

Renderings of Audacity

*Black Youth's Defiance Under the Canopy of
Educational Anti-Black Structural Violence*

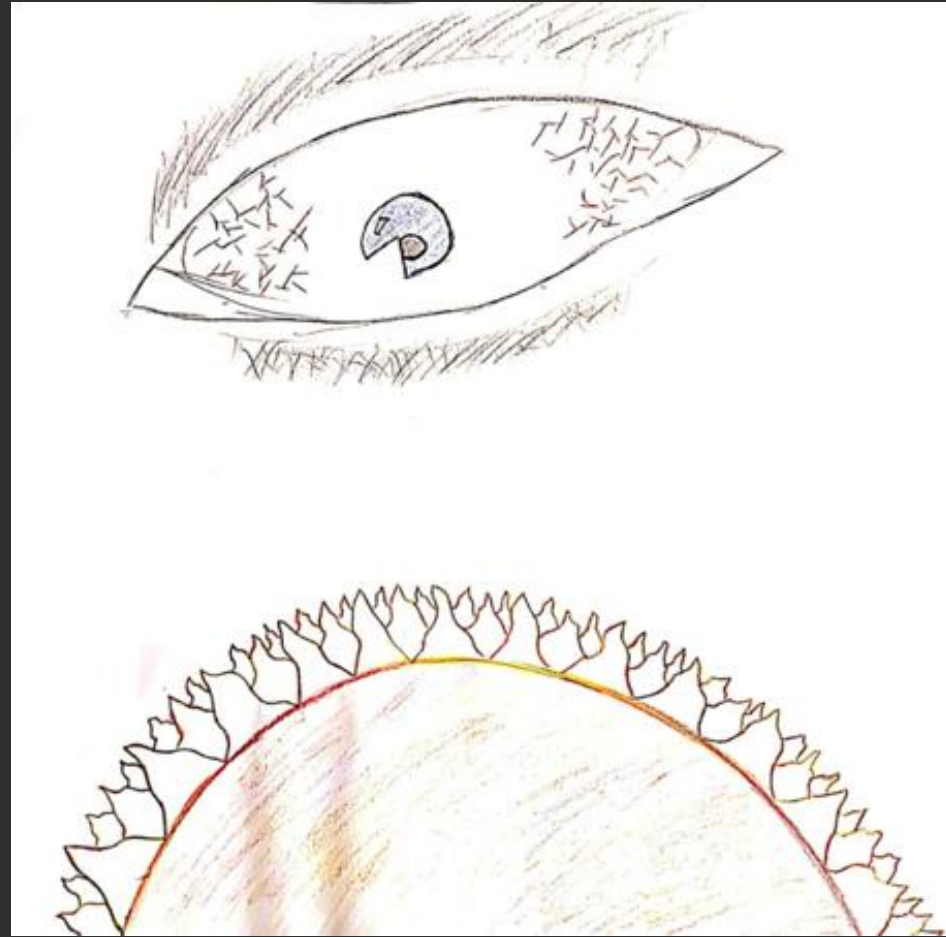
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“I see myself as brilliant. I am the sun.”
— *Karl, age 15*

The Problem

What We Know

- Black students face disproportionate suspension & expulsion rates
- 2025 executive order rescinded federal equity-based discipline guidance
- School-to-prison nexus: interlocking systems of power over youth
- Psychic & immaterial effects of exclusion remain understudied

The Gap

How does educational exclusion impact Black students' self-concept and how they believe the system views them?

Research Questions

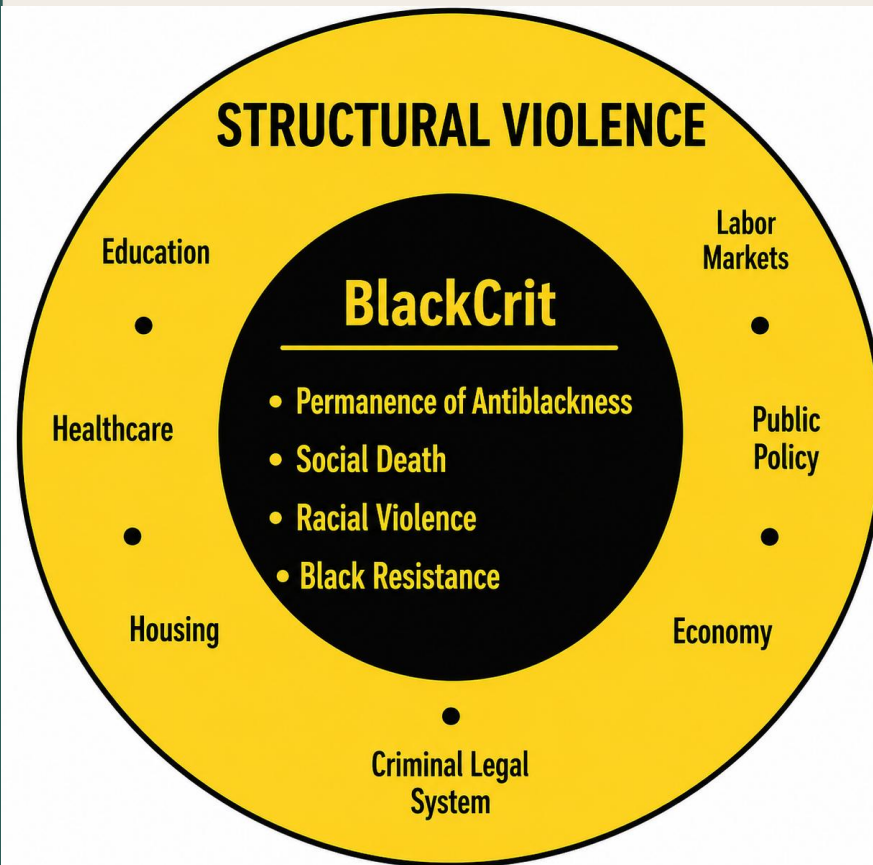
- RQ1: Since your suspension, how do you believe school views you?
- RQ2: Since your suspension, how do you view yourself?

Theoretical Framework

Structural Violence

Galtung (1969, 1990)

The avoidable difference between the possible and actual realization of human potential. Shows up as unequal power and unequal life chances both physical or psychological exerted through social structures and environmental milieu.



BlackCrit

Dumas & ross (2016)

Centers anti-Black racism specifically to explore disgust and disdain of Blackness. Is a branch of Critical Race Theory. Engages freedom dreaming as resistance and a vision of Black liberatory futures within and beyond education.

Methods: Arts-Based Inquiry

Site

Post-industrial Midwest urban community of Flint, MI; predominantly Black student population with a long history of structural ineptitudes and inequalities.



Participants

Self-identified as Black and/or African-American, grades 6th-12th, who experienced exclusion via school suspension within the last 2 years.

Approach

- Community-based day-long workshops; visual artistic expression pieces as counter-narrative.
- Two visual art prompts aligned to each research question.

Analysis

Visual Narrative Analysis (VNA)-What is the story being told?

Semiotic Analysis- What symbols are used to tell the story?

Findings

RQ1: How does school view you?

Theme 1: Inherently Incapable

Educators perceived as seeing students as intellectually deficient

Theme 2: Necessarily Surveilled

Recurring eye motifs ; accusatory, carceral, ever-present surveillance

RQ2: How do you view yourself?

Theme 3: Communal Contributors

Helpers, healers, givers; caring for peers and communities

Theme 4: Audaciously Determined

Aware of systemic danger; bold determination to strive and defy expectations

Finding 1 Inherently Incapable

“He is mean. He is going to fail. He is not smart.”

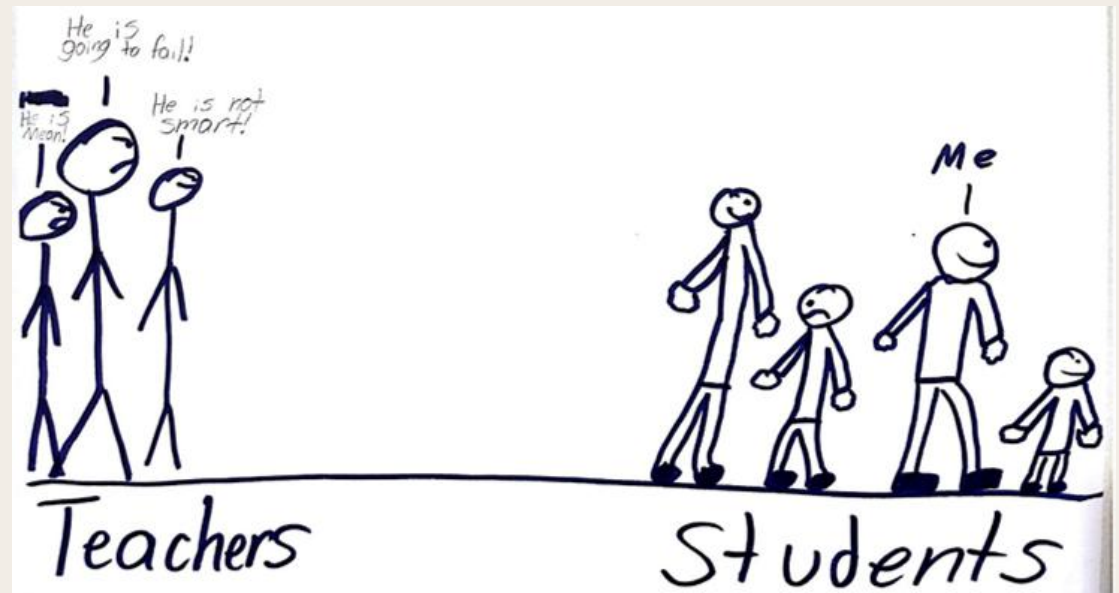
— Jonathan, age 13

Key Insight

Students' smiles masked acute awareness of negative educator perceptions as a survival response to being seen as intellectually inferior before being known as human.

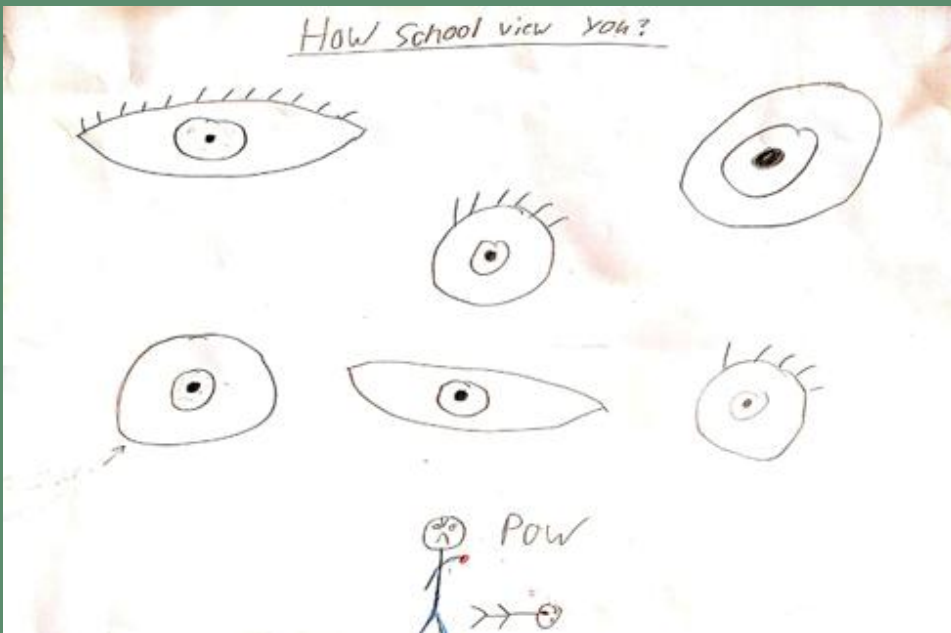
Double consciousness (DuBois, 1903): Masking as survival and smiling despite knowing how educators perceived him.

Deficit frameworks rooted in anti-Black stereotypes remain embedded in how educators perceive Black students' capacity.



Finding 2 **Necessarily Surveilled**

Kalvonte: Filled his piece with eyes after one incident permanently marked him as a “fighter.”



Karl (24 suspensions):
“The eye is white America. If they keep watching me, eventually, they will burn.”

Carceral Gaze in Schools

Eyes watch not to support learning but in expectation of a misstep leading to extraction. The school-to-prison nexus, embodied.

Resistance Through Luminosity

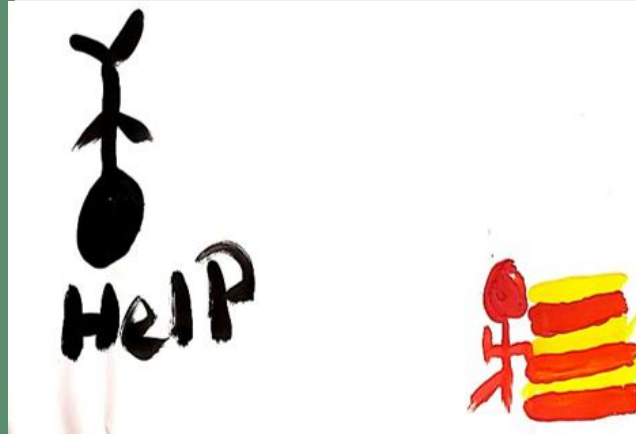
Karl reframes his brilliance as a threat to the watching eye. Surveillance becomes a stage for Black defiance. The sun does not dim to accommodate the gaze.

Finding 3 Communal Contributors

Jermaine: The Superhero

“I feel like a superhero. I can save or reach out to them when they need help.”

Draws himself as The Flash (red + yellow, the hero). When asked how school saw him: Zoom, the villain. Same body. Two radically different



Jonathan: Heal the World

Drew himself as musician and comedian- vibrant colors, audiences smiling, stick figures holding hands in peace. Grand aspiration: heal the world through art and comedy.



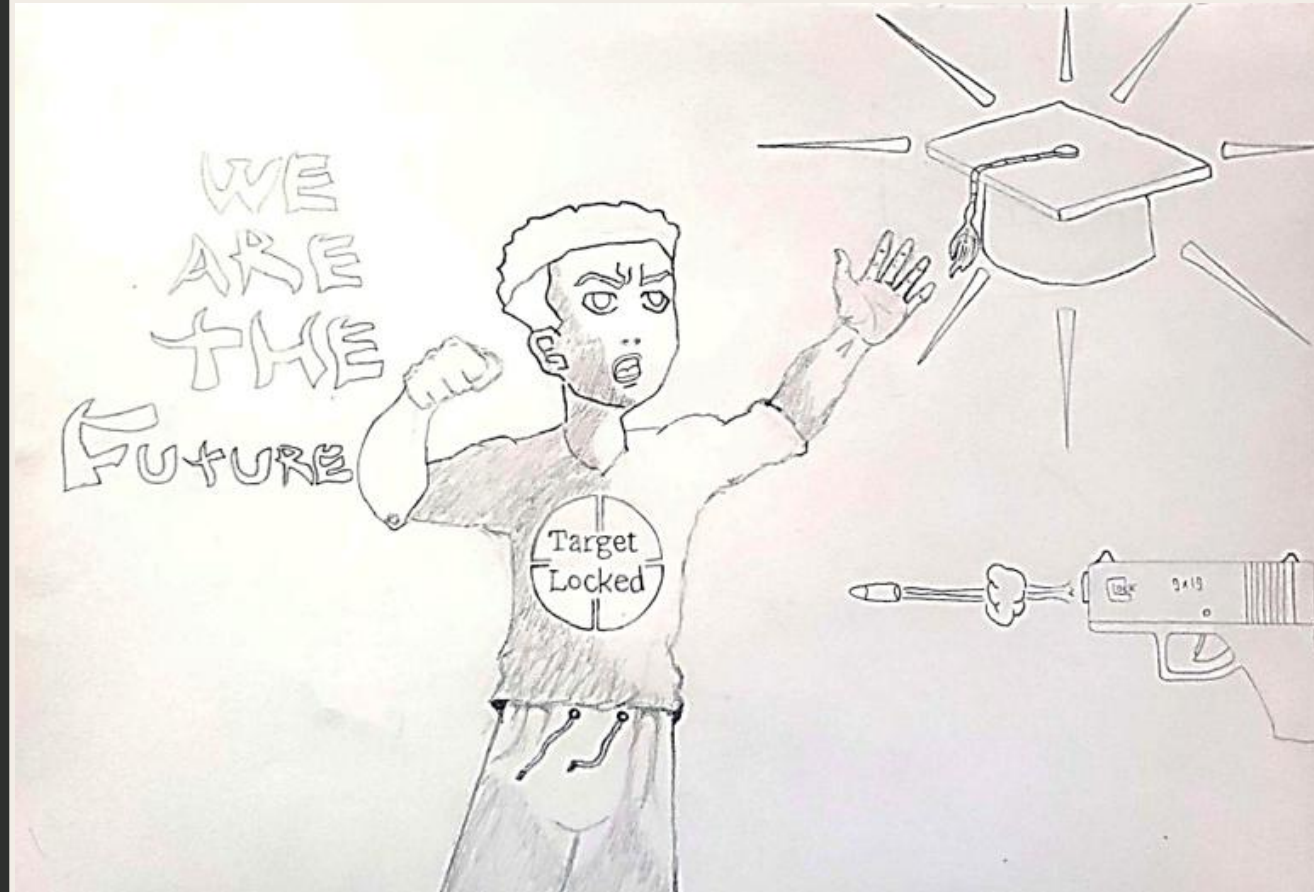
Finding 4 **Audaciously Determined**

Naz: Target & Future

A disembodied gun aims at the center of the frame. Naz — wearing a shirt reading “target locked,” one fist raised in defense, the other reaching toward a graduation cap.

Words behind him: *“We Are the Future”*

He is both individual target and collective ‘we.’ His art refuses to choose between acknowledging danger and claiming the future.



Discussion

“A child cannot be taught by anyone who despises him, and a child cannot afford to be fooled.” — James Baldwin, 1979

Core Tensions

Stark discrepancy between how students see themselves vs. how educators perceive them

Absent from every piece: any hopeful representation of educators offering affirmation or faith

Aesthetic resistance: educator renderings = dreary; self-renderings = vibrant and expansive

What the Art Insists

These students' imaginings are **not delusion but resistance** insisting on humanity, dreaming full futures (Dumas & ross, 2016)

They see themselves as superheroes in Gotham City and individuals capable of bringing joy, envisioning themselves as capable despite structural violence all around them

Implications

- Students tire of resisting and see schools as “not for them”.
- Students see educators as inherent enemies.
- Students eventually believe the school’s view of them.
- Students and their kin will either remove themselves, accommodate or work to transform the environment.



Suggestions for Practice

Art as liberatory tool

Recognize art not as addendum but as a necessary tool for youth voice, reflection, and resistance.

Humanizing educator training

Continuous education centered on bias, cultural cognizance, and relationship building.

Developmentally appropriate practice

Train educators to respond humanely to child behaviors and question their preconceptions

Protect audacity

Create spaces that protect Black students’ audacity (Warren & Coles, 2020) as foundational to educational persistence and Black liberatory futures

