ability to reason.

Gore (2007) has described this override as an "assault." He experienced this phenomenon when running for the US Senate in 1984. He took polls in order for his public relations team to determine the next strategic move in his campaign. Based on the data it collected, his team concluded that it needed to run a certain number of ads over a three-week period in order to increase his approval in the polls by 8.5%. He approved the strategy and, exactly three weeks later, his lead increased by 8.5%. Gore provided tangible proof that advertising is, in fact, "an assault" on public reasoning.

According to Burrell (2010), the message sold by corporate American media (since Africans were brought to America by European slave owners) to the American public has been Black inferiority. Additionally, due to the advent of slavery and the extent to which White colonizers went to maintain slavery as law, Burrell has asserted that patterns in Black consumerism indicate purchases of high-end brands to compensate for low self-esteem, and disproportionate spending on products related to bodily cleanliness to compensate for being stereotyped by the media and society as dirty

(physically and symbolically). Media used as propaganda, especially when combining visual imagery with text and/or audio, is a powerful brainwashing tool (Burrell, 2010).

Ani (1994) has explained that from the late 1800s to the early 1900s (during the US Reconstruction), European media makers conducted a systematic assault on African Americans. This period saw the launch of the "image making business" (p. 295), in which "the most effective weapons [were] used to ensure the exploitation and dependency of people of African descent" (p. 294). Ani (1994) described the manipulation of the Black image in the following terms: authentic African braids were portrayed in film as standing straight up with ribbons; smooth dark skin became shiny and plastic looking; lips became enlarged and bright red. Because Hollywood and news media makers were and have been predominantly White, this construction of negatively stereotyped Black images persists today.

Impressionable teens, who are frequent viewers and users of multiple forms of media, are impacted (most of the time subconsciously) by the distinct power and influence of media advertising and media messages. The Kaiser Family Foundation (2005) conducted a research study on youth whom they have dubbed as the "M-Media Generation." Youth, ages 8-18, use all forms of broadcast, interactive, digital, Internet, and print media. This study analyzed media environments, media exposure, and media use and their effect on the academic performance, behavior, and personal functioning of youth from multiple ethnic backgrounds. The Kaiser (2005) study showed that African American youth were more likely to be attracted to TV and to have a television and an additional media source in their bedrooms, such as satellite/cable, video games, or DVRs,

than White youth. Whereas 43% of African American youth surveyed said they had some sort of rules in their house, only 8% had rules regarding the amount of time spent engaged with the media, and only 7% had rules regarding the type of media content they were able to use or view. The study indicated that 74% of African American households had the TV on during meals—15% more than White households. "Clearly, in homes where the TV plays a central role in defining the environment, all media exposure increases" (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2005, p. 46).

In the current post–Civil Rights era, African Americans are widely influenced by the media and have not, as a whole, acquired the skill-set needed to cultivate social capital—"features of social life: networks, norms and trust, that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives" (Putnam, 1996)—and to navigate our media-saturated, consumer-driven society, educational system, and workplaces. As a direct implication, African Americans account for an incredibly high percentage of consumerism and have less impact on production compared to other ethnicities. By the year 2012, the annual African American buying power is projected to reach $1.1 trillion (Neilson Media Research, 2007). Media influence is a powerful tool for corporate advertisers and is clearly an effective tool within the Black community.

"Advertising is as concerned with selling lifestyles and socially desirable identities… as with selling the products themselves" (Kellner, 1995, p. 252). Media content in the form of "sexual messages, stereotypes and fantasy violence" (Heins & Cho, 2003) is a huge concern in terms of media influence on young people. Additionally, cable networks such as MTV and BET perpetually promote messages encouraging young

people to place higher value on material gain and entitlement. Such messages inculcate young people into the belief that the most important resources available to them are not their own, thus making them feel self-conscious and/or self-loathing enough to purchase a product advertised to them (Morrell, 2008). This messaging is in direct opposition to ancient African culture and the system of practices of African-centered learning. Messages related to human resources and self-knowledge, innovation and a disciplined work ethic, social/cultural capital cultivation, healthy interpersonal and intergenerational relationships, and community involvement are absent in the media messages Black communities typically receive. Messages of empowerment are virtually invisible to the public eye. Television spends a great proportion of advertising dollars to maintain its loyal Black consumer base and its contribution to America's Eurocentric system of domination.

African Americans, as a whole, lack the knowledge to discern the impact that media messages have on their self-image. Boles (2007) has identified the lack of role models presented in the media, pointing out that many Black fathers contribute to society in responsible and productive ways: "they build strong families, pay taxes and give back to their communities" (Boles, 2007, p. 239). However, young Black males do not see these role models depicted enough in the media. Instead, media images are designed to reinforce stereotypes and false expectations. "The disproportionate media coverage and glorification of black entertainers and sports figures (especially those engaging in unhealthy behavior) plays a large role in the immediate desire for riches" (Boles, 2007, p. 240). Sadly, media influence has played an active role in shaping the way African

Americans "see themselves" (Asante, 1998, p. 41) and participate in society. Instead of indigenous African culture, in which tradition, beliefs, and values serve as guides or elder councils function as community role models, corporate media tools guide the majority of African Americans toward participation as eager consumers, as opposed to producers. Promoting a society devoid of elder councils and without the support of a skilled and knowledgeable cultural community, America sustains the consistent absorption of negative media influences and the development of a new generation of mentally enslaved unqualified workers, materialistic entrepreneurs and dubious leadership for the Black community (Kunjufu, 1986).

Critical Pedagogy

"Critical educators argue that any worthwhile theory of schooling must be… fundamentally tied to a struggle for a qualitatively better life for all through the construction of a society based on nonexploitative relations and social justice" (McLaren, 2009, p. 62). In this dissertation, I have explored the birth of a hybrid pedagogy—African-centered and critical media—designed to counter the injustice imposed on African Americans through the American educational system and through media influence, in order to liberate them from mental slavery and oppression in the Digital Age. Critical pedagogy analyzes injustices related to class, race, and gender. With this aim in mind, this section explores concepts of critical theory and pedagogy—power, privilege, dialectics, knowledge construction, critical consciousness, social reproduction, hegemony, ideology, hidden curriculum, and praxis—as they align with the struggle of African Americans.

Critical theory begins with the premise that "Men and women are essentially unfree and inhabit a world rife with contradictions and asymmetries of power and privilege" (McLaren, 2009, p. 61). According to critical theorists, we are constantly engaged in a struggle against oppression by those in power; a good example of this subjugation is the European Slave Trade and the continuous struggle for physical and mental freedom that African Americans have engaged in for hundreds of years. All social structures, institutions, educational systems, and the dominant ideology in America were established by European slave owners for the purpose of cultivating generational wealth, privilege, and power.

Critical theorists also maintain that social problems similar to the African American struggle are not separate events; rather, they are "dialectical," meaning that they function as an exchange between the individual and society. A constant "interactive context" (McLaren, 2009, p. 61) is occurring, whereby each contributor creates the social structure in which he or she functions. With regard to education, "a dialectical understanding of schooling permits us to see schools as sites of both domination and liberation" (p. 62). Critical theory identifies variables in the power struggle, correlates them to race, class, and/or gender, and recognizes the classroom as a space for "constructing knowledge" in a way that sustains power. To deconstruct these power struggles, critical educators create a learning space for a dialectical dance between the individual and "critical consciousness" (Freire, 1974). Freire (1998) stated:

> It is our immersion in this consciousness that gives rise to a permanent movement of curious interrogation… that leads us to an awareness of the world [and]

> scientific knowledge of it. This permanent movement of searching creates a capacity for learning, not only in order to adapt to the world but especially to intervene, to re-create, and to transform it. (p. 66)

Constant interrogation of a system designed to oppress can spark the awareness needed to attain freedom. Without critical consciousness, those in power will continue to construct and legitimize society's dominant realm of knowledge, and all other voices, contributions, innovations, experiences will be left out. It is the job of the critical educator to expose this social construct, question and analyze it, to create the space for all forms of knowledge to be presented and validated, and to construct new "forms of knowledge" within the learning environment. In the traditional educational practices of Americans of African descent, prior to the slave trade, knowledge was constructed as a collective and drawn from the historical, spiritual, symbolic, ritualistic, and educational practices of African culture. Throughout American history, this cultural form of knowledge has been deemed illegitimate, and it has been strategically dismantled and systemically extracted from the American classroom (Murrell, 2002; Traore, 2004; Woodson; 1933).

As McLaren (2009) stated:

> Cultural forms are those symbols and social practices that express culture, such as those found in music, dress, food, religion, dance, education, which have developed from the efforts of groups to share their lives out of their surrounding material and political environment. Television, video and films are regarded as cultural forms. Schooling is also a cultural form. (p. 66)

Once the slave trade began, all aspects of culture that formulated the identity of Africans in America were replaced by dominant cultural forms, and media and schooling became the social tools for constructing and sustaining a dominant European form of knowledge. This institutionalized oppression is why critical pedagogy is so important in the classroom environment: teachers should not sustain and transfer dominant knowledge. "To know how to teach is to create possibilities for the construction and production of knowledge rather than to be engaged in a game of transferring knowledge" (Friere, 1998, p. 49).

According to McLaren (2009), "*Hegemony* is a cultural encasement of meanings, a prison-house of language and ideas that is 'freely' entered into by both dominators and dominated" (p. 67). The term "freely" is in quotations because when the dominant group constructs knowledge for all cultural groups, the dominated or subordinate group doesn't know to seek any other forms of knowledge. Cultural groups become conditioned to think that truths are only to be found on television, in texts at schools, or in printed news, all sources that more than likely reflect and are controlled by a master storyteller, a practitioner of European hegemony. Therefore, "the dominant class, need not impose force for the manufacture of hegemony since the subordinate class actively subscribes to many of the values and objectives of the dominant class" (McLaren, 2009, p. 67). This "subscription" to European hegemony is the result of the mis-education that Woodson (1933) references. A well-oiled machine, this system of hegemony establishes an ideology that, without critical consciousness, is seemingly impervious.

McLaren (2009) has reminded us that "Ideology refers to the production of sense

and meaning" (p. 69) and that hegemony cannot be actualized without it. Sense and meaning shape the way members of society view the world, experience interactions, and have beliefs and values. Ideology informs our communication, discourse, and judgments; most importantly, and specifically related to this paper, it informs our pedagogy. Therefore, critical educators constantly analyze the derivation of their own ideologies and encourage their students to do the same. This process is especially important when discussing another critical theory concept—"the hidden curriculum," which McLaren (2009) has defined in the following way:

> The hidden curriculum refers to the unintended outcomes of the schooling process. Critical educators recognize that schools shape students both through standardized learning situations, and through other agendas including… the informal pedagogical procedures used by teachers with specific groups of students. (p. 75)

The hidden curriculum can, in fact, reproduce a social standard that becomes normalized in the classroom, and can be transferred to society. For instance, if a teacher is influenced by a corporate American media campaign designed to promote a movie that portrays Black boys as violent and abusive toward White female teachers, she/he may subconsciously formulate a negative judgment toward a Black male student and adjust her/his approach toward teaching him. These teachers may distance themselves from interaction with him or, conversely, give him a good grade on a paper to avoid making him angry by assigning a lower grade, and so forth. This adapted judgment and action of the educator's interaction with Black boys can transfer out of the classroom to Black men

and into society. Just the same, media utilized as a tool for sustaining the dominant ideology can fuel the hidden curriculum of educators (Horn, 2003). Addressing the impact of propaganda and the hidden curriculum, Woodson (1933) maintained, "This [propaganda] crusade [in schools] is much more important than the anti-lynching movement, because there would be no lynching if it did not start in the classroom" (p. 3).

How do we effectively counter this horrific reality? Bourdieu (2008) has theorized that those in power have taken "social action" to sustain the power of the upper class so that the lower class continues to be powerless. Our public school system, on a local and national level, has not only sustained powerlessness amongst the poor, but has also pushed out African American students at an incredibly alarming rate (Noguera 2008; Noguera & Wing, 2006). Without social action or the agency needed to transform our social structures, we will never produce the change agents needed to transform as a society. According to Freire (1970), critical consciousness coupled with praxis equips the critical learner with the tools needed "to intervene, to re-create, and transform [the world]" (Friere, 1998, p. 66). Praxis "is a close relationship between discourse and action, between symbolic analysis and concrete action, using language as a tool to enhance our understanding of experience—theorizing practice and practicing theory" (Shor, 2009, p. 293). Without praxis, critical theory and pedagogy are just verbal and constant questions, with no tangible means of counter or resolve.

Critical Media Pedagogy

Critical media pedagogy "involves counterhegemonic instruction aimed at developing a consciousness of the role of the media in configuring social thought"

(Morrell, 2008, p. 158). In a technological revolution, media is produced at record speeds. Educators and role models must evolve with society and culture and develop multiple literacies as a means of engaging and preparing youth to excel. Utilizing critical media pedagogy (CMP), educational leaders (both formally and informally) can empower learners to critically analyze the language and message of media and produce alternative media that reinforces community building and understanding of other marginalized groups—and that authentically represents their cultures (Morrell, 2008). Indeed, "if education is to be relevant to the problems and challenges of contemporary life, engaged teachers must expand the concept of literacy and develop new curricula and pedagogies" (Kellner & Share, 2005, p. 370). Media, corporate America, and public educational systems are information powerhouses sending messages in a language founded on greed and power that influences people of color, leading to limited thinking, dependency on consumer goods, low self-esteem, and academic failure (Morrell, 2008). Critical literacy produces individuals literate in hegemonic language *and* the language of their cultural group, with the tools to navigate and counter Eurocentric ideologies. "There can be no liberation of self or other without the tools or language to perform counter readings of dominant texts that serve the interests of power" (Morrell, 2008, p. 114). The tools of critical literacy can be printed texts, verbal language, media, and so forth.

According to Thoman (2003b), the definition of "media literacy" is the ability to interpret and create personal meaning out of the images, sounds, and words from the media. Media literacy also "chooses and selects…challenges and questions, the ability to be conscious about what's going on around you and not be passive and therefore,

vulnerable." At an academic level, Hobbs and Frost (2003) have maintained that the skill of media analysis can increase reading comprehension. "For example, analyzing the setting, speech, thoughts, and dialogue in a film scene may help students understand, identify, and evaluate those elements of character development in literature (Hobbs & Frost, 2003, p. 333). Practicing media literacy is a key component in critical media pedagogy and one tool of critical literacy; indeed, practicing critical media as pedagogy for learners in the Digital Age can enable students to see and understand media messages as digital narratives, as opposed to truths (Morrell, 2008).

Because media is the ubiquitous pedagogy of influence and is the tool for modern-day oppression and consumerism (Kellner & Share, 2005), critical media pedagogy is included as a key component in all Message Media Ed programs, thus ensuring that our intervention approach is complete and relevant to the Digital Age. Horn (2003) has called this ubiquitous pedagogy the hidden curriculum, as critical theorists reference: "Hidden curriculum is a broad category that includes all of the unrecognized and sometimes unintended knowledge, values, and beliefs that are part of the learning process in schools and classrooms" (p. 298). Theorists have concluded that the most significant source for hidden curriculum is the media. Horn (2003) has maintained that hidden curriculum dictates the way teachers and educators interact with their students and influences how students construct meaning in the classroom.

Additionally, research has shown that an alarmingly high percentage of Black parents residing in communities where dropping out of school occurs more frequently are not college educated (National Urban League, 2007). Moreover, they do not have the

knowledge or means to educate their youth about their African heritage and African American history and culture, or know to seek African-centered learning environments for their children. Instead, both parent and child living in today's new Digital Age look to media messages from TV, radio, the Internet, video games, and other entertainment and interactive media outlets and to consumerism to support the development of their self-concept and potential for social, academic, and economic advancement.

Kellner and Share (2005) pointed out that:

> It is highly irresponsible in the face of saturation by the Internet and media culture to ignore these forms of socialization and education; consequently, a critical reconstruction of education should produce pedagogies that provide media literacy and enable students, teachers, and citizens to discern the nature and effects of media culture. (p. 371)

The outcome of the hybrid African-centered/critical media pedagogy is media-literate young people empowered by and proud of their African/African American history and culture and equipped with the alternative "frame of reference" (Richards, 2005) needed to help them think, learn, and advocate for themselves. Imagine a generation of critical thinkers and viewers of African descent! Young people watching MTV and admiring the cleverness in reality TV rather than incorporating the melodrama from reality TV into their social circles. Young people enthusiastically cooking meals at home with leafy vegetables rather than feeling compelled to increase their chances of high blood pressure and heart disease by catching the latest value meal at McDonald's. Young people consciously patronizing local entrepreneurs rather than flocking to the nearest

mall to pour their hard-earned dollar into the multiple "sales" advertised by corporate America. Young people sharing Black history facts as Facebook status updates, rather than sharing gossip from school.

Ultimately, scholarly literature shapes the assumption that the young critical viewer with a strong foundation of self-knowledge and a rich cultural framework has the capacity to break free from mental enslavement by television and other forms of media and to self-direct his or her own unique learning and life purpose. According to Putnam (1996) and Maras (2006), breaking free from media influence increases civic engagement and, therefore, social capital. Indeed, Putnam (1996) has said: "TV viewing is strongly and negatively related to social trust and group membership…" (p. 14).

In Rise Above the Noise, media literacy is realized through a collaborative and thoughtful comparison of two drastically different music videos. Participants practice being critical learners and media literate by answering questions and discussing concepts related to the videos introduced by Thoman (2003b). Table 1 shows core concepts and questions related to media literacy.

Horn (2003) has stated that "Critical awareness through media literacy can be liberating. Through awareness, choice becomes a possibility… individuals can be more effective advocates for themselves and others" (p. 300). Throughout the process of becoming media literate in Rise Above the Noise, the group begins to ask, "What can be done"? So we culminate the workshop by working collaboratively to reflect on their learning processes together and to share new knowledge with one another. They learn techniques in digital storytelling to produce educational, affirming media messages for

their community. These messages are recorded and podcast online. In this culminating stage of the RAN curriculum, participants become authentic media producers and partake

Table 1

Core Concepts and Questions in Media Literacy

1. All messages are "constructed."	Who created this message?	What is this? How is this put together?
2. Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.	What techniques are used to attract my attention?	What do I see, hear, smell, touch, or taste?
3. Different people experience the same media message differently.	How might different people understand this message differently from the way I do?	What do I think and feel about this? What might other people think and feel about this?
4. Media have embedded values and points of view.	What lifestyles, values and points of view are represented or omitted in this message?	What does this tell me about how other people live and what they believe?
5. Media are organized to gain profit and/or power.	Why was this message sent?	Is this trying to sell me something? Is this trying to tell me something?

in praxis (Freire, 1970) by utilizing the same historically oppressive media to build a "collective self-definition" (Murrell, 2002). As Burrell (2010) has said, "Branding got us into this mess. Branding can get us out" (p. 265).

Culturally Relevant Education

Today's society involves shaping minds, beliefs, and consumption through the tool of mass media. Richards (2005) has suggested that African American studies and media education will support the development of empowered, individual thinkers not susceptible to media influence:

> The school system doesn't teach them the truth about who they really are and their full potential. Now once they know who they really are and their full potential, when they see these stereotypes they [won't] connect with them. They [won't] see them as representing who they really are. But unless they have an alternative frame of reference to connect with, they are at risk of being what it is they are told they are. (quote from motion picture)

In the following section, I review the literature that informs ways to build the "alternative frame of reference" that Richards (2005) has suggested or, related to my goal for this research study, to correct the "mis-education" that Woodson (1933) has identified. As Murrell (2002) has put it, "Recognizing that racism is an everyday fact of American life and has everyday impacts that are made everyday, is the first step to systematically interrogating ideologies of repression, which is the goal of African-Centered Pedagogy" (p. xxxi).

Ladson-Billings (1994) has provided the foundation for culturally relevant pedagogy as it relates to the African-centered and critical media-combined pedagogy proposed in this paper, emphasizing the deep exchange between teacher and students, coconstructing (through literacy—language and media) an academic strategy reflective of the social, historical, and cultural representations of classroom members. Culturally relevant instruction in school, and in informal learning environments outside of school, can inspire the resiliency needed to counter negative racial stereotypes, social oppression, interpersonal aggression (Belgrave, Reed, Plybon, Butler, Allison, & Davis, 2004), and

depression (Mandara et al., 2009). In short, culturally relevant instruction cultivates ethnic pride in cultural groups victimized by hegemony.

In exploring ways educational institutions can achieve social justice, Abu El-Haj (2006) has concluded that "Equity might in fact be served through programs created by and for groups that have faced oppression in the broader society" (p. 192). Lee (2002) has acknowledged the importance of cultural education in the home and its impact on achievement in school. Lee conducted a study on Korean and Chinese American students, seeking to identify the differences in academic achievement among teens who assimilate to American culture and those who maintain strong cultural identity and pride in their indigenous cultures. Lee's study found that bilingualism and biculturalism are positively related to academic achievement, as opposed to the experience of students less interested in their cultural heritage and more interested in being assimilated into American culture. When the Eurocentric approach to education separates culture from the classroom, or only includes it in the school environment during Cinco de Mayo or Black History month, Nobles (1990) has asserted that education becomes a "product" of culture: "Culture is to humans as water is to fish…As such, education [and] curriculum development are cultural phenomena" (p. 6). As I designed the curriculum for Rise Above the Noise, I was mindful of this understanding. Thinking about 21st-century careers, I also became very sensitive to how critical culture-specific education is in making diversity substantive. Knowing your cultural heritage and its contribution to humanity, math, sciences, and the arts when entering a diverse community, classroom, or workplace will make for a rich exchange among cultures.

African-Centered Pedagogy

African-centered pedagogy incorporates a blend of critical theory, literacy, pedagogy, and culturally relevant pedagogy. Murrell (2002) has highlighted a critique of social structure, knowledge construction, and praxis as central themes in African-centered pedagogy; however, he also stated that "Critical Theory, from an African-centered perspective, stands on its own" (Murrell, 2002, p. 77). Also grounded in the intellectual legacies of Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Dubois, and Carter G. Woodson, African-centered pedagogy integrates a system of premises and best practices for appropriately educating Black America. As Murrell (2002) has said, "The goal of education is not to prepare children to fit within the present system, but to revolutionize the system toward the promise of democracy articulated in the documents (but not the deeds) that shaped America." African-centered pedagogy draws upon theories developed specifically for the African American learner. Akbar (1998) summarized W. Curtis Banks's (1982) 20th-century framework for appropriately educating African American descendants of the slave trade. In this framework, three levels should be adopted by the educator:

1. The *deconstructionist* must make known the inconsistencies and falsifications in Eurocentric education that were created to limit knowledge development for African American students—which is the "mis-education" Woodson (1933) details.
2. The *reconstructionist* corrects historical errors and makes education relevant to African Americans, which begins the development of a system of education

that reflects authentic accounts of African and African American history and their contributions.

3. The *constructionist* builds onto the foundation laid by the prior two stages and further advances the corrected mis-education by contributing to the broader field of education a corrected system of practices and unique life stories relevant to the African American experience.

Digesting these concepts and stepping into the 21st century, Murrell (2002) has offered a holistic educational model to accelerate the increase in academic achievement for African American students called African-Centered Pedagogy (ACP). He has described ACP as "a system of practices that includes systematic, culturally situated, historically grounded reflection and action of the teacher regarding the lives, experiences, intellectual heritage, and cultural legacy of children, their families, and the communities from which they come" (p.xxiii). ACP counters Eurocentric education and emphasizes communalism, social inquiry, and inclusivity. These ideologies are encompassed in seven premises and five essential practices of African-centered pedagogy. The premises are that (a) human cognition and intellectual development are socially and culturally situated in human activity; (b) the core of learning is meaningful and purposeful activity, embodied in practices and represented by signs to communicate understanding and to create a system of meaning making; (c) meaning making is the principal motive for learning; (d) the most important form of learning is the appropriation of signs and practices of worthwhile adult activity; (e) community and symbolic culture are significant to the learning of individuals; (f) the development of children's capacity to think, reason,

communicate, and perform academically is knowledge-in-use that is enacted in socially situated and culturally contextualized settings; and, (g) Black achievement is linked to conditions of schooling that reduce racial vulnerability (Murrell, 2002).

The practices are (a) engagement and participation, (b) identity development, (c) community integrity, (d) inquiry, and (e) meaning-making practices (Murrell, 2002). Through this holistic approach to instruction, African American students thrive (Murrell, 2002). To aid in attaining these outcomes, Murrell (2002) has enhanced these practices with specific methodologies. For this dissertation study I focused on the practices and methodologies shown in Table 2, below.

Table 2

Cultural Practices and Methodology of African-Centered Pedagogy

Cultural Practice	Methodology
Engagement and Participation Practices	Employ a living curriculum – such as "movement history," in which students address the historical struggle of African American people.
Identity Development Practices	Create spaces for oral performance and public talk that allows opportunities for inquiry practices in subject matter content.
Community Integrity Practices	Build a sense of *Harambee* (the Swahili word for working together): Harambee evokes the idea of collateral, community reflection, in which instructional practice is appraised as shared activity.
Practices of Inquiry	Tap and develop the idea of collective memory: ensure a common understanding of collective memory as how a people experience their present in light of the past.
Meaning-Making Practices	Organize literacy practices as an extended conversation and elaborated activity; for example this might be the enactment of stories with props (e.g., puppets, images of the characters throughout the room, and so forth).

According to Murrell (2002), "True teaching always results in demonstrable outcomes. The evidence of teaching is in students' development and achievement as learners, and their agency and consciousness as citizens" (p. xxxiii). African-centered schools develop the whole child, cultivating self-respect, cultural knowledge, and a spirit of community. This development builds a healthy self-concept and, by default, strengthens academic achievement (Merry & New, 2008). Additionally, students in African-centered schools are held both to high academic standards and to standards of "excellence in character and spirit" (Durden, 2007, p. 28) due to being recipients of instruction infused with role modeling and teachings emulating the character of African and African American ancestors (Durden, 2007). Notably, this pedagogical approach was developed in relation to racist acts imposed by White America, but is not centered on the acts of White racist oppression. As Merry and New (2008) have described it:

> African-centered pedagogy is not preoccupied with the narrative that puts White racism at the center of Black history and ontology, but this is not because White racism is not real. Indeed, institutional racism is assumed, and teachers are only too aware of what children will likely face in mainstream society. African-centrists are invested in re-scripting educational opportunity in a different way, one that is not mired in a victim-focused curriculum. (p. 13)

Because African-centered pedagogy fosters a healthy and productive self-image, "What follows, according to African-centrists, is greater self-esteem and higher academic achievement" (Merry & New, 2008, p. 14). Durden (2007) has characterized the Afrocentric approach to thinking and learning as being in direct opposition to Eurocentric

thought; out of Eurocentric thought, our currently failing school system was built—which is why media literacy *and* practices of inquiry in African-centered pedagogy are so valuable in educating African Americans. Even though Black youth may become "literate" in a Eurocentric learning environment, this literacy is often achieved at the cost of learning about their own culture. The lack of representation of their culture in the classroom often becomes the catalyst for "resistance, apathy and dropping out" (Morrell, 2008, p. 3). Eurocentrism sustains White privilege and White advantage in political, social, economic, and educational arenas (Durden, 2007). "So the question of why African-centered schooling is not being implemented in American schools is not a question of its impact on student achievement but rather the threat it poses on maintaining systematic hegemony" (Durden, 2007, p. 30). This pedagogical approach should be a vital component in intervention for Black youth and Black communities in the Digital Age, as Karenga (2005) has urged:

> We must recover our memory. We must return to our own history and culture. Until we recover the best of our history and culture and use it to enrich and expand our lives, we will always be impoverished. And our youth will suffer as a result of that. (quote from motion picture)

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The Rise Above the Noise (RAN) curriculum is revolutionary in nature and seeks to "improve the life chances for individuals at the bottom of the social hierarchy" (Hatch, 2002, p. 17). In order to properly counter Eurocentric ideals and shift the foundation on which the participants have developed their knowledge base, I adopted a qualitative research design informed by Critical Race Theory (CRT), a theoretical framework flexible enough for the integration of interdisciplinary methods in education. CRT gives voice to the historically marginalized Black race through the revolutionary process of counterstorytelling (Bell, 1995). In this case, the teaching styles of African-centered and critical media pedagogies (ACP & CMP) work well within the CRT framework.

Critical race theory, developed by legal scholars in the 1970s, sought to address the inability of legal studies to correctly address the historic struggle and experience of people of color (Bell, 1995). They were specifically concerned with the slow rate of progress in the Civil Rights Movement and understood that true emancipation for African Americans could not truly be realized in a society dominated by a master narrative, itself based only in European ideology and experience (Bell, 1995). With these narratives fueling the ubiquitous engine of White privilege, the legal system left no room for authentic voices of color.

According to Bell (1995), five tenets inform the theoretical framework of critical thought on race in America, as they apply to education:

1. The intercentricity of race and racism—The point that race and racism are integral and permanent components of American society, socially constructed by Whites to privilege Whites, and are the foundation of the American education system.
2. The challenge to dominant ideology—The part of CRT that questions claims of neutrality, objectivity, and color blindness in education when White students continue to sustain their privilege.
3. The commitment to social justice—The tenet that explains the commitment of CRT to attain social justice in education and society.
4. The centrality of experiential knowledge—CRT scholars view knowledge constructed through life experience as extremely valuable to the learning process of people of color, and CRT in education draws on these experiences to inform and counter Eurocentric educational systems.
5. The interdisciplinary perspective—This tenet analyzes racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia from multiple disciplines, embracing and adapting multiple methods pertinent to constructing experiential knowledge.

Working within a CRT framework infused by ACP and CMP, and utilizing critical race methodology through counterstorytelling, the purpose of this study was to document and analyze the means by which research participants applied new cultural knowledge and media tools to become self-advocates and to cultivate the self-efficacy needed to change their current life circumstances. I assessed how participants took action toward creating a positive self- and communal definition by producing media messages

that counter Eurocentricism and contribute authentic, culturally aware, digital counterstorytelling to the world of media. As Hatch (2002) has explained, "The object is to reveal for others the kinds and extent of oppression that are being experienced by those studied. With exposure of oppression comes the call for awareness, resistance, solidarity and revolutionary transformation" (p. 17).

The research question guiding this case study was:

1) How does the implementation of a combined African-centered/critical media pedagogy impel participants to transform their current life circumstances?

To answer this overarching question, I analyzed participant perceptions and learning, and assessed how African-centered pedagogy and critical media pedagogy informed each other throughout the implementation process.

The RAN curriculum incorporates the five cultural practices of African-centered pedagogy

1. engagement and participation,
2. identity development,
3. community integrity,
4. inquiry, and
5. meaning making.

Core concepts and questions introduced by Thoman (2003b) were applied for practicing media literacy pedagogy; they are a belief that

1. all messages are "constructed,"
2. media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules,

3. different people experience the same media message differently,
4. media have embedded values and points of view, and
5. media are organized to gain profit and/or power.

These are core curricular components of Rise Above the Noise, which combines the two pedagogies in order to enhance one another. As I analyzed the data collected, I also identified patterns consistent with Banks's (1982) D-R-C model, which prepares participants to *deconstruct* how Eurocentrism works through media's oppressive influence; to *reconstruct* truthful and authentic facts about Africans in America who are adrift in Eurocentric education; and further impels them and the facilitator to counter media influence by *constructing* creative, authentic, and empowering cultural media stories for a community with limited resources. The Rise Above the Noise curriculum makes use of cohesive critical media analysis, cultural empowerment, and digital counterstorytelling for communal praxis.

My educational and professional background as an educator, artist, and social justice advocate has been a driving force in implementing RAN and drove this research study. As a participant-observer, I actively facilitated the curriculum, guided participants through a process of critically analyzing social structures impacting their lives, and coconstructed an awareness of their role in praxis for the betterment of themselves and their cultural communities; therefore, and according to Hatch (2002), I worked within constructivist research paradigms.

Methods

Critical Race Methodology

Critical race methodology provides the framework, space, and platform in a persistently Euro-dominated post-secondary educational arena for many African American scholars to build critical pedagogies appropriate for educating Africans in America. Regarding Black psychological frameworks, Parham and Parham (2002) have asserted, "The theories and constructs on which traditional psychology has been built and advanced are inappropriate when used to understand and explain populations that are culturally different than those studied by the architects of many of psychology's theories" (p. 25). Many scholars (Piper-Mandy, 2010; Grills, 2002; Akbar, 1998; Karenga, 1997) —veterans and emerging—have argued that the very ways of understanding African American experiences, thought processes, and, in this case, learning, use frameworks and paradigms designed by European researchers to explain the behaviors and ideologies of European people. This approach is impracticable; Black psychological research has provided a foundation for the development and refinement of African-centered education and pedagogical design (Murrell, 2002). Therefore, I adopted critical race methodology as an appropriate means for educating and understanding the experiences and learning of African American participants in this research study.

Critical race methodology utilizes counterstorytelling (Delgado, 1995b) to document experiences of racially and historically marginalized people and introduces their stories to raise a critical consciousness about racial injustice (Delgado, 1995b; Freire, 1970, 1973; Yosso, 2006). To authentically translate the struggle for equal

education throughout the educational pipeline for Chicano students, Yosso (2006) utilized critical race counterstorytelling, which highlighted the barriers put in place by schools and the dominant society, a phenomenon otherwise difficult to capture. As Yosso (2006) put it, counterstories "bring attention to those who courageously resist racism and struggle toward a more socially and racially just society" (p. 10). Also applicable to the uses of counterstorytelling for this study, Yosso (2006) has summarized their function in the broader landscape of education:

1. Counterstories build community—They remind the marginalized that we do not navigate through the educational system alone and that counterstorytelling is a vehicle to cultivate empathy.
2. Counterstories can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society's center —Authentic stories from oppressed groups intervene in the master narrative and transform normalized belief systems.
3. Counterstories can nurture community cultural wealth, memory, and resistance—These stories can challenge and dismantle racism and restore the legacies of resistance and empowerment movements.
4. Counterstories can facilitate transformation in education—"Because counterstories embed critical conceptual and theoretical content within an accessible story format, they can serve as pedagogical tools" (Yosso, 2006, p.15). These stories should also impel oppressed groups to take action.

For the purpose of this research study, the varied stages of participant counterstories were captured through three separate methods:

Method 1: Interviews conducted by me as the primary researcher Interview questions included the following:

1. What is your age, ethnicity, occupation, and educational background?
2. Within a day, how many hours do you spend watching TV? How many hours are you on line? What are you typically doing on line? How often do you text, if any?
3. Name one thing you are proud of, that you feel comfortable sharing with the group. Name one challenge you'd like to overcome, that you feel comfortable sharing with the group. Name one career goal you have.
4. Do you see yourself as a leader? If so, what type of leader are you? What typical role do you play in leadership?

Method 2: Digital media messages produced by participants as the culminating project for RAN. The digital media messages allowed participants to practice countering negative media stereotypes they have experienced or observed. They also made a statement, recorded on video, expressing their vision for their community and the role they will play in achieving that vision. The framework utilized for producing their digital media messages aimed to assess learning and document shifts in each participant's perception of cultural awareness and self-efficacy, as related to their authentic experiences as African American young adults.

Method 3: Focus group for all participants in RAN to reflect on collective growth and to share personal thoughts on how to move forward with new knowledge toward a role of praxis. They were asked the following questions:

1. What have you learned today?
2. How did this experience make you feel?
3. What do you plan to do with knowledge that may be new to you? (All six participants in the research study will engage in the focus group.)

Additionally, writing prompts were given to participants to enhance their learning and reflective processes, and were used to triangulate the data. Writing prompt questions were the same questions used in the focus group. Journaling was used as a means of documenting personal insight (Hatch, 2002) and reflection while they actively experienced each of the four stages of the RAN curriculum (explained later).

Lastly, the entire study was filmed to capture all elements of discussion, reflection, questions, body language, environmental visuals, and workshop presentations. I transcribed all data on my own personal computer, which has an access code that only I know. Video data were accessed by myself and my chair, and is stored and locked in a secure cabinet in my home, along with all other hard copies of data transcribed during the research process. Upon completion, all video was destroyed.

The Curriculum

Rise Above the Noise has four core stages. For this research study, I used the following tools to collect data about this program:

1. Intro/Community Building—(video interviews)
2. History of Media Influence on African Americans and reflective discourse—brief lecture with video screenings and discussion (writing prompts)
3. Practicing Media Literacy—Critically analyzing media messages and

producing digital manifestos (digital media messages)

4. Review of the experience and closure (focus group)

The Sample

The Rise Above the Noise curriculum is revolutionary in nature and seeks to "improve life chances for individuals at the bottom of the social hierarchy" (Hatch, 2002, p. 17). African Americans are a historically marginalized and disadvantaged racial group of people who have suffered socially and economically since their involuntary arrival to America in the 1600s. The majority of African Americans continue to suffer from the impact of Eurocentrism and institutional racism. According to then-Senator Barack Obama (2007), across the country, more than 30% of Black children are poor, two-thirds grow up in a single-parent household, six out of 10 drop out of high school and end up in prison, and the AIDS rate is highest within the black community. African Americans make up 10% of the Los Angeles population (Los Angeles Urban League, 2005). However, African Americans are at a disadvantage socially, academically, and economically. The Los Angeles Unified School District is an outdated educational system, failing to properly prepare our youth to become critical thinkers and to successfully transition into the workplace, as a staggering 52% of Black youth do not graduate from high school (Harvard University, 2005). Additionally, the unemployment rate for African Americans in Los Angeles is 14%, more than double the rate for Whites and Asians, and 13% of African Americans are receiving public assistance, compared to 5% of Latinos and 2% of both Asians and Whites (Los Angeles Urban League, 2005). "In nearly every state, African American children are represented in foster care in higher

percentages than in the state's general population" (National Urban League, 2007). Once emancipated from the foster care system, many youth struggle for stability in their adult lives. According to Scott and Davis (2006):

> [to be a young, Black male] means to be a member of a group who is the disproportionate victim of homicide . . . whose rate of suicide is increasing astronomically in comparison to other populations . . . whose labor force status is declining enormously as evidenced by high rates of joblessness . . . . And for those in foster care, it means poorer life outcomes (e.g., incarceration, education, employment). (p. 236-237)

My goal was to work with a convenience sample of six African American young adults (both male and female), ages 18-30, from a variety of backgrounds that social and human service workers would classify as disadvantaged. Essence of Light (transitional housing facility), Los Angeles Job Corps (job training center), Los Angeles Urban League (job training and economic development organization), and Community Build (college prep and life skills development department) were the organizations from which I received referrals. I visited each facility and their counselors to explain details of the study, garnering their support in identifying participants. The components of my explanation included all of the following elements:

1. Purpose of the study.
2. The value of participant feedback throughout the study—giving feedback on their experience and evaluation of the program.
3. Significance of the study.

4. Incentives—Food, books, and raffle for $200 gift card to Express Clothing.
5. Date, time, and location of study.

My explanation also informed workers of the need to select potential participants who

- they would consider disadvantaged and/or in transition—socially or economically—so that this workshop and experience can be applied to their current life circumstances;
- are legal, young adults, between the ages of 18-30, thus increasing the capacity for them to freely articulate and broadcast online (if consent is obtained) their personal experiences without jeopardizing their privacy;
- have identified a career they would like to pursue, so that the components of the curriculum can potentially increase the perspective of their capacity to achieve their goal;
- have a direct working cell or phone number, in order to be contacted prior to and after the study;
- are generally dependable and responsible, increasing their potential to show up and participate in the study; and
- identify as being either Black or African American, in order to be consistent with the research question and the theoretical, pedagogical, and methodological components of this dissertation.

According to Morrell (2008), "Any citizen who aspires to live an independent life will need to confront and counter the ideologies" shaped by "bad…information brokers [who] control the world…via social institutions such as the media, corporate America and

public schools" (p. 5). With this understanding, I targeted organizations serving young adults who may or may not have had a stable living situation and who were seeking to build life skills for jobs and opportunities for their families.

I utilized the Rise Above the Noise curriculum to support them in confronting and countering institutional and media messages designed to mentally enslave them and limit their independence. They needed the tools to "speak back and act back against these constructions with counter-language and counter-texts… essential to redefining the self and the transformation of oppressive social structures" (Morrell, 2008, p. 5). RAN was designed for this purpose.

The Setting

The research study was held at the Los Angeles Urban League West Adams/Baldwin Hills Worksource Center, a facility conducive to supporting urban community members who are seeking opportunities for themselves and their families. To aid in emphasizing an African and African American learning environment, I accented the furniture with African fabric and played cultural music as we welcomed participants and during breaks.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Qualitative data from video interviews, journaling, digital media messages, and the focus group were transcribed. Because qualitative data analysis is nonlinear (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), I searched for common statements and themes that gave meaning to anticipated outcomes. To structure the themes in accordance with the ancient African tradition of education, "a process of harnessing the inner potential that was yet

unexpressed and brining it 'out' or 'up' into consciousness" (Akbar, 1998, p. 1), I adopted a framework supported by researchers throughout the African Diaspora (Akbar, 1998; Ani, 1994; Chinweizu, 1987; Hilliard et al., 1990; Karenga, 1997; Nobles, 1990) engaged in contributing to the growing scholarship of properly re-educating the mis-educated African mind in America. This framework, deconstructionist-reconstructionist-constructionist (also known as the D-R-C model), was introduced by W. Curtis Banks (1982) as a means of appropriately educating African Americans, a nationwide community of people culturally impacted by mental enslavement and oppression by Europeans. I used Banks's (1982) D-R-C model of the development of Black psychology to generally code my data and applied Marshall and Rossman's (2006) eight-phased method of managing, analyzing, and interpreting data for this qualitative, educational research study.

Akbar (1998) has described Banks's (1982) model as the systematic process of educating and preparing African Americans for independence and self-determination, countering the preparation for servitude instilled by the Eurocentric system of mis-education. Revisiting the RAN curriculum as a reference, the four core stages are as follows:

1. Intro/community building (video interviews).
2. History of media influence on African Americans and reflective discourse—brief lecture with video screenings and discussions (writing prompts).
3. Practicing Media Literacy—critically analyzing media messages and producing digital manifestos (digital media messages).

4. Review of the experience and closure (focus group).

Akbar (1998) has argued that because the American system of education was not designed to educate non-White youth, the job of the deconstructionist educator of African descent is to "critique or identify the error and weakness found in the typical approaches to education for African Americans" (p. 56), which "is the necessary first step towards the education of African people who have already been miseducated by a European-American educational system" (p. 57). During Stage 2 in the RAN curriculum, participants were exposed to the plight of the African American since the slave trade, how media has been used to enhance the Eurocentric oppressive and racist view of African Americans, and how that ideology or master narrative was transferred into and is sustained in the American educational system. The data collected through the lecture, video screenings, discussions, and reflections during this process were transcribed, coded, and analyzed according to the intentions of the deconstructionist's role in education.

The reconstructionist educator of African descent begins coconstructing with learners the correct educational framework for them, recovering the hidden historical and contemporary facts that have been missing from what has become the normalized learning environment (Akbar, 1998). This phase occurs during "Practicing media literacy" (Stage 3) of RAN's core curricular components, as historical African American contributions are introduced to counter the assumptions that make up the master narrative infused in our educational system. Part of the reconstructionist's role is to begin shifting the epistemological understanding of each participant's capacity for advancement in this society and to break through mental enslavement. As Akbar (1998) has described it:

> The ability to break away from many of the practices that were developed under the conditions of slavery can only occur when one has been mentally liberated which is a part of what must come from the information and techniques identified by the reconstructionist. (p. 60)

The transcription of this discourse was coded under the overarching responsibility of the reconstructionist.

Lastly, Akbar (1998) has described the constructionist as the one who must promote the continued, deliberate production of knowledge meant to benefit the welfare of African Americans. The responsibility of the educator is to enlist participants in collectively "seek[ing] to advance the critical growth of knowledge" (p. 61). In RAN, these are the digital media messages (Stage 3 as well) produced by participants, and the review of experience and closure (Stage 4). Again, Akbar (1998) stated:

> The new approaches of education that should emerge from the constructionists of Black education should not only enhance the education of African-American people, but it should offer some new and more effective models for the education of people in general. (p. 63)

Transcribed as well, the digital media messages and focus group were coded under the general heading of constructionist. Once the data was sorted this way, I began to manage, analyze, and interpret it all.

As outlined by Marshall and Rossmore (2006), I used the following phases to support the next stage in the data analysis process:

1. Organizing the Data—Using the curricular layout, I charted all components and methods of data collection for each, matched with each participant.
2. Immersion in the Data—Reading through written data and watching video-recorded data multiple times allowed me, as the researcher, to intimately comprehend what the data and therefore the participants were translating from their experience in the study.
3. Generating Categories and Themes—Within a critical theoretical framework, I questioned and reflected on the data collected, identifying and charting key patterns in behavior, answers, and interactions from participants.
4. Coding the Data—I abbreviated patterns seen in the data and standardized those abbreviations, and adjusted as new understandings emerged.
5. Writing Analytic Memos—As I engaged in this process of analyzing the data, I recorded my thoughts and insights to create a more meaningful and creative approach to understanding this research study.
6. Offering Interpretations—I noted all synthesized conclusions drawn from the data analysis process.
7. Searching for Alternative Understandings—I challenged the conclusions and understandings I drew from the data, evaluated their plausibility, and incorporated them into the larger framework.
8. Writing the Report—I organized a cohesive statement answering the questions posed in this paper.

This approach supported the political analysis and interpretation (Hatch, 2002) of my data, which included reviewing and marking key places that matched my ideological concerns and hopes for praxis, writing generalizations about them, revisiting focus group and journaling data to negotiate meaning and to confirm consciousness raising and participant emancipation, summarizing excerpts supporting my generalizations, identifying implications, and recognizing limitations.

CHAPTER FOUR

MAIN FINDINGS

"I've always observed other races and how they are in tune with their culture and where they come from. I've always had questions about mine and how I'm supposed to act according to the media" (Habiba, [S.P.]). This awareness speaks volumes—and all participants in this study remained essentially transparent with their thoughts throughout the study, making their experiences accessible for documentation and analysis. In this section, I highlight key findings that point to an explanation of how the Rise Above the Noise curriculum and its hybrid pedagogy impels participants to change their life circumstances. I was successful in recruiting five young adult participants, ranging between the ages of 20 and 24.

In order to structure this presentation of findings according to (a) curriculum components of RAN, (b) African-centered and critical media pedagogical practices with media literacy tools, (c) data collection methods, and (d) the deconstructionist-reconstructionist-constructionist (D-R-C) model for coding, I have organized the findings according to these categories, in paragraph form as they relate to each participant, and in chart form for an understanding of the overall approach (see Table 3).

Table 3

Main Findings Chart

Curricular Components	CMP w/ Media Literacy (ML), & ACP	Data Collection	DRC Stages
1. Intro & Community Building, Group Affirmation, Interviews	ACP: Engagement/Participation & Community Integrity (Swahili Names/Sankofa)	Video Interviews & Video Taping	N/A
2a. History of Media Influence, Media Stereotypes (Video Screening & Lecture)	ACP: Identity Dev. CMP/ML: All Msg's are constructed, using their own language & rules	Video Taping	Deconstructionist (identify falsifications in Eurocentric education)
2b. Reflective Discourse (written & verbal)	ACP: Practices of Inquiry CMP/ML: Media have embedded values & point of view, organized to gain profit/power	Video Taping & Journaling	Deconstructionist (identify falsifications in Eurocentric education)
3. Practicing African Centered/Media Literacy (screened examples of AC/CM, & created digital media messages)	ACP: Meaning Making, Community Integrity & Identity Development practices CMP/ML: All msg's are constructed, have embedded values, point of view, organized to gain profit/power, & PRAXIS	Video Tape & Media Production of Digital Media Messages	Reconstructionist (corrects errors and identifies AA contributions) Constructionist (further advances authentic education on a broader level)
4. Review of Learning/Closure	ACP: Meaning Making	Focus Group & Video Tape	Constructionist (further advances authentic education on a broader level)

Additionally, I have included brief profiles of each participant, giving additional insight into the demographic backgrounds of the sample. To protect their identities, and to enhance engagement and participation (Murrell, 2002), each participant received a Swahili name to use throughout the research study. I have used the abbreviation S.P. to represent Study Participants when referring to the individuals reported about in the findings.

Profiles of Sample

Erevu: Erevu (S.P.) was a 20–year-old African American male from South Los Angeles. He grew up raised by a mother who was addicted to heroin. He ended up in the foster care system and was incarcerated in high school for fighting. He was referred to this study by one of my assistants, who had been mentoring him and observing Erevu's drive to make a better life for himself.

Habiba: Habiba (S.P.) was an African America female who attended a local community college and had recently been accepted by a local four-year university. She grew up in foster care and had recently been emancipated. She currently resided in a transitional housing facility with her siblings. She was referred to us by the director at a college preparation program she attended; the director described her as extremely bright, motivated to complete her education, and in need of a strong support system to achieve her educational goals.

Adimu: Adimu (S.P.) was a 23-year-old African and Latino American (biracial) male. He grew up in foster care and was living with his grandmother. He was incarcerated a year ago and was currently on probation. Adimu was referred to the study

by the director of a job-training program he attended. The director described him as extremely motivated, in need of a stable job and support system, and sincerely wanting to create a better life for himself.

Anisa: Anisa (S.P.) was a 24-year-old female. She had been emancipated from foster care, lived in multiple transitional housing programs, and recently acquired her own apartment, but was struggling to keep the rent paid. She was a single mother with a five-year-old son. She was in desperate need of a strong support system and resources. Her mother had had a substance abuse problem and was not around. Anisa was referred to this research study by the director of a college prep program she was enrolled in; the director described her as motivated with a positive attitude. Anisa was currently attending a community college and was working part-time, but she was struggling academically.

Haki: Haki (S.P.) was a 20-year-old African American woman from New Jersey. At the time of the research study, her total time in Los Angeles had only been three months. The director of a health and wellness organization referred her and described her as a young African American female with a clue about her identity, but in desperate need of a support system. She was working on transitioning from community college to a four-year university and wanted to attend LMU. She was staying with her aunt, who lived on Skid Row in downtown Los Angeles. She was economically challenged and sincerely searching for help.

Curricular Component I: Intro/Community Building

Pedagogy:	African-centered (engagement/participation & community integrity)
Data Collection Tool/s:	Individual Video interviews & overall video taping
D-R-C Stage:	N/A

This section of the RAN curriculum included sign-in, breakfast, an overview of the research study, an explanation of the consent form, group affirmations, and video interviews of each participant. Upon arrival, participants were greeted warmly by my assistants and were given Swahili nametags. As they signed in, assistants explained to them that to keep their real names confidential (to protect their privacy), they should use their Swahili name from then on. They were offered continental breakfast items to enjoy until all participants arrived. I was expecting six participants: three male, three female, between the ages of 18 and 25; however, I learned later that one of the male participants could not attend due to a family emergency. The five remaining participants arrived on time. After they ate, my assistants passed out the consent form and instructed the participants to read through it. I entered the room and introduced myself. I then gave an overview of the hybrid African-centered/critical media pedagogy theory, research questions, purpose and significance behind the study, and an explanation of each point on the consent form, allowing for questions along the way. All participants felt comfortable

with signing the consent form and proceeding with the study. I began with an explanation of *Sankofa*.

As a part of the "engagement and participation" methods described by Murrell (2002), we are to "Address the historical struggle of African American people" (p. 71). Therefore, I introduced the concept of *Sankofa*, the symbol and meaning from the Akan people of West Africa. *Sankofa* means "to go back and fetch it," meaning that one must reconnect with his/her history, heritage, and self-concept in order to move forward in the present and future; it is symbolized by the *Sankofa* bird, whose image faces forward and looks backward. Many African Americans adopt the symbolism and meaning of *Sankofa* to support the reconstruction of their cultural past, lost in physical and mental enslavement (Temple, 2009). I also reminded participants of the ancestors who came before them and the sacrifices they made so that we can exist today. Defining the philosophical concept of *Sankofa* as our overarching goal for the day, coupled with assigning Swahili names and reflecting on ancestors, matched the goal of addressing the historical struggle of African Americans, which Murrell (2002) has referenced, and allowed me, as the principal investigator, to establish a cultural foundation for inquiry. The next step was to establish an emotionally safe cultural community in which participants could express themselves.

We moved to the main activity room. The video camera used to record all activity was set up in the corner on a stand to capture all components of the curriculum, facilitation, and participant involvement. Each of the participant chairs was assembled in a half circle and draped with brightly colored African cloth.

Antiphony or "call-and-response," an oral tradition known to have originated in the sub-Saharan region of Africa, is a creative means of communication and storytelling that incorporates audience performance and interaction (Sale, 1992). The implementation of call-and-response "provide[s] a basic model that depends and thrives upon audience performance and improvisation, which work together to ensure that the art will be meaningful or functional to the community" (Sale, 1992, p. 41). I utilized call-and-response in the group affirmation (Appendix A). I led and they repeated, improvising hand and body movements to accentuate the meaning of the words. It was fun and engaging and a great way to break the ice and connect with one another on a communal level. As mentioned in Chapter Three, video interviews are both a way to capture essential demographic data and to capture the first set of individual counterstories.

After the group affirmation, each participant was interviewed, answering the following questions:

1. What is your age, ethnicity, occupation, and educational background?
2. Within a day, how many hours do you spend watching TV? How many hours are you on line? What are you typically doing online? How often do you text, if any?
3. Name one thing you are proud of, that you feel comfortable sharing with the group. Name one challenge you'd like to overcome, that you feel comfortable sharing with the group. Name one career goal you have.
4. Do you see yourself as a leader? If so, what type of leader are you? What typical role do you play in leadership?

The purpose of these questions was to allow the group members to get to know each other, again practicing community integrity. Additionally, they were to discover an engaging way to define media habits and life circumstances, and to gauge their potential for praxis. From this initial interview component, we learned the following about our participants:

Erevu: Erevu (S.P.) brought a fun, yet mellow, spirit to the group. He identified as Black and African American and was 20-years old. He had completed high school and was currently in barber school. He texted "every 2 minutes," and rarely watched television. His online habits consisted of research related to the closing line he was developing and he visited social networking sites. Erevu spent an average of two hours online everyday. He was proud to be who he was. When asked about the challenge he was facing, he shared with the group that he was in a battle with himself to find out his limits. He shared that he wanted to find out who he was in order to cope with himself. To help him reach this goal, he expressed the need for positive influences from people around him with higher intellect to encourage him to "step his game up." He was certain that he was a leader and acknowledged how effective he was when a situation required him to step up.

Habiba: Habiba (S.P.) was a soft-spoken 22-year-old who identified as Black and/or African American and who attended a private Christian high school and was currently studying journalism at a local community college. She texted every 2 minutes, watched about two to three hours of television daily, and typically surfed the web about four to five hours each day, generally browsing and going back and forth between yahoo

instant messaging and Facebook. Habiba was particularly proud to be in the study that day; she smiled when she stated that. In terms of a challenge she was facing, she shared her struggle with staying focused on her studies and getting through school. She felt media was distracting. She mentioned that learning secrets from others on how to stay focused and on track was what would help her. She defined leaders as people who do things different than the norm. She acknowledged this was her role in leadership. "You don't really have to say too much to be a leader. If you do something different, people will follow you." Habiba said she likes to stand out from the rest.

Adimu: Adimu (S.P.) brought a warm spirit to the group. He was 23 and identified as Black or African American and Latino. He was a high school graduate and was proud to share certificates he had recently obtained in carpentry and green technology. He said he texted a lot, watched one to two hours of TV daily, and spent three hours online job hunting, watching YouTube videos, and checking and sending email. He expressed pride in the way he generated opportunities through positivity. He shared that his current challenge was financial stability and said that he needed support in finding a job. When asked about his role in leadership, he said confidently, "Every individual you meet is a potential opportunity and vice versa, so I navigate accordingly. Every reference I get I give out in return, and I expect the same."

Anisa: Anisa (S.P.) was a vibrant 24-year-old who identified as African American. She shared excitedly that she was a high school grad who was currently attending community college and working as a teacher's assistant, and that she wanted to own a day care and then pursue a career as a social worker. She texted a lot because, she

said, “It’s free and unlimited,” watched four to five hours of TV, and spent three to four hours online daily, doing schoolwork, browsing, researching colleges, networking on Facebook, and watching videos on YouTube. With a big smile, she expressed being proud to be in the study, to make new friends and a new family, and to get to know me (as the facilitator) better. She was clear that her current challenge related to saving money and reaching her goals. She mentioned that she had enrolled in a financial literacy program to help her first challenge; to support her second, she stated, “I have to let a lot of people go who are negative around me, so I can reach my goals.” She responded with a strong, “Yes,” when I asked if she was a leader. To expand, she described how she is a role model. She stated, “I stay focused, not go out, stay in school. Other single moms can see what’s necessary to be successful.”

Haki: Haki (S.P.) was a confident, observant 20-year-old who identified as African American. She shared that she had received an AA degree in social sciences and planned to go to a four-year university to get a BA in anthropology. She texted every 30 minutes, watched one to two hours of television, and was online four to five hours per day researching for her job and “Facebooking” her family in New Jersey. She expressed being proud of how bold she had gotten since she had arrived in Los Angeles, “because people get up in your face out here.” Focusing on one career path was challenging for her because she was interested in all kinds of things and jumped from one to another. To address this propensity, she said her current job needed to work with her, not against her. She was dealing with a lot of personality conflicts, which distracted her. Haki was clear on her role as a leader. She had taken the initiative to share the knowledge she was

gaining about applying for a university and, at her job, she conducted outreach in the Black community related to natural hair care and products.

Curricular Component IIa: Media Stereotypes, History of Media Influence

Pedagogy:	African-centered (identity development) and critical media/media literacy (All messages are constructed, using their own language and rules)
Data Collection Tool/s:	Overall video taping
D-R-C Stage:	Deconstructionist

In this and the next section and of the RAN curriculum (IIa & IIb), we explored negative media stereotypes, discussed their origin, watched two brief documentaries on the history of media influence on the African American community, and engaged in reflective discourse. Exploring negative media stereotypes in a collaborative way sustains the ACP component, engagement, and participation (Murrell, 2002), while beginning the deconstructionist (Akbar, 1998) and identity development (Murrell, 2002) processes.

First, we defined *media* and *stereotype*, allowing for a collective consensus and understanding of each word. Next, participants were given two minutes to write and post as many negative stereotypes they could think of on the wall. I used large Post-it notes (5" x 7"), and provided an abundance of them to the group. They were encouraged to write one stereotype on each Post-it, posting them one at a time on the wall, until the time

ran out. Timing the process makes an otherwise somber activity into a fun and engaging one, as participants find themselves rushing to complete the activity. Once the time was up, we sat and read everything to absorb it all. This is when the deconstructionist process (Akbar, 1998) truly began. Stereotypes listed by participants included deprived, late, chicken, lost, religious, helpless, uneducated, educated = whited out, welfare, loud, superficial, ghetto, gangbanger, hostile, inarticulate.

After sitting and absorbing the list of stereotypes in silence, I read them out loud. To engage in critical discourse about the list, after reading each stereotype aloud, I asked the participants if they had either heard of the stereotype, observed the stereotype in media (television, music, advertising, news, etc.), or witnessed a friend of theirs whom they felt integrated one or more stereotypes into his or her character. Many participants expressed frustration seeing their friends "get caught up in silly drama" (Anisa S.P.). I then screened two short documentaries to help drive the conversation toward a more critical media inquiry. Prior to beginning, I instructed the participants to take detailed notes and to record their thoughts about each film.

The first film was entitled *The Resolution Project* and was produced by Tom Burrell (2011), a retired African American Advertising Director. Burrell was the founder of the top African American advertising agency in America. His documentary described media influence as "brainwashing," and addressed stereotyping of African Americans by the Founding Fathers. He revealed the dichotomous connection between sustaining democracy *and* slavery, and the successful marketing and propaganda campaigns to convince Blacks and Whites that Blacks "had always been and would forever be

mentally, physically, spiritually and culturally inferior" (Burrell, 2010, p. xii). He also drew the correlation that the impact of this media campaign manifested in the plight of the present-day African American community. In his words:

> Relentless abuse and humiliation decimated black self-esteem and exacerbated feelings of inferiority. This aggressive marketing campaign selling black inferiority came from all directions: books, cartoons, movies, medicine, from the pulpit to the bench… Niggerology was a popular science… These vile and destructive images would forever scar the American psyche, both blacks and whites. The damage to the Black psyche was so thorough that Blacks assumed their own denigration. (Burrell, 2011)

This documentary invited the audience to begin breaking down (deconstructing) all of the negative media messages and to identify European slave owners as the media producers. By peeling back the layers of stereotypes, participants in this study naturally began to realize the historical development of African American stereotypes and the ultimate meaning behind them: to dominate, build wealth, and sustain power and consumerism. After watching this documentary, I requested that they write down their thoughts.

Next, I screened "Generations," a section from the documentary *500 Years Later,* directed by Shahadah (2005). The entire documentary traced the African American experience from the slave trade to today. "Generations" addressed the plight of the African American community, identifying crime and the expanded representation of Black men in the prison system. It discussed the lack of healing African people have had as descendents of slaves in America, the lack of knowledge African Americans have

about their culture and heritage, and how media (music, music videos, TV) depicts African Americans as thugs, delinquents, uneducated, and so forth to all other cultures. It also began to explain the mental control that media sustains and how that control is funded by European consumers.

Curricular Component IIb: Written and Verbal Reflective Discourse

Pedagogy:	African-centered (practices of inquiry) & critical media/media literacy (Media have embedded values and points of view, organized to gain profit/power)
Data Collection Tool/s:	Journaling and overall video taping
D-R-C Stage:	Deconstructionist

Upon the completion of screening "Generations," I presented a brief lecture to summarize the two videos. I defined Eurocentrism (McIntosh, 1988) and discussed its implications in our education, economic, and justice systems, as it related to power, and the European investment in sustaining power through image control ever since the slave trade (Akbar, 1996; Ani, 1994; Asante, 1996; Burrell, 2010). I defined White privilege as a direct implication of Eurocentrism and identified how privilege translates through media. I also described how values and belief systems are shaped by media advertising, and linked the values of participants as consumers. I presented how media advertisers study trends and stereotypes of young adult African Americans, and how they target that population and tailor their ads to incorporate stereotyped lifestyles of African Americans

(Morrell, 2008). I asked various questions to begin practicing inquiry, interrogating and interpreting the images and messages they had received from the two videos and my lecture (Murrell, 2002) after screening the documentaries: Are African Americans truly receiving an appropriate education? Are African Americans equipped with the tools to navigate White privilege or Eurocentric ideologies? If our education system isn't diversified, are White teachers equipped with the tools to properly teach African Americans? Are White teachers influenced by media stereotypes of Black students? In answering these questions, participants engaged in thinking through their viewpoints verbally as a group, with each one listening and learning from the other.

To triangulate the verbal discussion, I asked the participants to write in their journals, answering the following questions: What have you learned so far? How does this new knowledge make you feel? What do you plan to do with this knowledge? After spending some time writing, I asked the participants to share some of their thoughts with the group. Below, I've highlighted excerpts from verbal reflections from the discussion and from written responses to the journaling prompts.

Erevu: Erevu (S.P.) shared that he was "happy to be discussing these topics because there are so many Black people who are not aware of either what's going on or what went on in our African American history." In his writing, he mentioned:

> My mind was opened up to who owned corporations during slavery days, and they are the same now. The media is what has bamboozled me. I want to continue to educate others… I want to make movies and one day I will make a movie or documentary about us Black people.

Habiba: Habiba (S.P.) was quiet for most of the discussion; however, she was very expressive in her writing, where she explained:

> They were making money by trading us in slavery and now are still making money off of us… I've always observed other races and how they are intuned with their culture and where they come from. I've always had questions about mine and how I'm supposed to act according to the media… The stereotypes make me angry but what makes me more angry is how my own people buy into those stereotypes… But I understand that most of them are not educated about it. At one point, I wasn't aware myself… I plan on taking many things I've learned today and educate myself further. I want to use this towards my major and my profession to go against the grain of how Blacks are normally portrayed… As a matter of fact I have a long term goal of creating my own magazine, an African American magazine for African American teen girls and young adults.

Habiba did share a brief and important statement verbally with the group:

> I had to read the book *Invisible Man* in school. He was talking about how we're still enslaved today in our minds, it's like an unconscious thing. These videos today clarified it, you know, what I was thinking… really good experience today.

Adimu: Adimu (S.P.) shared with the group, "I am feeling more enlightened on my history, being bi-racial, but focusing on my African American side . . . . I am in the process of associating the Black culture with the Latino culture, because I am both. They're receiving the same message and affected the same way." In his writing, he shared the following:

I am feeling angry at the heartlessness of White men… I am going to spread this knowledge with my peers… I'm feeling like my past mistakes were "just a mindset" as opposed to who "I am"…I am more conscious of my purpose in life.

Anisa: Anisa (S.P.) shared briefly verbally, and didn't share much in writing. She said:

What sticks out for me is the quote from the second video, "Children not taught by their parents are taught by the world." So true, because I just did a project in school on gang banging, and it doesn't matter if your father is a preacher, you get it from school and stuff and it's basically up to you… it's up to you.

Haki: Haki (S.P.) shared her thoughts verbally with the group and had much to say in her writings as well. When reading her written entries, Haki stated:

Not many people are aware of African history we are discovering today because of the Eurocentric perspective that dominates the world… With this in mind, I would like to work out the gap between African Americans and their African heritage. To accomplish this, I could work with my job to engage the community. We could make programs for children to teach them about media and its construction of the "Black image"… Also, I believe that all Americans need to be educated about the true history of Black Americans. When they see the reality that Black Americans face, it may change how they perceive them. A good means to reach the general American public is through social media… This workshop has helped me realize stereotypes rule America… My general feeling

> right now is somewhat somber, but hopeful. If everyone in this workshop goes out and makes a difference, there can be change.

Verbally, Haki worked through challenges she'd experienced related to identity:

> On the real tip, sometimes I feel overwhelmed being Black. People stay shocked by me and my demeanor. I think because what is perceived to be as an articulate way, but refuse to lose my culture, they are surprised… It's even annoying to me when people say that I don't have typical Black features. People always make this comment about my nose, and then compliment me on it. This shows how indoctrinated people are.

After completing the writing prompts and engaging in brief reflective discourse, we took a lunch break.

Curricular Component III: Practicing African-Centered/Critical Media Literacy

Pedagogy:	African-centered (meaning making, community integrity, identity development) and critical media/literacy (all messages are constructed, have embedded values, point of view, organized to gain profit and power), and praxis
Data Collection Tool/s:	Production of digital media messages and overall video taping
D-R-C Level:	Reconstructionist/constructionist

After the lunch break, participants reconvened in the main activity room. I began to define critical media literacy and African-centered ideology. We revisited the cultural stereotypes listed on the wall and began to synthesize what we had learned since listing them. We traced the history of slave trade and examined old media ("Public sale of negro" [Appendix B]) and the demeaning language used to describe African Americans. We then viewed a cartoon created by a German cartoonist depicting the story of White and Black race relations in America (Appendix C). We analyzed the visual language and its ability to tell a story, comparing these two examples to the movies we had just seen and how they depicted the life and image of African Americans. We began bridging the two pedagogies, African-centered and critical media, and studied three examples of this hybrid approach to education in media productions, in this case, in African-centered digital counterstories.

The first example was a Sesame Street (2011) production entitled "I Love My Hair." It sent a message to young African American kids that their hair is cool. Apart from what they see on TV, film, or in their neighborhood, wearing their hair naturally, without straightening it, is a good and beautiful thing. They use language familiar to African American hairstyles, for example, corn rows, afro, twists, braids; the muppet is a cute little brown girl who shows the various hairstyles mentioned above. She says:

I don't need a trip to the beauty shop

Cuz I love what I got on top

It's curlie and brown and right up there

You know what I love?

That's right, my hair!

I love my hair

There's nothing else that can compare, with my hair

Wear a clip or in a bow

Or let it sit in an Afro

My hair looks good in corn rows

It does so many things

That's why I let it grow… (Sesame Street, 2011)

This video demonstrated the product or praxis of a successful blend of African-centered/critical media. It spoke to the African American experience, countering what we typically believe about our hair, and taught young people to celebrate their authentic selves.

I screened the second video to exemplify the product of African-centered/critical media in a raw, authentic form. The video is a performance piece produced by Taalam Acey (2011), a local poet from Los Angeles, entitled "Market for Niggas." In it, Acey utilized spoken word as a means of waking up the African American musical/ performance community—both producers and consumers. He speaks about the African American production of demeaning, unhealthy, minstrel-type music that reinforces negative media stereotypes of African Americans, and conveys the message that as long as African American artists produce that type of music, White people will continue to purchase it in order to sustain these images of African Americans, and therefore to sustain the impact of these images on African American communities. In Acey's (2011) words:

> If he's willing to play the role of society's savage
>
> Then society will make him a star/Cuz there's a market for niggas
>
> Just write some bullshit
>
> There's money to be made in convincing black people that Jill Scott does not exist
>
> Cuz if a young girl knows she's golden she won't allow herself to be called no bitch
>
> And it's only common sense that if you take away her self-confidence
>
> She'll believe that droppin' it like it's hot for a soldier, is an accomplishment…
>
> And if it will increase a young man's chances of going to jail, they'll promote it…
>
> Just focus on being a stereotype

> Like you wake up every morning like you're dying to fight… You think I'm playing? As long as white folk got money
>
> There's a market for niggas. (Acey, 2011)

Acey's video really sparked a vivid discussion, primarily among study participants Erevu, Adimu, and Haki. Habiba and Anisa contributed their nods of approval and listened intently throughout. Adimu said:

> What stuck to me was the music I wrote while I was in [jail]. You know, it sounds nice, but when you dissect it all, it's all retarded. And that [Acey video] just made me say fuck it, because there's a broader picture than just your financial ability… how you call women a bitch and thinking you all cool and all that, but really you're an asshole, and you're going along with the program, with the white man… and man… I could write a poem off that.

"He said so much… it's just so relevant" (Erevu, S.P.). Haki (S.P.) added:

> The part where he said they're trying to hide Jill Scott from little girls… I remember when my co-worker was devastated when her 6 year-old niece said her role model was Nicki Minaj… That's like her role model… and like, the Jill Scotts and Lauryn Hills, like, they don't get big [radio] play.

We identified the master storyteller and discussed how music on the radio produced by the master storyteller is intended to "dumb" us (African American consumers) down, about which Erevu (S.P.) said:

> But that's what corporations want to do. They want us to come out with stuff like this so we can look worse as Black people, you know, and it's like, they not

> finna' put millions and millions of dollars behind someone who's talking about go to school, get yo' life right and pay attention, you feel me? . . . They knew exactly what they were doing and we're just victims [now]. We're vanity slaves.

In the middle of the discussion, I played a music video by R&B singer Angie Stone (2011) entitled *Brotha*. This song is a full-length tribute to Black men of all types. *Brotha* is an example of African-entered, digital counterstorytelling. While the lyrics applaud Black men, Stone showed images of positive Black male role models, including Nelson Mandela, Tavis Smiley, Will Smith, Johnny Cochran, Martin Luther King, and so forth, and she featured the everyday Black man as well—the father, construction worker, garbage man, teacher, lawyer, and so on. After viewing this music video, Haki (S.P.) mentioned to me, "Well the corporations, like you were saying earlier, are constructing what they want. This is a positive thing and they're not going to direct you to do positive things, because in turn, it affects consumerism." When the discussion turned to how to share this knowledge, Haki posed a question. "How do you counteract someone who says they just want to listen to chill music and they don't want to be saturated with all of this educational stuff, how do you counteract that?" To this question, the group had many answers, which included forcing them to listen or inviting them over and showing them a documentary. They all came to the conclusion that social media was a great way to share information casually with their peers.

I then introduced the core concepts and questions for practicing media literacy (Thoman, 2003a) (Appendix D), so that they would have the tools to do the same thing with their friends. I screened the music video "The Next Episode" by Dr. Dre (2011),

featuring Snoop Dogg and Kurupt. This activity allowed us to revisit many the concepts we had discussed throughout the day. These video screenings, discussions, and practicing of critical media literacy established a foundation for us to enter the last stage of the research study: producing an African-centered, media literate digital media message or counterstory (Delgado, 1995; Morrell, 2008; Yosso, 2006).

Giving participants an opportunity to merge critical analysis with action—known as praxis (Friere, 1970; Shor, 2008)—by utilizing media to share their new knowledge, they were instructed to work together to create a digital video message for their peers that reflected their learning throughout RAN. They were also instructed to share their vision for the African American community in a creative way (using song, movement, acting, or a chant) or by making a statement. To provide guidelines for their media messages and to prompt the development of "skills in analysis and interpretation" (Murrell, 2002, p. 55), I gave them the following questions to think about:

1. As a role model, how will you challenge a stereotype that may apply to you or your peers?
2. As a young adult, how will you use what you learned today to counter a challenge in your personal life?
3. As a leader, what is your vision for the African American community and the role you will play in achieving that vision?

I split the group into two groups (girls and guys), and they were given 45 minutes to create their media messages. Once they completed their messages, we resumed in the main activity room to videotape their messages. The girls performed skits to set the stage

for their individual messages and the guys made statements (Adimu [S.P.] incorporated a poem into his statement).

Erevu (S.P.):

The issue is education in America, for Black America. I feel that coming as a young Black man in a classroom, we don't have equal opportunity. We don't get the same respect. Things have to change. Young people should come together, like we are now, and come up with ways for us, and people period, to have equal rights for education. My vision is to educate Black people as far as things to better themselves. I'm a barber, I cut hair and would like to infuse educating someone while I'm cutting their hair. I want to bring those two together.

Habiba (S.P.):

I've overcome the stereotype that most African Americans are illiterate, by speaking up in class. My vision for my community is to create a magazine for African American girls. Seventeen and Vogue is more geared toward White girls. I'm going to network and share my goal.

Adimu (S.P.):

Negative circumstances
Give the majority of urban individuals opportunity
To take penitentiary chances
Those urban individuals who do take the school route
Are faced with certain challenges that hinder the mind
Casting doubt

Now stepping out of the environment, that breeds violence, racism and adversity

Into an environment that frowns upon your record

Event though your plan is to join a university

Could make or break one

Shake or take one

Into a mindset that might be negative or positive . . . You face all of these adversities and you either indulge in the negative and always thing negative, so you'll stop caring or you can get out and go to these resources and network and change and treat everyone as an opportunity to get to where you want to go and vice versa. Even though you have a murder or violent record, there's still opportunity for you to get to where you want to go . . . and whatever resources come by, that might generate employment for me, I'm going to give it right out to the community, like I expect it . . . and that's how we are going to be effective in taking our mindsets from negative to positive.

Anisa (S.P.):

I'm countering the stereotype of being a young, Black single mother, by going to school and take care of myself at the same time. My vision for the community is to let all single mothers out there know that we can do it, either work or go to school. Don't give up. We have to do this for us and our kids. My role is to let other people know that if I can do it, they can do it too.

Haki (S.P.):

My goal is to not lose my identity and not let other people stereotype me or make me think I need to act a certain way, and I'm not going to let anything stop me from doing my education. My role in that is to be an example for our community by going to school and getting my BA in anthropology, and my vision for the future is to open a non-profit organization for kids to travel around so they can realize there's more to the world than just America.

Curricular Component IV: Review of Learning/Closure

Pedagogy:	African-centered (meaning making)
Data Collection Tool/s:	Focus group & overall video taping
D-R-C Level:	Constructionist

After conducting the raffle and prize giveaways, we closed the workshop for the day. We stood in a circle, and I asked each participant to speak what was on his or her heart using the following questions as guidelines:

1. What are you leaving with?
2. What will you share with your community/family?
3. Are you empowered?
4. Was this experience valuable to you?

After each participant shared his/her closing statements, we revealed the meaning of their Swahili name:

Erevu = Clever

> What stuck out for me was to know that the corporations that founded slavery are big corporations now. Oh my God! That really hit home. Other than that everything was informative to me. I'm telling you, the second I step up in my barber school, we got us a whole day ahead of us, because this is all I'm talking about. I'm grateful for being invited to this. We are all special in our own way. I'm glad I got to me very special people.

Habiba = Loved

I like all the facts that was presented. I learned a lot. It was like an interesting experience. I learned a lot from each person. I'm glad I was invited to participate. I didn't know what to expect, but yeah, it was pretty good!

Adimu = Unique, rare

While you all were explaining to look for things in the media, the way it's selling us stuff, I do that in my girlfriend's church on how they ask for money. I tell my girlfriend, it's a business. She doesn't like to think about that stuff though. I learned to be more conscious about my actions, because I'm a product of the environment. I love that music, so it kind of helped me evaluate myself, and evaluate the connections I have and the people I know, and kind of shovel it all out. This helps me stay more focused. Because it's so easy to go back to where I was. I'm going to give it back.

Anisa = Grace

What I learned today, was, I like the stereotypes [exercise]. I always hear about stuff, but I never got a chance to sit down and talk about them. Them words actually made me a stronger person… to make sure no one puts those stereotypes on me. I'm glad I was invited. I feel like I've known everyone here a long time. I was kinda shy, but I absorbed a lot. Thank you.

Haki = Justice, truth

I learned about being collaborative today. Everyone had a different point of view, everyone was teaching each other, we all worked together. Our group, we fed off

of all our ideals. So that goes back to our African culture and community, and no one can tell us we don't have culture.

Taking the lead from Haki's statement, we closed the workshop by standing together in a circle, holding each other's hands, and reciting our group affirmation (Appendix A) one last time.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"Any citizen who aspires to live an independent life will need to confront and counter the ideologies" shaped by "bad… information brokers [who] control the world… via social institutions such as the media, corporate America and public schools" (Morrell, 2008, p. 5). Participants in this research study have lived lives many of us, as educators, cannot fathom: growing up in a dysfunctional, drug-abusive household; socially and emotionally developing as young men and women in the foster care system; turning 21 with a baby on the way without the support of family; making a violent mistake before the age of 21 and carrying a criminal record with you to every job interview and college application. Experiencing any of these things with limited knowledge about how the same institutions young people encounter for survival or education or incarceration have been designed to limit success in life and maintain oppression is only a small glimpse of their life experiences. Society typically views individuals with these backgrounds as degenerates, with no hope for a productive future.

From an African-centered pedagogical lens (see Appendix E), the African American study participants were revolutionaries engaged in building self-reliance and were assumed to possess the potential to contribute to the larger goal of nation building within the African diaspora; for its part, critical media pedagogy offers the tools for social action to become realized and to counter hegemony. In response to my research question: "How does the implementation of a combined African-centered/critical media pedagogy impel participants to transform their current life circumstances?", the following

themes emerged from this research study: (a) achieving an awareness of mis-education, (b) building a collective self-definition, and (c) gaining clarity of life focus.

Awareness of Mis-Education

Woodson's (1933) detailed account of the White myths that have deceived all African Americans, and the revelations identified through personal and professional accounts by W. E. B Dubois and Frederick Douglass, are critical assets to the foundation of African-centered education as a whole. They speak to the personal transformation all African Americans must experience in order for self-actualization to occur (Murrell, 2002). As an African American, I experienced a process of discovering this mis-education over many years, and media literacy helped to clarify this horror. Awareness of this mis-education, and how it is sustained by media, was experienced and expressed in different ways by our participants.

Erevu (S.P.) exclaimed, "The media is what has bamboozled me," when making the connection that the corporations whose products and lifestyles are heavily consumed by the African American community in the 21st century are the same corporations that exploited African American labor during the slave trade hundreds of years ago. *Bamboozled* was a term used to express both the feeling of being deceived by the trickery and successful propaganda campaign (Burrell, 2011) engineered by Europeans, and the frustrating, on-going struggle toward racial identity by African Americans (Chidester, Campbell, & Bell, 2006). Habiba (S.P.) realized that the questions she had about her culture were valid. She mentioned observing how other people were in tune with their cultures and wondering how she should act according to the way media portrayed her

culture. She also expressed this awareness through the frustration she felt with how African Americans blindly adopt the identities given to them by corporate American media. She understood, however, that they buy into negative media stereotypes because "Most of them are not educated about it. At one point, I wasn't myself." Haki's (S.P.) realization occurred on a broader perspective. She quickly made the correlation that the media has been the tool for sustaining mis-education, and therefore made the statement, "This workshop made me realize stereotypes rule America." Anisa (S.P.) translated the awareness of mis-education to the helpless role of the parent. She gravitated to the African proverb shared in the Shahadah (2005) documentary, "Children not taught by their parents are taught by the world." A media-saturated world has many unhealthy messages to transmit to the vulnerable minds of our youth; she saw that without a solid foundation of self-knowledge how easily they can be directed to journey down the wrong path in life.

Adimu's (S.P.) experience reflected the balance of knowledge he's needed throughout his life as a biracial male. He expressed feeling, "enlightened… and angry at the heartlessness of White men." His awareness of the mis-education was realized by sharing his appreciation for having a better understanding of the mindset of African Americans, based on the new knowledge presented to him regarding the African American struggle. His awareness allowed him to connect the dots, switching his view of African Americans from negative to positive, and giving himself permission to acknowledge his past mistakes as a "mindset, as opposed to who I am." This awareness is critical to achieving mental liberation. The media literacy concepts I shared throughout

taught Adimu that all media messages were constructed with embedded values and were organized to sustain power. This information allowed Adimu to begin to free himself from the construct that had mentally directed his actions in the past.

Horn (2003) has reminded us, "Critical awareness through media literacy can be liberating. Through awareness, choice becomes a possibility" (p. 300). From an African-centered perspective, Murrell (2002) detailed, in the identity development practice of the pedagogy, that the learner's "actions involve trying out different roles and expressions of self, by discourse… [the] learner practices of identity development include all means of self-definition and re-definition." Adimu (S.P.) began to redefine his self-concept, separating himself from what he thought he had to be (according to a particular mindset), and shifting to a more authentic self, a *choice* he had not realized he had.

Embarking on a journey to change an individual's life circumstances with an awareness of who you are and what you have to offer the world—that are not dictated by society's view—is empowering. Shifting from the labels imposed by society (based on your past or current background or race), to defining or redefining the individual's authentic self, transcends increasing an understanding of power structures designed to dominate. In this case, the awareness of the mis-education was, in fact, liberating.

Building a Collective Self-Definition

Another significant outcome from this research study was how participants began to express the ways they wanted to share their new knowledge with others, shifting their learning experience from individual to communal, and expressing urgent ways to change themselves *and* enlighten the African American community. Once exposed to the concept

of mis-education, they felt more comfortable sharing their learning experiences with each other, and they saw the critical need to re-educate others in the Diaspora. This response was consistent with Murrell's (2002) assertions:

> The act of collective self-definition is a crucial part of the reconstruction of African American subjectivity… This theme is important to the critical consciousness of African Americans. The conflictive relationship between self and the Black collectivity is a theme that needs to be developed in the critical pedagogy of African American learners through the literature and cultural history of African Americans. (p. 138)

Erevu (S.P.) expressed half-way through the workshop that he wanted to "one day create a documentary about us Black people," and later, upon completion of the workshop, he shared that he would immediately begin incorporating the new knowledge he had gained into the regular discussions he had at barber school. Habiba (S.P.) planned to "take many things I've learned today and educate myself further… use this towards my major and profession, to go against the grain of how blacks are normally portrayed." Adimu (S.P.) simply made the commitment to share his new knowledge with his peers, and Anisa (S.P.) voiced specifically the urge to share this information, "back home, school, and anywhere else."

Haki (S.P.) began planning her actions to share with and empower the African American community early on in the workshop. In her words:

> Not many people are aware of what we are discovering today because of the Eurocentric perspective that dominates the world… we could make programs for

children to teach them about the media and its construction of the Black image…

All Americans need to be educated about the true history of Black Americans…

a good means to reach the general public is through social media…

She concluded by acknowledging the power that her peers in the workshop shared: "My general feeling right now is somewhat somber, but hopeful. If everyone in this workshop goes out and makes a difference, there can be change" (Haki, S.P.). Her testimony speaks to the lesson that critical media and praxis teaches: to identify the media that has stereotyped and oppressed African Americans, and to utilize similar and new media to counter and empower. Haki realized that she has access to 21st-century communication tools and uses them daily. She can now, and on a larger scale within the African American community of knowledge makers, potentially use social media for nation building across the African Diaspora (Murrell, 2002). In essence, what emerged as the outcome of the hybrid African-centered/critical media pedagogy were constructionists (Akbar, 1998; Banks, 1982) who defined themselves by a collective, who established meaning-making practices (Murrell, 2002) in online, *cyber*-critical media communities (Morrell, 2008) in order to enhance the education of African American people and to provide new models of education for the general public (Akbar, 1998).

Lastly, Murrell (2002) and Ani (1994) have reminded us that, from an African-centered perspective, Eurocentric learning reinforces a sense of cultural supremacy, rugged individualism, and a competitive nature. The hybrid pedagogical formula presented in this paper reinforces the critical need for cultivating knowledge as a community and for succeeding together *as one unit.* Regarding changing one's life

circumstances, building a network of support and knowledge sharing becomes substantive and builds self-efficacy for successful transformation.

Clarity of Life Focus

> We cannot continue to be the reactors or participants in the vision or world view of people who see us as fixtures in their world rather than as co-builders of a world that places our priorities and perspective at the top of the human agenda. (Akbar, 1998, p. 69)

The present research study (with the RAN curriculum and the implementation of the hybrid African-centered/critical media pedagogy) culminated with participants placing the needs of their race at the forefront of their purpose in life. Erevu (S.P.) entered the study in a place of flux, admitting to the group, "I'm in a battle with myself… I just want to find out who I am more." Upon completion of the study, his digital media message (counterstory) captured him making an empassioned statement on the issue of equality in education for African Americans and presenting a clear plan for supporting that education in his own informal learning environment. He said:

> The issue is education in America, for Black America… coming as a young black man into the classroom, we don't have equal opportunity… we don't get the same respect. Young people should come together, like we are today, and come up with ways for us to have equal rights for education. I'm a barber… I would like to infuse educating someone while I'm cutting their hair. (Erevu, S.P.)

Anisa (S.P.) and Haki (S.P.) were clear on countering specific stereotypes in their lives. The workshop gave them the space they needed to come to terms with cultural

judgments imposed on them by society—and by members of their immediate social circles. For Anisa, being a young African American single mother is a stigma she struggles with daily. For Haki, being Afrocentric in mind and heart, but exhibiting so-called European features and demeanor, she sometimes feels, as she put it, "overwhelmed by being black… because [when] I speak in what is perceived to be an articulate way, but refuse to lose my culture, they are surprised… this shows how indoctrinated people are." By the end of the workshop, they were fully committed to countering these stereotypes, and voiced that commitment in their digital media messages (counterstories).

> I'm countering the stereotype of being a young, black, single mother by going to school and taking care of myself at the same time. My vision is to let all single mothers know we can do it. Don't give up… I like the stereotypes [exercise]… I hear them… but never got a chance to sit down and talk about them… Them words made me a stronger person, to make sure no one puts those words on me (Anisa, S.P.).

Haki (S.P.) entered this research study confused about her goals in life, sharing that she was interested in many things and really wanted to focus on one career path. By the end of the study, her career focus and her role in the larger goal of advancing her race became clear, as she explained:

> My goal is not to lose my identity and not let other people stereotype me or make me think I need to act a certain way. My role is to be the example for our community by going to school, getting my degree in anthropology… and to open

> a non-profit for kids to travel around the world and realize there's more than just America.

Habiba's (S.P.) mission was clearly stated at the end of the workshop—and validated throughout. This experience gave her the push she needed to speak her vision and to understand the steps she needed to take toward achieving it. Her long-term goal included creating a fashion magazine for Black girls, acknowledging how the fashion and magazine industry is dominated by White images. She wanted to utilize print media to counter hegemony.

Adimu's (S.P.) transformation stood out among them all, and his transparency painted a picture of how a participant in RAN can uncover and clarify his authentic purpose in life. Adimu immediately began sharing his inner thoughts and experiences throughout each stage of the workshop. In the beginning, he could feel himself becoming, "more conscious of my purpose in life and relations." As we dissected media messages, he realized, as a young poet, that he was contributing to the same unhealthy media messages that influenced him, and that he needed to shift away from that: "It's a struggle…[but] there's a broader picture than just your financial ability…how can you call a woman a bitch? . . . you're just [going] along with the program…with the white man." His digital media message (counterstory) was a poem, expressing his struggle with trying to transform from his past life of crime and incarceration into a new life of authenticity. His final statement during the focus group spoke volumes:

> I learned to be more conscious about my actions, because I am a product of the environment…[This workshop] helped me evaluate myself, and the connections I

> have and the people I know…and shovel it all out. This [workshop] helped me stay more focused…I'm going to give it back. (Adimu, S.P.)

Adimu's path is one of self-realization and, at the same time, self-actualization. His experience in RAN, and as a learner within the hybrid African-centered/critical media pedagogy, awakened the true spirit within and allowed him to take the reins, transcend his environment, and begin exploring his true calling in life. "Properly awakened, the Negro can do the so-called impossible…and thus help to govern, rather than merely be governed" (Woodson, 1933, p. 187).

My Pedagogy

> I learned about being collaborative today. Everyone had a different point of view, everyone was teaching each other, we all worked together. In our group, we fed off of all of our ideals. So that goes back to our African culture, and no one can tell us we don't have culture. (Haki, S.P.)

The critical educator in me set the stage early on in RAN, so that all of the participants would understand the value of their voices and the expertise they bring to the learning environment (Baltodono, Darder & Torres, 2009; Freire, 1970; Morrell, 2008). The African-centered educator in me immediately and simultaneously acknowledged the ancestors who came before them and reminded them whose shoulders they stood on as they prepared to teach each other; even I, as the facilitator, did so (Murrell 2002). I made it clear that I was there to learn from them as well. The assignment of Swahili names, circle seating, and group affirmation were designed to open up the soul of the African learner within and to establish a collective mindset. This

environment prompted our journey together and was the catalyst for the symbolic African learning village that Haki (S.P.) referenced above. The fifth premise of African-centered pedagogy discusses the importance of establishing a significant community and symbolic culture for learning individuals. As stated by Murrell (2002):

> A social-cultural community is where children negotiate meaning. Negotiated meaning in general, is the fabric of social interaction and learning in any social scene. It is how people experience the world and engage in what we find as meaningful. (p. 50)

As an African American female educator, I found this cultivated learning community to be essential for the deconstructionist—reconstructionist—constructionist (Akbar 1998; Banks 1982) phases of re-educating the mis-educated, because my instinct to nurture and protect while unveiling and countering the horror of the African American historical experience was shared and supported by each participant throughout the learning process.

The cultural foundation of my pedagogy also stems from personal life experiences. "A pedagogy always engenders a direction and purpose for learning, whether it is a formal one like the African Centered pedagogy, or a personal one incorporating some or all of many educational frameworks" (Murrell, 2002, p. 55). In 1990, my mother took me to see Nelson Mandela, the South African activist and humanitarian, speak at the Los Angeles Coliseum. Sitting in a sea people from all ethnic backgrounds, I was entranced by this legendary leader. He had an uncanny ability to connect with each and every individual and to create an environment that empowered everyone there to take action for his cause. I felt as if he were speaking *only* to me! He

shared his personal and professional experiences as an active participant in the freedom struggle, graphically defined the term *apartheid,* and discussed his role in dismantling it. I was overwhelmed, humbled, and deeply disheartened by the story of his reality, and the reality of South African people, my global brothers and sisters. He then announced he would begin fasting until there were equal voting rights declared by the South African government and requested that the public join him in taking action toward the same goal. In the car ride home, I told my mother I would fast by removing beef and pork from my diet until South African citizens were able to vote. I maintained this commitment until 1994, when equal voting rights in South Africa was declared. It was not until I became a doctoral student that I was able to define that experience.

My mother, a Black female educator, inserted me into an African-centered (Murrell, 2002) informal educational space—what Mezirow (1997) and Bailey and Alfred (2006) would describe as a culturally rooted, transformative learning environment. Through autonomous thinking, transformative learning is the process of effecting change within an established social structure (Mezirow, 1997) and is organic in nature among Black women educators cognizant of their role and impact on cultural empowerment (Bailey & Alfred, 2006). At the age of 16, my Mandela experience challenged me to think critically about the world and directed my understanding of racism as a social structure. The type of critical media used to influence and educate me about the implications of European colonialism was the cultural medium of oration. It fostered the constructionist (Akbar, 1998; Banks 1982) in me, and contributed to my ability to identify my individual role in countering and transforming racism and power for the

betterment of the global African Diaspora (Murrell, 2002). It was within many of these informal African-centered educational environments that I began modeling African-centered and critical media thought and action, subconsciously formulating the pedagogy inherent in me as an educator today.

At the age of 36, I am also a product of the hip-hop generation. I come from a time when media genres labeled as "conscious hip hop" and "ganster rap" were equally played on the radio, and were integrated into a larger radio rotation along with music from our parent's generation—both the "classic soul" of the 1960s, and the "R&B" and "Neo-Soul" renaissance of the 1980s and 1990s. When I was growing up, Black music was fully represented, and I had a choice as to what aspect of Black life it was going to teach me at any given moment. These themes, which emerged from this workshop: (a) awareness of mis-education, (b) building a collective self-definition, and (c) clarity of life focus, were revealed to me through the socially and culturally conscious movement of hip hop. Before it was targeted by European-influenced corporate America, hip hop in the 20th century was a means toward self-realization and self-actualization; indeed, hip hop began as the language and creative teaching tool of Africans in America. These experiences have woven the fabric of my pedagogy, and support why producing digital media counterstories are so important in the process of educating African American youth in the Digital Age. Hip hop in the 21st century has been colonized, but with the advent of the Internet and new media, African Americans can translate the vision of the constructionist (Akbar 1998; Banks 1982), meaning making practices (Murrell, 2002),

and digital counterstories (Delgado, 1995b; Yosso, 2006) into a more innovative, expansive, bold, and radical movement.

Jenkins et al. (2006), and Shirky (2009) would suggest introducing the value of the participatory culture that new media offers in the 21st century as a tool for organizing, coordinating, and shaping by cultural groups. Jenkins et al. (2006) have asserted that our goal should be to encourage youth to participate in contemporary culture and that it is important to have communication tools available, and more importantly, that understanding is gained into how cultural groups use those tools. They suggested that these tools be utilized to advance cultural needs and goals. Jenkins et al. (2006) have also praised informal learning environments as spaces that can evolve to respond to short-term needs. Online, informal learning environments are identified as "affinity spaces" (Gee, 2004). They are powerful tools because they are maintained by online users with common interests who can be of various ages, classes, genders, races, and educational levels with varying skill levels to share and build on information.

Shirky (2009) has argued that the social media network phenomenon, similar to affinity spaces, is where innovation occurs all the time. The Internet, a media revolution according to Shirky, and social media represent "the largest increase in expressive capability in human history" (quote from video podcast). About 100 years ago, radio and, later, television broadcasting were the sole producers of news and information. Shirky described this communication system as the "one-to-many" pattern. Today, thanks to the Internet, news and information sharing occurs in a "many-to-many" pattern. Everyone with skill and access can produce and share information through blogs,

websites, email, and social media networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace) (Shirky, 2009). "We are moving away from a world in which some produce and many consume media, toward one in which everyone has a more active stake in the culture that is produced" (Jenkins, et al., 2006, p. 10).

"Critical educators argue that any worthwhile theory of schooling must be… fundamentally tied to a struggle for a qualitatively better life for all through the construction of a society based on nonexploitative relations and social justice" (McLaren, 2009, p. 62). Taken together, and according to the concepts of critical theory and critical media pedagogy, educators and learners who participate in the digital landscape have the tools needed to construct new knowledge and culture in cyberspace and in the classroom. Integrating tools of new media into a learning environment designed to support the transformation of African American students can be a powerful force for countering the cultural supremacy that has dominated the classroom for hundreds of years. Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the potential for creating critical cyber communities online (Morrell, 2008) based on Haki's (S.P.) revelation of sharing the information she had learned in RAN through social media outlets. In order for Haki's vision to be realized, the African American community needs to close the digital divide. Without access and skilled use of new media across the generations, African Americans will be limited in utilizing new and old media tools to attain liberation in the Digital Age.

Because my generation transitioned into adulthood at the intersection of two critical centuries, I have concluded that it is my generation's responsibility to bridge the digital divide and to move our complete African village toward advancement in the

Digital Age. Additionally, it is imperative that African American educators from my generation utilize the tools of new media to re-educate our mis-educated community, whether informally, in our families and communities, or formally, in the classroom. This aim is my pedagogy and vision for the African American community—and can be the next historical cultural and educational movement toward mental liberation in the Digital Age.

The Blend of Pedagogies

As a participant-observer in Rise Above the Noise and thorough analysis of the findings from this research study, I noted three key points: (a) the similarities between African-centered pedagogy's meaning-making practices (Murrell, 2002) and critical media pedagogy's praxis (Freire, 1974; Shor, 2008), (b) the way the two pedagogies inform each other to inspire social action by the participants, and (c) the critical need to master the understanding and implementation of African-centered pedagogy's seven premises and five practices simultaneously.

In African-centered pedagogy it is essential to the process of meaning making that students apply their understanding of the cultural information they absorb in the learning environment (Murrell, 2002). Gaining this insight depends on how well we, as African-centered educators, establish a space for engagement and participation and community integrity, and support students' development in practicing inquiry and identity development. The ability to identify meaning and construct knowledge-in-practice is essential to uncovering their innate gifts to humanity. In critical pedagogy, the concept of praxis is what gives the learner an opportunity to apply theory to practice, whether

through written texts or media production. The benefit of combining the two pedagogies in this manner aligns the contemporary tool of media (a tool this generation is familiar with) with the awareness of the mis-education and gives permission to the learner to produce media for self-realization and self-actualization.

Following this path, social action on the part of learners becomes something attainable and within their reach and power. Because they become conscious and utilize new media tools to voice their personal transformation, the agency needed to extend these new forms of knowledge outside of the classroom, and with their peers, becomes at once imperative and possible. They begin to uncover their authenticity, free from what society has imposed on them.

Lastly, for the African-centered/critical media educator, mastery of the elements for establishing an authentic cultural foundation for educating African Americans—one rooted in the traditional African principles and values of education—that aligns with the work of African American scholars and educators becomes imperative for successful instruction, especially in the Digital Age. "In order to serve African children our methods must reflect the best understandings that we have of how they develop and learn biologically, spiritually and culturally" (Murrell, 2002, p. 77). Although combined with critical media, it is important to note, African-centered pedagogy stands on its own because of its delicate gift of transforming the spirit of the student. It continues where critical pedagogy stops. This spiritual juncture bears fruit for all participants in the learning process, including the facilitator/s or educators themselves. African-centered pedagogy reveals this essential building block for communal healing. Although elusive,

this transformational spirit is felt within by each participant in the hybrid pedagogical approach, ensuring that (a) awareness of the miseducation, (b) collective self-definition, and (c) clarity of life focus are attainable by participants. The curricular components of RAN and its implementation only scratch the surface of what critical media within an African-centered framework can produce, because African-centered schooling, when all premises and practices are implemented accurately and simultaneously, expands learning across spiritual planes and transcends the human experience.

According to the Council of Independent Black Institutions (1996), African-centered education:

1. Acknowledges Afrikan spirituality as an essential aspect of our uniqueness as a people and makes it an instrument of our liberation (Ani, 1994; Anwisye; 1993; Clarke, 1991; Richards, 1989).
2. Facilitates participation in the affairs of nations and defining (or redefining) reality on our own terms, in our own time, and in our own interests (Karenga, 1980).
3. Prepares Afrikans "for self-reliance, nation maintenance, and nation management in every regard" (Clarke, 1991, p. 62).
4. Emphasizes the fundamental relationship between the strength of our families and the strength of our nation.
5. Ensures that the historic role and function of the customs, traditions, rituals, and ceremonies are understood and made relevant to the challenges that confront us in our time.

6. Emphasizes that Afrikan identity is embedded in the continuity of Afrikan cultural history and that Afrikan cultural history represents a distinct reality continually evolving from the experiences of all Afrikan people, wherever they are and have been on the planet across time and generations.
7. Focuses on the "knowledge and discovery of historical truths, through comparison, hypothesizing and testing through debate, trial, and application, through analysis and synthesis, through creative and critical thinking, through problem resolution processes, and through final evaluation and decision making" (Akoto, 1992, p. 116).
8. Can only be systematically facilitated by people who themselves are consciously engaged in the process of Afrikan-centered personal transformation.
9. Is a process dependent upon human perception and interpretation, in an Afrikan-centered manner (Murrell, 2002, p. 77-78; Shujaa, 1992).

Adimu (S.P.) shared, "I learned to be more conscious…. This workshop helped me evaluate myself…I'm going to give it back." Statements like these suggest an element of transformation attained by a learner who may not have reached that conclusion from an isolated lesson in critical media literacy.

Recommendations for the Field of Education in the Digital Age

"This is a critical juncture in African history and every thought and action has the potential for becoming liberating or incarcerating" (Nobles, 1990). As mentioned earlier in this paper, the African American community is in a state of emergency (NAACP,

2007). We are the only race of people in the nation at the bottom level of all socioeconomic, education, health, and criminal justice institutions, and who survived a holocaust of 500 years. Mental enslavement by European hegemony has effectively brainwashed all Americans (subconsciously and consciously) that Black inferiority is truth (Burrell, 2010). The Black image and contribution to humanity continues to be harshly stereotyped and exploited, and a self-hatred among African Americans is concrete. The life span of Black males has shortened due to Black-on-Black crime (National Urban League, 2007).

Innovation—the gift of African people to humanity, as the originators of mankind, arts, sciences, spirituality, culture—is innate in Africans in America, and if repression is sustained, the evolution of humankind will continue to be stunted. We have been conditioned very well to believe that culture-specific education is discriminatory or separatist. This view is Eurocentric and, therefore, an understandable, yet false conclusion. Africans in America need to heal. Our consciousness needs the space to transcend, so that our voices can be validated, our self-concept restored, our community revitalized, our culture renewed, our minds reawakened, and our souls freed. Advocacy for African-centered pedagogy by African American educators for African American learners must be encouraged by White educators in the Digital Age. As a whole, Americans of European descent must be morally outraged with the actions and impact of their European ancestors, and show accountability for their privilege. For educators of European descent, critical consciousness should begin with an awareness of privilege. The pedagogy of European educators in America should be infused with an analysis both

of their role in sustaining injustice in the classroom and of the inhumane acts of their ancestors in society.

Lastly, the eighth requirement from the Council of Independent Black Institutions (1996) for implementing African-centered education says, "It can only be systematically facilitated by people who themselves are consciously engaged in the process of Afrikan-centered personal transformation" (Murrell, 2002, p. 78). Therefore, educators engaged in implementing hybrid African-centered/critical media pedagogies should be African Americans who bring spiritual and emotional courage and conviction to the work of liberating the minds of African American learners. Countering Eurocentric hegemony, re-educating the mis-educated, seeing the brilliance and potential innovator in African American learners typically disposed of by society takes tremendous love, determination, and resilience, and requires instructors with a higher sense of self, in tune with the voices and wisdom of our African ancestors. Training in African-centered pedagogy must expand and become infused with critical media pedagogy. This hybrid pedagogical formula must be mastered in the Digital Age. "The Negro needs to become radical, and the race will never amount to anything until it does become so, but this radicalism should come [first] from within. He must learn to do so for himself, or be exterminated" (Woodson, 1933, pp. 187-88).

APPENDIX A

RISE ABOVE THE NOISE GROUP AFFIRMATION

Group Affirmation:

Hey sister/brother

I see you

You are my family

Hey family

I see you

Let us rise as a community

Each of us

Has all the resources – will – knowledge

To overcome any obstacle

To lift while we climb

To share life lessons on the way

To innovate and lead in the 21st Century

We are all uniquely brilliant – capable – and ready

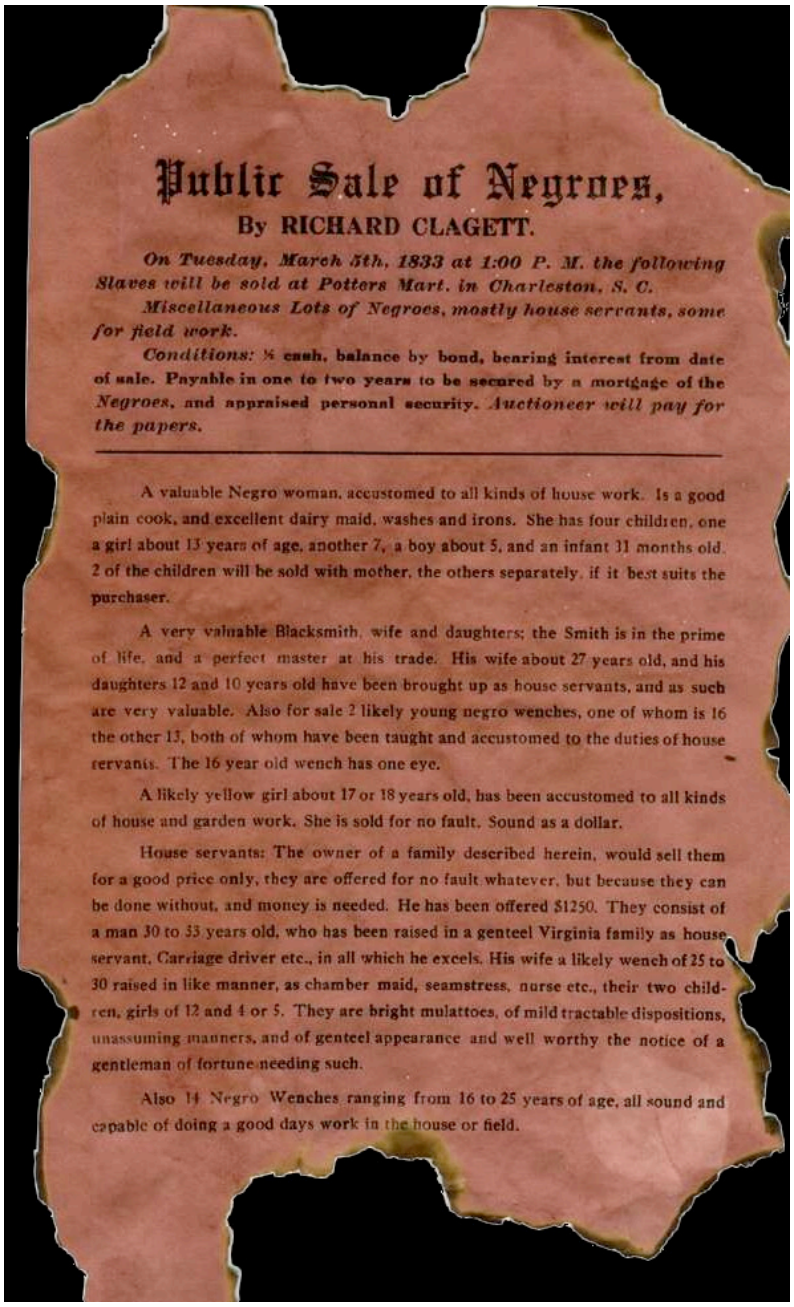
Hey family

I see you

Let us rise as a community!

APPENDIX B

PUBLIC SALE OF NEGROES



Public Sale of Negroes,

By RICHARD CLAGETT.

On Tuesday, March 5th, 1833 at 1:00 P. M. the following Slaves will be sold at Potters Mart, in Charleston, S. C.

Miscellaneous Lots of Negroes, mostly house servants, some for field work.

Conditions: **¼ cash, balance by bond, bearing interest from date of sale. Payable in one to two years to be secured by a mortgage of the *Negroes*, and appraised personal security. *Auctioneer will pay for the papers.***

A valuable Negro woman, accustomed to all kinds of house work. Is a good plain cook, and excellent dairy maid, washes and irons. She has four children, one a girl about 13 years of age, another 7, a boy about 5, and an infant 11 months old. 2 of the children will be sold with mother, the others separately, if it best suits the purchaser.

A very valuable Blacksmith, wife and daughters; the Smith is in the prime of life, and a perfect master at his trade. His wife about 27 years old, and his daughters 12 and 10 years old have been brought up as house servants, and as such are very valuable. Also for sale 2 likely young negro wenches, one of whom is 16 the other 13, both of whom have been taught and accustomed to the duties of house servants. The 16 year old wench has one eye.

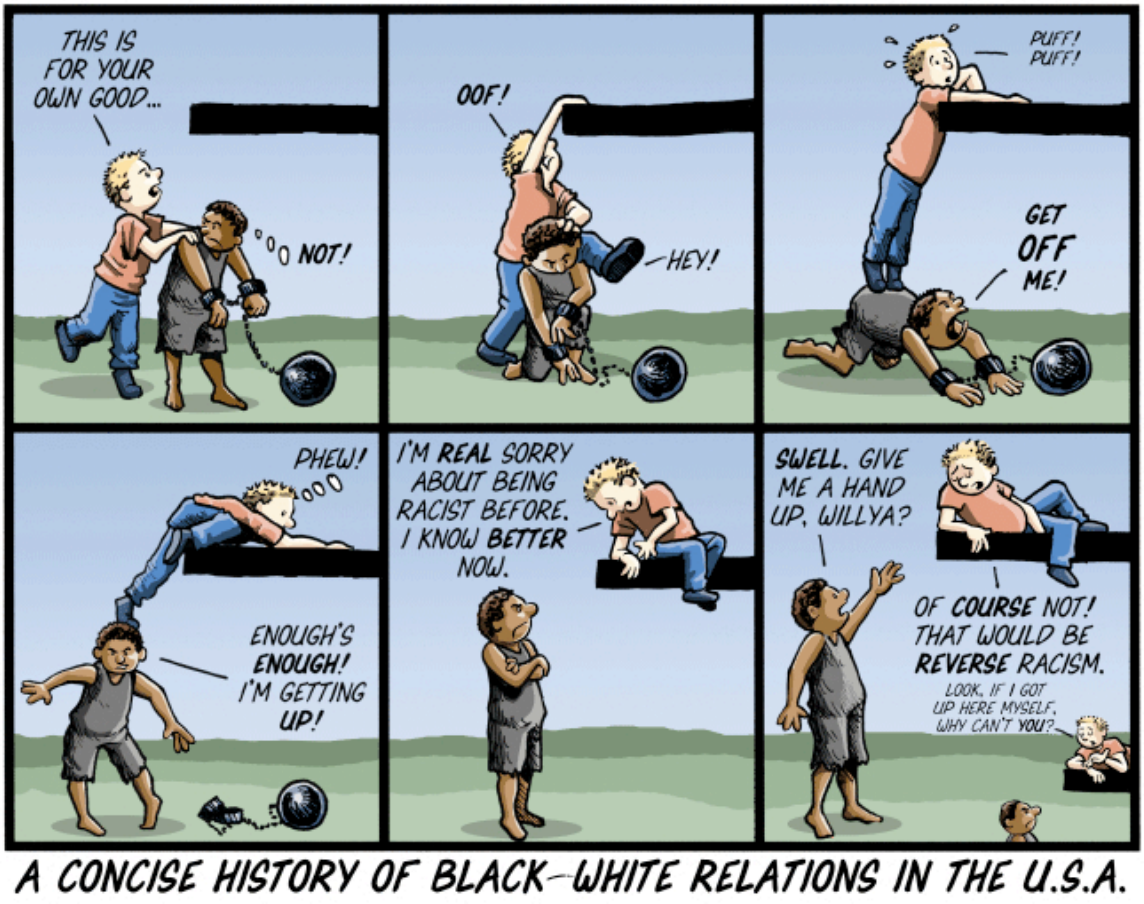
A likely yellow girl about 17 or 18 years old, has been accustomed to all kinds of house and garden work. She is sold for no fault. Sound as a dollar.

House servants: The owner of a family described herein, would sell them for a good price only, they are offered for no fault whatever, but because they can be done without, and money is needed. He has been offered $1250. They consist of a man 30 to 33 years old, who has been raised in a genteel Virginia family as house servant, Carriage driver etc., in all which he excels. His wife a likely wench of 25 to 30 raised in like manner, as chamber maid, seamstress, nurse etc., their two children, girls of 12 and 4 or 5. They are bright mulattoes, of mild tractable dispositions, unassuming manners, and of genteel appearance and well worthy the notice of a gentleman of fortune needing such.

Also 14 Negro Wenches ranging from 16 to 25 years of age, all sound and capable of doing a good days work in the house or field.

APPENDIX C

A CONCISE HISTORY OF BLACK-WHITE RELATIONS IN THE USA



APPENDIX D

CORE CONCEPTS AND QUESTIONS IN MEDIA LITERACY

Core Concepts	Key Questions	Guiding Questions
1. All messages are "constructed".	Who created this message?	What is this? How is this put together?
2. Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.	What techniques are used to attract my attention?	What do I see, hear, smell, touch or taste?
3. Different people experience the same media message differently.	How might different people understand this message differently from the way I do?	What do I think and feel about this? What might other people think and feel about this?
4. Media have embedded values and points of view.	What lifestyles, values and points of view are represented or omitted in this message?	What does this tell me about how other people live and what they believe?
5. Media are organized to gain profit and/or power.	Why was this message sent?	Is this trying to sell me something? Is this trying to tell me something?

APPENDIX E

CULTURAL PRACTICES AND METHODOLOGY OF

AFRICAN-CENTERED PEDAGOGY

Cultural Practice	Methodology
Engagement and Participation Practices	Employ a living curriculum – such as "movement history" in which students address the historical struggle of African American people.
Identity Development Practices	Create spaces for oral performance and public talk that allows opportunities for inquiry practices in subject matter content
Community Integrity Practices	Build a sense of *Harambee* (the Swahili word for working together): Harambee evokes the idea of collateral, community reflection, in which instructional practice is appraised as shared activity.
Practices of Inquiry	Tapping and developing the idea of collective memory: ensure a common understanding of collective memory as how a people experience their present in light of the past
Meaning-Making Practices	Organize literacy practices as an extended conversation and elaborated activity: For example, this practice might be the enactment of stories with props (e.g., puppets, images of the characters throughout the room, and so forth)

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