

**University Sin Fronteras- Atlanta Campus**  
**November 12, 2014**  
**“Plantation Education”**  
**Adjunct Faculty Members: Les Etienne & Cita Cook**

In attendance: Note taker: Jeanette, [jeanette@projectsouth.org](mailto:jeanette@projectsouth.org)

Les: Welcome to the last class of the Emancipation Autumn Semester. Cita and I discussed the role of the State in education and narrowed it down to what’s going on in public education in Georgia and Atlanta. We used historical resources to set the context for that topic. Cita is going to talk about what plantation education is and the definition that we have been working with. We want to analyze what we see as glaring historical affronts to education and then what it [education] can be. We can look over what the shared learning objectives are in this class:

1. To engage participants in a dialogue about the system, legacy, and perpetuation of the plantation approach to education in the South.
2. To explore, for Georgia, the historical and present use of oppressive educational policies that still affect black, poor, and otherwise marginalized students.
3. To develop critical strategies in order to build movement power capable of opposing a system of education in the South that seeks to maintain the State’s deleterious, pro-corporate agenda.

**Introductions:**

**Les:** I am the Educational Coordinator for the Atlanta Campus of the University Sin Fronteras.

**Cita:** I am a retired educator who taught U.S. and Southern History at the high school, community college and university levels, including teaching southern and Georgia History at the University of West Georgia for eighteen years. I attended school during the Jim Crow years in Houston, but I also spent twentyofuve years in San Francisco before deciding that i needed to be back in the South.

**1:** Freelance journalist in Atlanta

**2:** I’ve worked with youth in various genres. I am an artist working with several books right now in progress.

**3:** I’m from Jacksonville, Florida. I work with the UNSIF there. I have been an educator and teacher there, as well as elsewhere in the United States and in Brazil.

**4:** Youth organizer at SPARK Reproductive Justice.

**5:** From northern Minnesota originally; a film maker and writer.

**6:** I work with the UNSIF as a technical experts and other tasks and am a student.

**7:** I’m super pumped and eager to talk about youth liberation.

**8:** Work for Project South and the University Sin Fronteras.

**General Introduction (Cita):**

- The Supplemental Information Handout is purely for you to have for reference. We can go over it if something comes up about it. It is not complete but can be helpful to see how many people are involved in affecting public education. Beware of any chart that makes the decision-making process for education policy look simple.
- [SOMETHING ABOUT STATE POWER AND EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE OTHER CLASSES?]
- We’ll start with an overview and then cover some of the developments in local public education during different historical periods. You can use the chronological handout (“African Americans and Public Schools in Georgia and Atlanta”) to follow what we present. I’ll say some things about the historical context for each basic time period and then Les will talk about the significance of some of the specific events for that period. The chart that will be on the board and that you can fill out on the handout will show the extent to which some aspects of plantation education when slavery was legal persisted over time and/or changed. Notice how both

someone's classification for race and class affected their access to different kinds of public education. Feel free to share what does and doesn't work. When we get to the last time period, it will be up to everybody to see what we can do to take it to the next level.

- Whatever we think of when we think of plantation education, we also need to think about the history of people's education. In southern history, white oppressive patriarchal and slave-owning men were establishing certain things about education from the beginning. And then there was a period of resistance. Except for the Civil War, the periods did not start so precisely as the years given might suggest, but we are highlighting the patterns that predominated during each period. Along with push and pull back and forth there is a sense of the content of what is going on in the schools. Not just how much money for schools but what did they learn and what was the time.
- [Be clearer about the periods and the meaning of the back and forth as a power struggle.]

### **Plantation Society (1820-1865):**

- Going into a plantation society goes further past into colonial time. From 1820 into emancipation in 1865. It's very much a hierarchical society where an elite wealthy oligarchy owned GA rice and cottons. The mountains didn't have this because the soil wasn't right. The "black belt" was where the big plantations were. The power they had was not over just over what people owned but the state was very privatized. It was like a feudal manor of power in GA. The State in that time is different than what we mean now. It was worked by slaves and their descendants. What people don't know is that the vast majority of white Georgians did not have slaves and never could. People who did not know anything about owning slaves or own them were willing to give up their lives for something they could never have. There was no public school system until after the Civil War. The 2 forms of education were for the elite. Hired teachers and tutors and governesses. Their sons could go to college and beyond. When the University of GA began it was for boys in their teens. When people learned to read, white or black, they were home schooled. Their main text book was the bible. The other issue is that the power to read and write and the power you could have was so threatening to the planters and their allies that when people were pushing back like during the Nat Turner revolt in Virginia there was always a wave of laws against reading and writing. They were afraid of losing power.
- In GA, there were a small minority of African Americans who were not slaves. It would be odd to call them free people because while they were not enslaved, they were not free people because they were limited by voting laws etc but they were called free as they were not enslaved.

Les: For more specifics, let's go over the timeline. There was a couple of things we want to highlight starting on page 2 [of the handout African Americans and Public Schools in GA & Atlanta]:

1770- A law passed by the Colony of GA allowed a twenty pound fine for anyone who taught a slave to read or write, not wanting them to be able to write their own passes or read about political developments.

1850s- Some white Georgians decided a few slaves should learn to read and write so they could be useful in doing work other than that in cotton and rice fields.

### **Reconstruction (1865-1880):**

- December 1864- Soon after General Sherman's U.S. troops entered Savannah, ensuring emancipation for the slaves, the African American Community formed the Savannah Education Association. The SEA hired fifteen black teachers and found buildings for schools, including one that had housed a slave market.
- 1867- The Freedmen's bureau took over the funding of the Storrs Grammar School and established Summerhill Grammar School for black children in Atlanta (close to Project South). We are near Summerhill. When you think about Turner Field, they fought to get it here and now they are taking it out. There is a lot of history here.

- 1872- The Atlanta Public School System (APS) opened with two white high schools, three white grammar schools, and Storrs and Summerhill Grammar [elementary] Schools for black children. Ex-governor Joseph E. Brown, the Governor of GA under the Confederacy and a wealthy exploiter of convict labor, became the first president of the APS Board of Education. In 1923 Joseph E. Brown High School for white children was named for him. In 1992, it became Brown Middle School. You have a school named after a confederate and now there is another also named after him in Marietta. It is now looked at in Atlanta as “the” black middle school.

### **Jim Crow Period (1880-1954):**

- Introduction (Cita): There was a couple of concepts that I am not sure if everyone knows. Under Jim Crow [page 3 of hand out], de jure segregation was when laws were passed that put it on the books and Southern and U.S. courts went along with it. At the same time there was de facto practiced, meaning “in deed” in Latin. If there wasn't a law that said you couldn't walk on the sidewalk if a white person was there it didn't mean that you could. It was being institutionalized a lot in that period. During reconstruction black folks were fighting for schools and teachers and the federal government said generally that white people could do what they wanted.
- 1892- White schools received \$120,000 if the \$270,000 in state tax paid by black Georgians
- 1924- Booker T. Washington High School became the first high school for black students in Atlanta. People I know will talk about going to Washington high school.

### **Civil Rights/Black Freedom Movement Period (1954-1965):**

- 1954- In *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, the Supreme Court ruled that racially segregated schools were inherently unequal. A Georgia constitutional amendment allowed the governor to close any desegregated schools and to distribute state vouchers to white students wishing to attend private schools. A lot of *Brown* was built together from different states. I'm not sure if ours was in it. When we think of charter schools and Christian day schools were started from *Brown v. BOE*. From students who were not interested in going into segregated schools.
- 1958- In *Calhoun v. Latimer*, ten parents sued APS to force them to desegregate. Constance Baker Motley, the first black woman to argue a case before the Supreme Court, was the lead attorney.
- 1961- The APS Board set a series of criteria for black applicants wishing to transfer from a black school to a white school, including “scholastic aptitude,” “relative intelligence,” and “possible friction or disorder” to be caused by that particular transfer. They could transfer only to four high schools: Northside, Grady, Murphy, and Brown. 132 black students applied, but only 9 were allowed to transfer that fall. The Southern Regional Council brought Harvard psychiatrist Robert Coles to Atlanta to counsel the students and their families. He put some of their experiences in the first volume of *Children of Crisis*. What we are seeing now in this timeline is something related to No Child Left Behind and Vouchers.
- November 21, 1963- Students from Archer, Howard, Turner, and Washington High Schools marched in downtown Atlanta to demand more and better jobs for African Americans at Rich's Department Store. There are a lot of pictures of this. A lot of SNCC people were there.
- Cita: There were a lot of people from the Atlanta University Center who assisted.
- 1964- The Civil Rights Act authorized cutting off federal funds to segregated school districts. The APS Board agreed to allow over 700 black students transfer to white schools, after accepting only 85 the year before. Over half of the new transfers were to West Fulton High School, where over 400 white parents removed their children within a week.
- 1970- Dr. Benjamin Mays, ex-president of Morehouse College, was elected to the APS Board and became president. The Board then adopted an “M[ajority] to M[inority] Transfer Program: assisting students who were willing to move from a school district where their race was the

majority to be where they were a minority. The U.S. District Court rules that Atlanta had to desegregate faculty to match the ratio of students in the system: 57% black and 43% white. When many white teachers left the system, the district organized a bi-racial committee to advise the board. Three thousand white APS students marched downtown to protest the desegregation of the faculty and thousands more boycotted classes on that day.

- 1973- The APS board agreed to a compromise engineered by Lonnie King, President of the Atlanta NAACP, and Lyndon Wade, President of the Atlanta Urban League. It required a voluntary transfer plan with limited busing, a goal of at least 30% black enrollment at white schools, the appointment of a black superintendent, and that 50% of the administrators be black. This reflected a decision that too many whites had fled the city to allow for true integration and that black students would be better off with black administrators. The national NAACP, headed by Roy Wilkins, suspended the Atlanta chapter and removed the local leaders from executive positions because of their choosing to shift their focus away from integrating classrooms to improving education for all black children. Dr. Alonzo A. Crim became the first African American Superintendent of the APS, serving until 1988.
- 1974- There was a black majority on the APS board of Education. The courts agreed that APS was free of racial discrimination. Appeals about this continued until the Supreme Court affirmed the decision in 1980.

### **Neoconservative and Neoliberal Period (1980-2014):**

Introduction (Cita):

- A transition from the last big coming down. The Civil Rights Movement did away with de jure segregation. There is a lot of de facto and exploitation. It did not succeed at changing in major ways with economic movement beyond the individual. Black women who could be teachers could now be doctors but for the majority it was been difficult. There is no question that the election of Ronald Reagan was a major turning point. You may have questioned if Obama would be a major turning point but there was a new form of conservatism from Reagan. In the south, democrats who supported racism and slavery switched over to a republican ticket. It is part of that transition why GA is a red state. 1980 marked going against liberal reforms with their limitations, the new deal, social security. When Social Security happened it was not allowed for mainly African American jobs. Southern Congressmen would not let them get away with it. Lyndon Johnson means 50 years since the war of poverty and those laws. Reagan created the welfare queens and the distortions and stereotypes were continued. On the one hand we see a lot of conflict between red and blue but the democrats are similar to republicans when it comes to corporate aid and that creates a greater income gap. That includes privatizing in many ways like in education- that struggle. There are lots of different ways that privatizing works. Support systems like with Clinton who does away with welfare before. The profit motivate is effective in many ways. In that context we see what going on in the schools.

An example of an earlier pattern continuing until today:

- 1904- Black parents had to beg the Atlanta City Council for \$650 for space to educate 500 children, but fifty white students needing space easily received \$100,000
- 2013- North Atlanta high school moved into a new building that had cost the district \$147 million at the same time some schools in the poorer neighborhoods were suffering from bad sewage systems and excessive mold. The building used to be IBM one and its 11 stories high. A lot of people in south Atlanta area call it the Taj Mahal. its a reminder of what still persists.

**Round Robin:** In your opinion or from what you have seen, what aspects of Plantation Education have persisted since the Jim Crow period?

- I'm interested in seeing education before Jim Crow. On a bike tour recently, we talked about segregated communities that were once held by law. An 11 year old asked why but all the white

guides could share is that things have gotten better now but its so clear that by the school populations and districts that we still are.

- For me I see the need to finding the education gaps. Education gaps as a space for revolution. I worked at a charter school that was significantly under funded which was compared to public which was under funded compared to private schools. Under funded schools are disadvantaged. Different people but same schools systems there could be a partnership in change.
- I think its good to make a difference between de jure and de facto. It can be hard to figure out how to counter that idea that things are better. Its a good framework. Coming from rural northern MN i see some parallels between the history of Native American boarding schools and the legacy of that today. The challenges in undoing the knots of systemic oppression that are not segregated by law but in reality everyday are. And countering those legacies. Thinking outside of the framework and go back to the initial issues.
- I think about how schools function as training ground for respectability. Training black and brown students to police each other, codes of conduct, whats right and whats not, self regulating. Getting used to always watching yourself and then you do that while you watch your own people.
- I grew up in rural central GA. My mom and I went to the same school system just 40 years later. All the white students went to private schools. In elementary its even with numbers but in middle school all the white kids left to private schools. But in high school its about 70% black because those who could afford it could leave. Our county did not reflect that [population distribution]. Gifted and honors classes are still white. How do you see that as statistically possible? If you don't have an advocate no one gets you into those classes. White students do not see the distribution.
- i'm thinking about teaching in savannah. my daughter has been gifted. when she moved to savannah they wanted my daughter to skip again. savannah because of Gulla-Geechee. In Florida she was the only black girl in gifted and she didn't want to do it. she is home school now. i never thought i would have to. going from that jim crow in JAX. slavery ended then jim crow. the schools prevalent in civil rights transitioned like after Plessy. I really like the timeline. for me it supports why I feel like I home school. I have time during our freedom summer. I feel like Nigel, I want to know about slavery about another time, i would like to know before Jim Crow. ??
- First things, as far as segregation in schools between then and now. I don't see that much of a difference. Considering plantations you think about being a slave. Everything that you know is taught to you by the person who holds you in bondage. You've been robbed of culture and dignity and your oppressor calls you a savage and they tell you what not to read or practice. You are gaining only things from your oppressors. When I grew up in South Carolina my high school was majority black, white kids who could afford it went to white cane academy. Never did I hear of a black family going to send students to a school like that. White kids talking about being excited to get into white cane because "I'm tired of being around black people." A week later I caught him writing the N word on the wall. Those separations made it ok to let schools in white districts to take money form the state and get themselves all new stuff. it makes it ok for Crim to get second hand things. Its chump change for over worked teachers. It goes to keeping education down. I see kids now who think its cool to be a dummy. Saying that we aren't down if you talk correctly or I want to aspire or speak like someone who is white. There is a person in the middle who is trying to get educated by the same person who was hurting their education again. True integration would mean white students going into black schools. I know that marietta schools and better than Grady because of the power dynamics. My cousin moved to give his kids proper education but he is the only black student in an all white school. We talk all the time about how he will find his blackness a problem and start relating to white students. He does not want his son to talk about race or see race even when its inevitable that he will.
- I went to APS K-12, Marylin, Inman, Grady. In elementary it was all mixed up and we were all in the same classes and together equally. In middle school it shifted a lot because of societal reason. In high school it was very systematic. Grady was a magnet school. There are two schools in two

buildings. It has changed now into academies. I don't remember the application for the program but i would like to know what it was. I suspect the process was not based on grades alone but I don't know what the other factors were. This 1961 application for transfers also moves to the process like in a magnet school which is what I think it was like.

- I have been spending a lot of time with APS and at the state level. There are problems at Brown so they are now working on an equity study and figuring out what that means. Black or white those who represent the upper middle class and certain values are making the decisions.
- I'm a product of Detroit schools. I could show you the flat land now where my school is now. I feel like it was a systematic break down. i remember giving my dad cigarettes who was a teacher while he was picketing. The big strong union they had with parents even in my rough high school was systematically broken down and public education was broken down. It was a historical assault on not educating poor white kids, black kids, brown kids.

**Quote from *Education for Insurgency: The Roles of Young People in Schools of Poverty* by Jay Gillen,** based on his experiences as a teacher in the Baltimore Algebra Project: "It is hard to ignore the obvious parallels between the plantation owners' analysis of slave behavior and the typical theories and systems of control employed by most twenty-first century schools for young people in poverty. Both systems rely on coercion, because they interpret the slaves; or students; motives as either bestial or diseased.... Well-run schools, like well-run plantations, are places where the 'consequence' for violating requirements are swift and certain. And for most teachers, administrators, students, and parents, it is unthinkable that students would go where they are 'supposed to,' 'do their work,' or 'stop talking' unless they feared punishment – humiliation, failure, or physical exclusion."

#### **Small Group Discussions:**

- Les: For our group break out we will do an extension of the first question. In what ways do we see these oppressions boomerang back to now? What are ways that you see things have changed? I also think it would be good to have ideas on what you see in your organizing and in your own work and what we can do.
- Cita: What are forms of resistance? What can you do?
- Les: How is segregation residing in urban education? What can you do in your practice?

#### **Group 1:**

- We were thinking about we can improve schools. We were skeptical of doing it within the frame work and that it isn't truly ever public. It would be better for the students to do it themselves.
- Students I went to school with who were younger than me had a teacher who tried to bring students of color and white students together and it was only one meeting. It devolved and they never had more than one meeting but I applaud the effort. There must be some efforts and models to look to.

#### **Notes:**

- Share the history within schools on their segregation
- The students need to show up and discuss whats up (do it themselves since the state won't)
- Acknowledge the racism in schools socially and in history
- Re-form the ways language is used to discriminate students (EX "speaking correctly")
- Freedom Schools, self-education, showing young students they can

#### **Group 2:**

- We talked about the resistance from the plantation education system. How it is the creation of a caste system. What came up about the fast track students versus regular students or whatever they call those students. I think about how it happens between people of color to create divisions.
- Oppression associated with resources like states, districts, & schools within them. Like "No child left behind." The new faces of old things like the school to prison pipeline. The whole coming

right into schools to criminalize people. No more intermediate space or place. One thing we discussed is education being under censorship and control. Our new vision is to create a new space for freedom. how to take things over. how do we break apart from changing what is going on in the system and thinking of a new liberatory system that's in a new world. We need to reenvision economics and military. Technology gives us the technology to do that.

Notes:

- Persisted
- Caste system of students
- Class system of schools
- Segregation
- Oppression associated with resources
- Changed from culture competency
- School to prison pipeline
- Going into schools to criminalize
- Educational spaces still subject to censorship and

New Vision

- Education for an educated populace
- Intentional home schooling with liberation pedagogy

Freedom Schools

- Virtual schools
  - Access to purposefully chosen resources
- Technology
- Asking for new and relevant curriculum in schools
- Create pure spaces

Group 3:

- We discussed how not much has change but how it has transformed. Schools are still racially segregated. Laws stopped making it a hard difference to transfer to other schools but it does cause hardship on black students when they do. Every step forward feels like we are going away. The illusion of people making it doesn't show how many are not. I remember when I went to my 10 year reunion. Those without college didn't go because they didn't think it was for them. We also discussed how folks in power created the dynamics of oppression. Quita discussed how athletics and how no one cared about it until they started winning. more people started to pay attention to the actual school. Books were not being funneled in for students who needed them but would bend the rules for white students. People went educate kids on the real issues because they say they are not old enough to understand what they need. They don't have an opinion until someone gives it to them. I've always wondered why they started black history at slavery but you don't hear about other people before that who could cause a change in a person.
- I wish we had more time to talk about athletics. Its fertile but a lot. Regarding kids having to navigate racism and it not being talked about by adults. I think its easier to talk to youth about race and class than it is to adults. White kids need to learn about race if you don't talk about racism its letting white kids become racists.

Notes:

- Not much as changes, but transformed (i.e. racially segregated)
- For every step forward, the goal becomes further away
- Folks in power have created these dynamics
- intersections of wealth and class
- Standardized testing
- Money being funneled into certain avenues
- Bending of rules
- Not educating kids because of fear of them not being old enough

Les: For the reflection piece, just write down what you took away from today's lesson and what resonates with you. We will see you next week for the synthesis.