

AERA 2000 Symposium
The People Who Could Fly:
A New Millennium Research Agenda on Black Education

A Critique Focusing on International Policy and Educational Matters
Discussant Remarks

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This critique will focus on three key issues: 1) Comments on the papers by Kassie Freeman and William Watkins; 2) a cross-national comparison examining nation-specific, yet emerging, motifs and dominant paradigms; and 3) comments on the forthcoming work for the Commission, namely, issues that should guide the research agenda of AERA and national research and policy agendas.

Kassie Freeman's research focuses on Black populations in Australia, Great Britain, Germany, Portugal, and the USA. In each of these countries, the controlling population is non-Black, hence she examines the similarities of experiences of Black populations in these diverse nations in their quest to participate in education. My comments address selected themes this paper focused on, that of cultural alienation and annihilation; two distinct yet, interrelated constructs.

Freeman defines cultural alienation and annihilation as the "process that controlling populations use to minimize or eradicate the culture of minority populations" (p. 6). The uprooting or destruction of a race and its culture is an illustration of assimilation that Freeman uses to describe cultural alienation and annihilation. What may, in fact, appear to be alienation is really an early stage of cultural annihilation. The examples offered in the paper and examples from other countries, such as South Africa and Zimbabwe, reveal post-modern paradigms (referenced in Watson's paper) that would be helpful in understanding these interrelated terms.

During the prolonged historical struggle in countries such as South Africa and Zimbabwe, indigenous people had opportunities to retain their cultures throughout their oppression. However, today we observe young men being culturally alienated, and de-neutered of their indigenous culture; that is cultural annihilation. When close interaction within one's own culture is required to maintain that culture, and one migrates to a country that will not accept or permit the indigenous culture, alienation exists. South Africa and Zimbabwe are added examples of this type of alienation. We must also examine the annihilation that occurs at a psychological and economic level.

When alienation exists, it wreaks havoc on society. For example, for those of you who have recently traveled to South Africa, many hotels and major sites in

downtown Johannesburg have been closed. This is because bands of young African males—lost generations—have not been in school, but have been terrorizing the public. This is not vastly different from disconnected youth in any other society. With some schools attempting to eradicate positive cultural values and force assimilation, educational opportunities for Black people are severely reduced and society is adversely affected. The challenge is to analyze both the structural conditions in the individual school at the micro level and at the larger macro societal level, with issues that influence alienation for these young men. This alienation can lead to a “culture of exclusion” for Black populations globally.

The monetary and nonmonetary cost of exclusion is another issue covered in the Freeman paper. Nonmonetary costs include the psychological, the cultural and the intergenerational increased delinquency and adult crime. Freeman notes that Black populations globally find themselves in a “culture of exclusion” via cultural alienation and annihilation. When Black children are “excluded from schooling, whether through suspension or expulsion or placement in the lower tracks of schooling” (Freeman, p. 11), they are excluded from the mainstream culture. This exclusion is based largely on behavioral or cultural differences and leads to the non-monetary costs mentioned above.

With the recent activity in Great Britain, we note some of those non-monetary and monetary manifestations on the old eleven plus exam, which was used to exclude students from entering viable academic secondary schools. Such exclusion meant limited reliable education or economic options. Hence, comprehensive economic career alternatives are not readily accessible in the United Kingdom. During my recent trip to Great Britain, the Chancellor of the Exchequer (roughly equivalent to the American Secretary of the Treasury) was decrying secondary school structures and examinations that limit students’ options.

After reading Kassie Freeman’s paper, I immediately began thinking about NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement. The comments and concerns voiced by Caribbean Ambassadors regarding whether their nations would be able to participate in NAFTA—their nations were economically excluded—echo incessantly. What are the contemporary and future macro policy implications of national exclusion?

Taken together the Freeman and Watkins papers constitute a micro and intermediate levels of analysis (the Freeman paper) compared to a macro and comprehensive analysis (the Watkins paper). Watkins begins with a critical historical analysis that examines ethnic conflict in Africa emanating from formal colonization resulting from the 1885-86 Berlin Conference. What we need to take into account are the kinds of contemporary conditions caused by historical appropriations provided to different countries by the European Union (EU), the World Bank, or the United States government. For instance, the United States spends less than 2 percent of its Federal budget on international matters, excluding military

appropriations. So we are discussing only 2-3 percent of the total national budget directed to international funding that will move into development.

William Watkins's paper presents conceptual frameworks regarding colonialism, neocolonialism, dependency theory, modern economic theory, that is, the dominant paradigms for the last thirty to fifty years in international relations. Now we are at the post-modern period. What do we need to sustain a vibrant society and what is the principle goal of education for the people in sustaining society?

In a post-modern period, there are different structural formulas being used, such as structural adjustments and debt relief. However, indebted countries do not have the means to resolve their outstanding debt, because there are few viable economic means within a developing society, and this realization is critical when incredible social and educational needs exist. Another factor depicted in this paper is that 20 percent of the Gross National Product (GNP) of many African countries has been spent on education; that is a crucial amount of funding. However, if 20 percent is spent on education, what does that mean for the other components in the society that rely on the economic infrastructure? How do other sectors obtain final government approval and appropriations for societal development in a post-modern era?

How these questions are addressed becomes very important vis-à-vis what I refer to as diverse leadership styles and modes of participation in shifting political climates. Very briefly we can reference authoritarian, citing Ali Mazuri, or personal enrichment styles. Citing the late president Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, I would also suggest participatory and rather transparent styles of leadership and methods of input. These are some of the variables needing consideration for understanding democratic processes and for understanding who is involved in the decision-making processes concerning education and other parts of the infrastructure.

My concluding comments are limited to six areas and I will then suggest some paradigms and levels of analyses. An initial, first critical issue we need to consider in African and other nations (and certainly in the United States) is public health and public policy issues. Penn State University, where I am a Dean, has a linkage with a particular South African University. The vice-chancellor of the university (equivalent to an American university president) stated that about 25 percent of the university students (self-selected groups) have tested HIV positive. They will be lost to us, before they graduate or shortly thereafter. They will not be teachers, bankers, or entrepreneurs, and that's a critical public policy issue. It is a very human issue, and an economic one.

A second area involves technology. Some of you have certainly read *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and other publications with features concerning the emerging virtual African universities. The University of South Africa, for example, offers extensive distance education programs. Those of us at various American universities and in the Midwestern University Consortium for International Activity

(MUCIA) form partnerships for distance education. This may be one way to proceed; and I think I am not alone when I declare Black education has to take into account new forms of technology. The critical factor, though, is to ensure that all people are equal participants in the university technology partnerships—that is, *affirmative opportunities* are needed in new modes of instruction and learning by faculty and students regardless of locale.

A third area, again a partnership with Africa, Great Britain, and elsewhere, has to do with those involved with economics and technology. A few years ago I participated in a conference where Archbishop Desmond Tutu was one of the keynote speakers. He said, “people called me ‘Mr. Anti-Apartheid.’ I did not want apartheid in education and any other social institutions. However, now I want them to call me ‘Mr. Investment,’ because I want to have a say in what kind of economic options are out there.” We need to move beyond apartheid and explore international economic and technological options.

A fourth area referenced earlier is the transparent process in macro policy analysis that allows faculty and students on various campuses to make decisions for themselves. The nature of scholarship, curriculum and evolving dynamic paradigms to address national needs must be in the forefront of a participatory academy.

A fifth area necessitates an examination of intermediate and micro-level analyses. Several of the cases (of this AERA plenary symposium) elucidated styles of interaction, styles of teaching and what is conducive and what is not conducive to learning. What is really interesting is to tease out those factors that may appear authoritarian but encourage learning and vice-versa. Now what do I mean by that? As William Watkins’s paper portrays, some of the teachers in African countries are very condescending; the students are not encouraged to interact. But the classrooms are not as chaotic as many of the classrooms here in the United States. I am not suggesting that we want to have condescending, authoritarian teachers; but all of these are factors we need to analyze to identify best practices that may emerge.

A final area addresses educational funding formulas. The funding formulas in many African countries (and elsewhere) allow some creativity (as Watkins concludes concerning alternative schools). However, non-government funding formulas for self-reliant schools come from the local community, and in many cases the local community does not have sustainable economic resources to support a viable alternative school. The Harambee Schools in Kenya is a grassroots program designed for the community. Funding for Harambee came from the local people, and in many cases many communities went without other necessities because these “makeshift” second-chance schools devoured funds.

In conclusion, I would like to articulate the necessity for an emergence of evolving dynamic paradigms. We must simultaneously address macro, intermediate and micro level analyses using interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary methods of

research. As we do this, our research can become very valuable, not only to those of us within the educational community, but also to the policy makers at the state, national, and international levels. Together, we can collectively ensure that we are the people who can run and fly into the new millennium.