Communicating the Logic and Language of Black Liberation

by

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Introduction

Of the many ways to approach a theme such as that of the language and logic of Black liberation room must be made for a critical assessment of the ability to produce and disseminate the linguistic expression of such a logic within an understood context of there being a need for that logic and language to thrive. The language of Black liberation naturally contains its own quite appropriate logic, that is, a desire for an improved material and spiritual condition. As an emancipatory logic with its attendant language of Black liberation it, by definition, predetermines itself – both in logic and language – to be a threat to that from which it seeks emancipation. Therefore, and equally natural or predetermined, such logic and language are attacked or simply omitted from conventional discussion, media representation or communicative access via regulated technology.

The logic of Black liberation is today, much as it has always been, anathema to current designs and goals of the United States and those for whom this country as a geopolitical entity is meant to benefit. A continuing colonial relationship between African America and the dominant society, a bond forged in enslavement and reified through denial and whitewashing, justifies a logic and language of Black liberation. However, the development of this logic is impeded through carefully constructed systems of education whose models have long been established on a political need to instill nation-wide cognitive and cultural limitations (Watkins 2001, Churchill 2004) and is reinforced systemically via the nation's mass media (Curran, et al 1995). The linguistic expression of this logic, the ability to communicate the validity of Black liberation, to define what that liberation means or how it is to be achieved, therefore, must by definition be made illegitimate or simply omitted altogether from popular discourse.

Recognition of the power of communication (Downing 1984), the power of the spoken word (Asante 1987) and their relationship to maintenance of one group's power over another (Wilson 1993) has long since existed. In fact, as has been said, "power and communication are indissolubly linked" (Downing 1984: 5). Similarly, the relationship of language to culture, of language *being* culture, has also long been discussed (Diop 1989, Carey 1989). Culture too, being the "battleground" (Said 1994: xiii) it is, has long been at issue within academic and activist circles (Connel 1997). However, these previous analyses (among many others) need updating. They need be continued and applied to today's all pervasive, highly consolidated advanced communications technology, whose impressive reach and ability to penetrate globally is matched only by the miniscule numbers in control of that technology. It is this particular confluence which threatens the language of Black liberation more today than at any other time in human history.

Colonialism

"But at the beginning of his association with the people the native intellectual over-stresses details and thereby comes to forget that the defeat of colonialism is the real object of the struggle."

- *Frantz Fanon*

To summarize the current theoretical approach and call for a need to conjure a logic of Black liberation that is then more widely disseminated linguistically (and in any other communicative form) some attempt must be made to describe the conditions from which liberation is desired. Colonialism as a model of analysis overtly (aggressively) centers an ongoing power struggle then expands theoretical approaches which in turn expands the ranges of responses to that colonization. Within this framework existing inequality, in all its forms or manifestations, is understood to be intentional, by design and necessary to the maintenance of the power of one group over the rest. Within this framework the development – underdevelopment dialectic (materially and immaterially) remains central (Rodney 1972). In other words, the dominance of one group can only be to the extent that others are dominated and the power of one group over another is contingent upon its ability to benefit from that which is produced by the other (materially and immaterially). In this sense it is understood that, by definition, no such fallacies of "pluralism," "democracy," or "equality" and "freedom" can exist other than by appearance or illusion. Colonialism is attendant to or is a byproduct of predation and "predator" (Churchill 1993) does not recognize or "speak the language" (Malcolm X 1964) of polite appeal.

Within this colonial framework, the establishment of colonialism as the working theoretical framework affords the necessary understanding of a colonized media environment within which all countervailing ideas, cultural expression, imagery or media production must struggle. My own use of this approach is less novel than suppressed (Kunjufu 2002, Atkinson 1993, Blauner 1972, Tabb 1970, Carmichael and Hamilton 1967). It has long-since been offered (with variations)[i] but its continued relevance as a theoretical approach, due primarily of course to a continued colonization, is precisely why consideration of challenges facing a logic and language of Black liberation remains essential.

By colonialism I simply mean that African America is similar to Cherrie Moraga's consideration of "Chicanos with memory like our Indian counterparts recognize that we are a nation within a nation. An internal nation whose existence defies borders of language, geography, race" (2005: 102). It is a rejection of the identities artificially created to conform to equally artificial geopolitical entities known affectionately as "nation-states" who, in this immediate sense, no more limit the Africanity of Black Americans than any could limit pan-African self/group-conceptions which have routinely dismissed as false the identities ascribed to Africans the world over by "geographical locations based on colonialist spheres of influence" (Clarke 1976: 8).

This extension or simplification of the "nation within a nation" thesis/approach (Cheney 2005) identifies that African America retains the basic tenets of a traditional colony regarding its relationship to the United States and so doing allows for alternative interpretation and response to that reality. That is, African America is spatially distinct living in Black neighborhoods, ghettoes, projects, etc.; in fact, retaining segregation rates (particularly in public education) that mirror any point in the nation's history (Bell 2004, Kozol 2005). African American wealth, access to health care, quality education and housing all continue to decline[ii] (Muhammad, et al. 2004, 2005, 2008). And then there is the looming and worsening epidemic of police brutality (Nelson 2000) which is but a small portion of a larger epidemic of mass incarceration within a prison industrial complex itself the largest in human history, among the nation's largest businesses and is itself a direct descendant of plantation enslavement (Davis 2003, Bobo 2007).

It needs only to be understood that the wealth of the nation continues to depend greatly upon maintaining the underdevelopment of African America in much the same way the entire West maintains itself on the underdevelopment of the Global South.[iii] The relationship is not personal. Individual decisions of social, business or political integration is of no consequence to the relationship of any community to another or either to the nation or dominant power. Appearances of integration obfuscate rather than symbolize the genuine relationship of communities.

Here is the purpose of Memmi's "colonial pyramid." "While to a Frenchman," he explained, "I may be a Jew I am certainly no Arab" (1965: xiii). Or, as Fanon made succinct, "Colonialism is not a type of individual relations but the conquest of a national territory and the oppression of a people: that is all" (1964: 81).

This continued colonialism (neo/domestic/internal) carries its own logic or ideology which is defined, protected/defended and disseminated through mass media. This ideology, incestuously feeding itself via the highly pervasive media technologies of the day, assures that counter-narratives will be treated as such if permitted any attention at all. The following defined tenets of this ideology of a colonial mass media, while not arbitrary, are certainly by no means exhaustive or at all definitive. They are placeholders, bookmarks, folded corners of varying – even disparate – approaches but selected for their macro focus on the laws that govern social relationships (economic, cultural, political) and their micro focus on African America.

Colonialism and Mass Media Ideology & Technology

We don't know who discovered water but we know it was not a fish. An all pervasive environment is undetectable.

\- *Marshall McLuhan*

To the extent that this nation maintains some form of a capitalist economy[iv] it has as its "original sin" (Kamenka 1983: pp. 462-463) the need to make any and everything into commodity. Logic, language, culture, even air and water are not exempt. That Africans were this nation's "original commodity" (Tate 2003: 4) continues to impact that community's interaction with the larger nation. This forms a constant (re)making of "opposites" whereby racism becomes the nation's "conceptual original sin" (Downing/Husband 2005: 2-3). This Western tendency toward dichotomy and its application regarding the African world (which African America is decidedly, unequivocally and unapologetically included within) results in the destruction/distortion of African culture as being a "political necessity" (Wilson 1993: 36).

It must then be understood and seen as inevitable that the language of any logic which threatens existing power will be treated as such. The challenge to those who would seek to express a logic of Black liberation is to determine how this expression could be disseminated, accepted and, therefore, acted upon. This requires critical reassessment of the production and distribution of mass media, as well as, a willingness to engage in the production and distribution of Black liberation logic and language media.

Resistance and confusion over this last point is often related to how media and technology are understood. Too often the term "media" is reduced in definition to what are its "organized technologies" (McQuail 2000: 14) of television, film, radio, etc. This confuses the depth and importance of media to the maintenance of societal order (as is necessary in a colony). Media are better understood as that which communicate, deliver, mediate or convey ideology, worldview, culture and consciousness. They create for us the "undetectable" environment described by McLuhan (McMahon 2002). The less we recognize our environment the more powerful it becomes. But due to the readily available technology of mass media and the prevalence of imaged Blackness the mirage evolves exponentially.

An encouraged confusion resulting from popular promulgation of "advances" in technology has furthered the difficulty facing a proper reading of popular culture and media. This results, for many, in difficulty or an inability to isolate specific problems in general or the impact of mass media specifically. Popular image reflects some kind of inclusion both culturally, as well as, politically (even economically) of Black people forcing us today to struggle with what Kwame Ture made clear some years ago that, "Black visibility does not equal Black power" (1967). This, in addition to the long-standing incorporation of the colonized into a capitalist economy "tokenism" (Baran and Sweezy 1966) and its attendant dissemination of gadgets (often misunderstood as "technology" (Cosby 2005)[v], toys, and various non-asset-building material goods, has led us further into a confused state of assumed "progress."

These "advances" in technology have done nothing to upset established norms regarding the relationship of power or groups of people and has only been the outgrowth or response to determined societal needs – that is, that which those in power or the elite determine is an essential need for a given society. Technological advances have done nothing but reinforce existing differences in class (Phillips 2002) and race (Hilliard and Weise 2002). Access to gadgets and material items at times leads to a confused assumption of progress or societal improvement and rarely is connected to external factors such as has been described in terms of development/underdevelopment (Cosby 2005). In fact, more plainly stated, technology is developed by exploiting large elements of the population and then used to further or maintain that very oppressive relationship (Hilliard and Weise 2002). And probably more to the point here is that technology has been used more for the purposes of surveillance and monitoring than liberation (Mattelart 1998, Simpson 1994).

Language as Communication, Communication Studies, Culture and Power

When we get ready to create revolution we must redefine the world, and redefine words; there is no way around it.

- Amos Wilson

There is no shortage of those who have focused on the relationship between power and culture. Many of these studies are illustrative for our purposes here. Language in African-centered or Afrocentric thought has been described as an important determinant of conceptual boundaries and been seen as a site of political, identity and cultural struggle (Diop 1989, Asante 1987, T'iongo 1986). In Western (even "radical") and Eurocentric scholarship similar points have been made relating language to power (Downing 2001, Downing 1984) where in either case the ability to use language to communicate concepts and to carry ideology has been seen as essential to the maintenance of power (Simpson 1994). An ability to establish acceptable parameters of thought and then to define conceptual terrains has been recognized as inseparable from rule (Mattleart 1998).

The very field of communications theory and study has been marked by this concern. Whether to establish identity with the nation-state (Mattleart 1998) and then to subordinate will or thought to that state's power (Simpson 1994) language has been seen as every bit a part of imperial weaponry (Brzezinksi 1997). Those colonized yet resistant have recognized this as well. Desire to speak one's own language for the sake of cultural survival and political necessity has too long-since been discussed (Tiongo 1986, Diop 1978). The connection between dominance and the imposition of an imperial universal concept through language has also been made (Fanon 1967). However, in either case in-group exclusivity forms a colonizer v. colonized linguistic dialectic which remains largely in tact, hence such continuing battles over high and low culture, language as markers of deserved inequality and as cultural barriers (Krims 2000). Similarly, though without agreement in perspective, politics or depth all agree that language conveys culture and as such opens it up to the "battleground" (Said 1994) which culture invariably is.

Language, as an expression of culture, communicates ways of knowing, worldviews, and ideology. Culture has been seen as that which "governs behavior" (Geertz 1973), helps form group consensus and identity (Ani 1994), and as such, has been seen as being a necessary target for distortion/destruction (Fanon 1964).

Therefore, through its ability to limit, regulate and to define language has been and continues to be essential to establishing and sustaining order. Media, that which communicates ideas, norms, interpretive definition (McLeish 1995) and whose control has been linked intimately to continued empire (Brzezinski 1997, Wilson 1993), by performing its colonizing duties restricts that which falls outside acceptable parameters of thought (acceptable, of course, as defined by power).

It is not here that we often find debate. Many recognize the potential harm to wider ranges of thought that media consolidation presents (Bagdikian 2004, McChesney 2004, Goodman 2004). Important differences emerge at the point of considering the *intent* to limit those ranges of thought. Most who write on the subject remain safely within debates over public policy which almost all ends in calls for greater appeals to Congress or the Federal Communications Commission (McChensey and Scott 2005, Barsamian 2001). Even when studies by "progressive" organizations conclude that particularly in the arena of radio that diversity and content, access for music and ideas has "gotten worse" (Toomey on McChesney 1/28/07) their recommendations remain exclusively within appeals to the FCC to enforce or enact policies that impact corporate radio (FMC 2006). This again assumes those tendencies in popular scholarship or "activism," previously dismissed herein as insufficient, toward beliefs in "pluralism," and/or "democracy" the structures of which could be pushed toward "media reform" or "media democracy."[vi]

It is precisely these reasons that necessitate varying forms of theoretical and practical approaches to how media interact with society, with those relegated to "other," and particularly those colonized. Once colonialism is established, be it traditional, domestic, internal, neo or otherwise, that fundamental (archetypal) relationship determines the intent behind use of media (Sandoval 2000). It is colonialism, not the flaws of a more-or-less free society's public policy, that have determined the sustained the popular image of Blackness as "Uncle Toms, Mammies and Aunt Jemimas" (Barlow 1995) – across all or any one particular medium – throughout this nation's history (Tate 2003, Wynter 2002). Again, much of the media scholarship produced, even that which is presented as "critical" or "progressive," often does not address the continuing colonial power struggle which allows for much of their analysis to center on a need to change federal/public policy (Berry and Theobald 2006) or finding ways for journalists to "revisit the studies on social control in the newsroom, and the processes of news work that have helped us understand the ideological underpinnings of the profession" (Rhodes 2001).

These "ideological underpinnings," due to an unnamed/identified colonialism, often leave those seeking redress for the African world empty in large part due to their adherence to "a utopian model of society" (Hardt, 234) which takes as a given that which cannot now nor ever have been applied to African America or the African Diaspora as a whole.

That is, this view of society is "based upon a vision of consensual participation as democratic practice and an understanding of the exercise of political and economic power as acts of progressive intervention in the advancement of people." Finally, this leads – especially today – to a point where even "radical" and "critical" theory in communication or media studies continue in their inability to properly address "the foundations of social theory and the false optimism of social inquiries into the role and function of communication and media" (Hardt 1992: 234).

We should note also that Hardt himself says nothing of media and colonialism nor does he deal with the particular concerns faced by the colonized and those racialized as "others," that is, his own criticism does not break the Western-held notion that radicals need go no further than Marxism. This omission is associated with what is a larger need to disassociate African America from international politics, to assume that a civil rights movement has largely solved the concerns of this population or simply does not rise to a level of concern or consideration when the topic is the so-called "Third World" or anti-colonial struggles. This flies in the face of analyses of those engaged in that struggle and is supported to this day, unfortunately, by "postcolonial theorists {who} tend not to consider the experiences of African Americans when exploring matters of imperialism. This oversight has left postcolonial theorists without recourse to the African American experience as a resource for understanding and possibly resolving the knotty problem of positionality. Moreover, this omission allows for the false reading of the Western imperialist impulse as distinct from Black chattel slavery in America and Jim and Jane Crowism" (Lake, T. 2007).

In fact, Hardt's own conclusion regarding North American communication studies can be applied to his own critique and that of many "radical" communication scholarship particularly when concerning the world's colonized populations. "The dilemma," he writes, "of American communication studies continues to lie in its *failure to comprehend and overcome limitations of its own intellectual history*, not only by failing to address the theoretical and methodological problems of an established academic discipline, but also by failing to recognize the potential of radical thought" (emphasis added, 237). Amen.

Journalists and Journalism

To the extent that they are engaged in the act of investigating and reporting or communicating information, "news," and ideas, journalists' and journalism's relationship to a logic and language of Black liberation must be considered. That is, in the United States (for one instance) the relationship between those involved in struggles for Black liberation have all seen it necessary to involve a journalistic component. Samuel Cornish and John Russwurm's *Freedom's Journal*, the first African American newspaper stated explicitly its desire to advance the cause of liberation of enslaved Africans (Burroughs 2001). Frederick Douglas' *North Star* did the same (Levine 1997). David Walker, himself a one time courier for *Freedom's Journal*, distributed his *Appeal to the Colored Persons of the United States* as would Ida B. Wells and her *Red Record*, Marcus Garvey's *Negro World* and Robert and Mabel Williams' *The Crusader* and *Radio Free Dixie*. This is not to say that the entire Black press always had as its primary concern the freedom struggle of African America or that they have ever been outside criticism over their content (or lack thereof) (Waters 1987, Clarke 1961, DuBois 1905). It is to say, however, that traditions within the Black press of adhering to some form of an emancipatory ethic needs to be revisited in the 21st century even in the face of ubiquitous if not empty "blackness."

Hardt's critique of conventional journalism history remains sound in that the popular narrative is one of progress from an overtly biased or political press to the evolution of the modern "professional journalism" practiced today. Rarely is the political nature of the development of the field of journalism or of journalism/communication study and education ever the focus (Hardt 1992). When attention is paid, even by Hardt or other critical media theorists/historians, rarely is the focus on a continued colonialism or the particular need to suppress African American rebellion (Berry and Theobald 2006, Downing and Husband 2005). In this context there is neither any institutional censorship (self-censorship notwithstanding (McChesney 2004) nor, therefore, any need for a language of Black liberation since liberation has been achieved (or as closely approximated as is humanly possible). No calls for Black (or any) liberation can be seen as valid if the overwhelming message disseminated from on-high is that this is the land of the free and one based in the merit of the individual.

However, another narrative exists, one particular to African and African-descended people, which suggests something else entirely. For African people (and a great many others as well) communication has and continues to be a perilous enterprise. Communicating outside an accepted script or norm continues to result in varying degrees of conflict with society. And certainly communicating such counter-hegemonic ideas such as "liberation," regardless of how one defines it – the claim of such a need itself – by definition results in societal backlash, marginalization or simple and complete omission.

This has been noted in a pan-African context recently, for example, by Ankomah (2003). That is, in this essay the meta-relationship between Africans and Western media was laid bare[vii] demonstrating the need of the latter to relegate the former to limited description or range of discussion in support or European national self-interest. The effect, as Ankomah explains, is also to limit the range of acceptable journalistic practice *among Africans* themselves. That is, false notions of the aforementioned "professional journalism" which gives rise to equally false notions of "objectivity," and "balance" prevent a form of journalism from being practiced which might break conventional norms by, at least, encouraging African collective breaks with norms of nation-state and pan-African governance or relations with the West. The falseness of these claims from the West, as Ankomah correctly identifies, is based in the preconditioned accepted norm/"wisdom" that there does in fact exist in the West a "free press" (). This notion of a free press is similar to, and encapsulated in, the previously stated popular mythology that there no longer is a need for what must be seen now as an outdated call for "Black liberation." Again, this gives rise to the necessary exclusion, dismissal or reduction of afforded time/space to a logic or language of Black liberation.

The tradition within African American press/media work which supports this call is often suppressed in journalism histories and in contemporary academia regarding journalism, media or telecommunications studies. Parroting dominant themes much of the established academic literature on the subject ignores the radical press histories – as Kessler says, "a tradition" (1984: 16) – within the Black, Indigenous, Latin American, Feminist press histories giving rise to an illusion of inclusion and encouraging, preparing and training students to for work within popular media as opposed to critically assessing them or acting to circumvent or destroy them. With much of the U.S.-based academic training mirroring more of that of a journalism or media vocational school few find time or interest in expressing, covering, engaging in or even considering (if hearing at all!) the language and, therefore, logic of Black liberation.

It is this issue of journalistic practice among the colonized which has been the focus of this author's work and efforts regarding the use of the hip-hop mix tape and a low-technological mass media, underground press option (Ball 2005) work itself greatly indebted to the journalistic philosophy defined as emancipatory journalism by Hemant Shah (1996). Shah's work and subsequent debates on the topic (1996) centers the political question of "objectivity" as defined by the West and suggests that this is insufficient in encapsulating the experiences and needs of the colonized. In other words, Shah's emancipatory journalism buttresses the concerns raised by Ankomah and encourages that activists incorporate this philosophy of journalism into their work advocating, covering and encouraging further political struggle against that which has been determined to be oppressive forces, institutions, governments, etc.

As the name suggests recognizing a status that is other than "free" is required. One cannot assume the Western notions of "progress" or "democracy" as meaning that there is room for an objectivity as defined by the West. Emancipatory journalism as philosophy and practice requires a recognition by the practitioner of her/his role in having journalism make plain the forces preventing freedom, as well as, covering the various struggles (of which the journalist is a part!) involved in making what is ultimately an acceptable change.

Media as Obstacle: Commercial Radio in Washington, DC

Radio One is Black Power!
Cathy Hughes (owner)

Remark made during keynote speech delivered to Morgan State University's 2007 graduating class

Washington, DC provides an appropriate approximation of the previously described struggle surrounding the dissemination of unsanctioned, unauthorized cultural expression, journalism or specifically a logic and language of Black liberation. It remains a predominantly Black city (57%) and is surrounded by Prince Georges County which at 66% Black[viii] is also the wealthiest Black community in the country. While there certainly exists access to libraries[ix], an ever-expanding internet[x], various forms of print and television media radio remains the primary and most pervasive medium regarding African America.[xi] Though Howard University's WHUR (96.3 FM) ranks number 1 in city-wide ratings it cannot be said to be so among Black youth nor can it be said to have any more of an emancipatory content than the two stations who dominate among Black youth – a key demographic long sought after by activists to maintain or evolve radical politics and by those seeking to blunt those same efforts.[xii] For younger audiences there are really only two radio stations: Viacom's WPGC (95.5 FM) ranked 3rd in the city and Radio One's WKYS (93.9 FM) ranked 5th.[xiii] Part of the overall problem, a problem to be more fully developed below, is summarized by Glen Ford and deserves to be quoted at length:

> *In 1973, 21 reporters from three Black-oriented radio stations provided African Americans in Washington, DC a daily diet of news - hard, factual information vital to the material and political fortunes of the local community. The three stations - WOL-AM, WOOK-AM and WHUR-FM - their news staffs as fiercely competitive as their disc jockeys, vied for domination of the Black Washington market. Community activists and institutions demanded, expected, and received intense and sustained coverage of the fullest range of their activities.*

> *In scores of large, medium and even small cities across the nation, the early to mid-Seventies saw a flowering of Black radio news, a response to the voices of an awakened people. Black ownership had relatively little to do with the phenomenon. According to the National Association of Black-owned Broadcasters (NABOB), there were only 30 African-American owned broadcast facilities in the United States in 1976. Today, NABOB boasts 220 member stations - and local Black radio news is near extinction. With some notable exceptions, Black owners are as culpable as white corporations in the demise of Black radio news. In Washington, DC, the culprit is obvious. Black-oriented radio journalism in the nation's capitol has plummeted from 21 reporters at three stations, 30 years ago, to four reporters at two stations, today. WPGC-FM (Infinity-Viacom) fields one reporter, and Howard University's commercially operated WHUR-FM employs three. Black Washington's dominant radio influence is Radio One, the 66-station chain founded by Cathy Liggins Hughes, valued at $2 billion. Hughes employs not a single newsperson at her four Washington stations - a corporate policy reflected in most of the 22 cities in which Radio One operates. The chain is the dominant influence in at least 13 of these markets. (Radio One also programs 5 channels of XM Satellite Radio, and has launched a Black-oriented television venture with Comcast, the cable giant.) While 1,200-station Clear Channel deserves every lash of the whip as the Great Homogenizer of American radio, the chain operates only 49 stations programmed to Blacks, and is dominant in no large African American market. The Queen of Black broadcasting is Radio One {with well over 60 stations}, and her dictum is, Let Them Eat Talk (Ford, 2004, emphasis added).*[xiv]

Ford touches upon a number of serious concerns facing proponents of progressive political struggle and certainly those seeking to expand the reach of a logic and language of Black liberation. First among them is that Radio One, the leading provider of Black-targeted radio, follows precisely the established model of dominant-society radio. Its FM stations follow the same payola-based play-list format assuring "homogenization" of the music and there exists no attempt at investigative journalism or news gathering. What Radio One offers, as is the case with Washington, DC's WOL and Baltimore's WOLB AM stations is talk radio. While the latter is not without benefit it does not replace news gathering, particularly the kind Ford describes as being related and necessary to political movements. In response to these raised concerns are statements from Victor Starr, program director at Radio One's Baltimore FM station 92.3, who dismisses that station's need to deliver news to its audience "in an information era" where one can easily go to "CNN.com" to get the important news not covered in the 2 minute segments each hour, that is unless it is something on the order of "Anna Nicole's death" in which case mention will be made (personal communication with Leah Taylor[xv]).

Or from Lee Michaels, program director of Radio One's XM169 "The Power," the response is that "radio is business" and, therefore, Radio One need not nor cannot continue any tradition of Black progressivism in radio or that particular role for Black America. And in statements strikingly similar to those engaged in "media reform" efforts Michaels too suggests that change can only come from the people appealing to the FCC (personal communication 2007).

But it is precisely these disparate approaches each calling for mass appeals to the FCC as the primary (only) mechanism for change, one from an ostensibly "outsider media reform movement," the other from one situated well within that institution (and in no insignificant position), that demand attention be paid to the *systemic* nature of colonialism. The final mass media product, that which hits the air, is predetermined to be limited in scope, safe, functionally supportive of that which determines its shape. Neither race nor gender nor title of "owner" or "program director" in the end is of any significance. And strategies for change that relegate to or overemphasize the importance of appeals to the FCC are the political equivalent to the hens appeal to the fox or better still Malcolm X's chicken laying, of course, a chicken egg. Were it to lie a "duck egg it would be one revolutionary chicken."

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) whose nominal role is regulation of the public's airwaves has, since its inception in 1934, never been able to assure that Black image were anything other than that described in endless criticism, "Uncle Toms, Mammies and Aunt Jemimas" (Barlow). Its 5-member body consisting of appointees of the President (many with corporate ties) with the tie-breaker going to that President's party along with its limited funding for in-depth study (Barsamian, 2001) assures its impotency as an agent for change. Its oversight of the initial multi-billion dollar give-away of the public's airwaves has been followed by decades of policy or inaction which have sustained the control of those airwaves securely within the most elite segments of our society (McChesney 2004, Herman and McChesney 1997). It is currently over-seeing the further billion-dollar give-aways of our airwaves and digital spectrum which will likely relegate the new technologies of digital television and the internet to the same fate as is predictable – inevitable – in an on-going process of colonization. Empires are imperial. Colonialism demands the colonization be that of land, property, labor or mass media.

Since the 1996 Telecommunications Act further deregulated airwaves (paving the way also for Radio One to accumulate more stations) the situation has worsened as diversity of media content has lessened (FMC, 2006). Today Black-targeted radio is, as so explicitly made clear by Michaels, incapable of altering drastically its content to suit what are often the genuine needs of its audience.

An FCC-overseen weakening of media ownership restrictions and the never-ending need to seek revenue through advertising which ultimately determines content alone conspire as structural impediments to a wide dissemination of antithetical values such as Black liberation (or worker's rights, gender equality, calls for the freedom of political prisoners or an end to a system of mass incarceration). Quality of content is of no concern. All that is at issue is that there be no dissident or critical thought. Advertising helps to form colonialism's protection of its political system by, in this case of radio, establishing "the concentration of decisions" or the "concentration of symbols of legitimacy" necessary to the maintenance of political system "sovereignty" (Deutsch 1957).

Radio and television monitoring projects conducted by this author's own classes at the University of Maryland at College Park (and continuing now at Morgan State University) with Lisa Fager of Industry Ears and Chanelle Hardy then with Consumers Union[xvi] resulted in dozens of FCC complaints being filed by students with no significant response or action. But as was demonstrated by the University of Chicago study (Cohen 2007) Black youth dislike for popular versions of their own cultural expression is rendered powerless in the face of a cemented imaged "original sin"(Downing and Husband 2005). This exemplifies Fanon's view of an oppositional image of the colonized which "testifies against" them (1964). In defense of this are more claims of economic imperatives which require advertising revenue. The mere existence of a few minutes of news per hour is offered as balance. Advertising, of course, is normal and as such should not be questioned. This was ultimately the purpose for the initial ignoble union of the private and public sectors to all but guarantee a perpetual elite stranglehold over "our" airwaves. Advertising, the market model or structure of mass media, was solidified in 1934 as the FCC transferred sole access to and the right to generate private revenue from the sale of airtime on their licensed public airwaves. This determined that neither ownership nor management was necessary as advertising dollars and the threat of their withholding could be wielded as a mechanism of content control.

Advertising, which is only the sale of the audience to the highest bidder or sponsor, is not the interruption but the only purpose for the mass medium's existence. Advertising does not simply sell products but ideas of normalcy, comfort, even the idea that mass production for mass consumption is ok. Advertising, the psychological warfare assault on the audience's consciousness – or the process through which the sold consciousness of the audience goes as it is passed through the airwaves – forces "concision" (Achbar 1992) or the need to keep comments or thoughts to brief moments between commercial segments. This concision forces those speaking to relegate themselves to that which is already common sense which itself has been appropriately described as "more common than sense" (Mills 1959). Breaks from the norm require an explanation impossible to fit into those brief moments so if heard at all appear as lunacy in their abbreviated state.

This concision also serves as a constant reminder of the true purpose of the medium – delivery of acceptable consciousness. Constant breaks also prevent sustained trains of thought (even if that thought is not particularly dissident) or meditation on ideas necessary to development of critical thinking, interpretation or premeditated action.

Important too is that concision is also what allows/causes the arbitrariness or unspecified form of the non-dissident or accepted range of thought. The constant stoppage of non-advertisement programming[xvii] merely then requires only that time and space between commercials be filled. Keep the insanity coming. Any occurrences of dishonesty, inaccuracy or cultural bastardization are only to be met with so much more that it all soon appears to make sense. It is the moment at hand that must be filled with something, anything (non-threatening). After all, it is mere filler for yet another overt advertisement which is only there to assure you know who has been bringing you all the covert ads (). But it is the sheer repetitive mass and speed with which it all comes that allows for its relative success. Or as James Gordon Bennett[xviii] is to have said, "Advertisement dwells [in] a one-day world" (Innis: p. 79).

An institutional analysis, however, does not preclude the investigator from a critique of specific ownership or administration. Here is precisely why Ford places special emphasis on Radio One in his own reporting. The particular history and relationship between radio and African America (including Radio One's dominance over Black-targeted radio), the special needs of colonized populations to access or be given access to alternative forms of thought and cultural expression demand that particular criticism and pressure be put on those most likely to feel intra-group pressure for change. Exclusion of news and investigative journalism from the most popular radio outlets impacts Black America differently/more severely than other communities. Therefore, Black ownership must be held accountable if only to expose their inability to any more effectively challenge or alter the structure of the medium.[xix]

However, another form of exclusion of news or critical thought exists. If the first were through news and commercials this form of exclusion manifests via payola and play-lists which result in a saturation of a colonized cultural expression. The saturation is necessary as it offers or imposes the appearance of authenticity. The environment we cannot identify like McLuhan's fish in the ocean is constructed by repetition which leads to recognition which leads to false notions of "like" or at least normalcy (Adorno 1938). Commercial radio outlets such as WPGC and WKYS which dominate youth radio listening (ages 12-17) have their content determined by a three corporation "musical OPEC" (Palast 2002) who are ultimately responsible for nearly everything we hear on radio (or see on music video channels). This leads to nation-wide airing of songs, or spins, which reach the tens of thousands in a month, 10,000 in one week or once an hour, every hour, everyday.

This, of course, determines that not only will so much time a day be spent to airing these paid-for songs, but it also means that there is this much time taken away from the airing of other music and certainly the kinds of necessary information communities facing the worst of this nation's economic, social, cultural and racial policies would need more to help support or encourage more adequate responses. The radio applauded by Dr. King in 1967 for having assisted the civil rights movement exists, if at all, in a tremendously weakened or limited capacity.[xx] And we need remember that these policies, resulting from a colonial relationship, are intentional and are tantamount, as Derrick Bell has said, to "weekly, random roundups of hundreds of blacks who are then taken to a secluded place and shot" (Adams and Bracey 1999). This is the "inertia," described by Fanon, which is "utterly dishonest" and inundates the colonized with a false representation of themselves, a representation formed in the process of their own colonization, which "testifies against" them and "defines them in fact without appeal" (1964).

This inertia was made yet again popular, albeit unwittingly, when in January of 2007 Oprah Winfrey popularly stated that, "If you are a child in the United States, you can get an education. I became so frustrated with visiting inner-city schools that I just stopped going. The sense that you need to learn just isn't there. If you ask the kids what they want or need, they will say an iPod or some sneakers. In South Africa, they don't ask for money or toys. They ask for uniforms so they can go to school."[xxi] Aside from the anti-historical nature of the comment or her positioning as a "Black leader" despite having as her primary audience affluent white women (Peck 2008) her comments defy the reality of the media environment impacting these "inner-city" youths. Perhaps, to the extent that there is truth in these comments, she might investigate the content and messaging in her show or, more appropriately, explore the content and delivery mechanism of the media directed at these unappreciative Black children. This desire for material goods Winfrey laments is as likely to occur from the formulaic, massively repetitive and news-less radio imposed upon that community, an imposition we should note occurs regardless of whether or not that community wants to hear it (Cohen, et al, 2007).[xxii]

In 2005 the final *American Brandstand* report was published (James 2005) which tracked the prevalence of product placement name brand mentions within hip-hop lyrics. As the figures (1-4) below demonstrate, the sheer amount of airplay coupled with the infusion of product placement, there can be no confusion as to why young people might be more focused on material goods than deeper intellectual pursuits. Perhaps were this matched with recent assessments of the modern "education" facing most African American students () the concern would shift from blame to radical change. Products such as Mercedes Benz and AK-47 machine guns being mentioned with such prevalence in songs played thousands of times a week nationally (not counting video plays, video game placements, malls, buses, barbershops, beauty salons, mix tapes, etc.) assures the cognitive in/direction of many young people.

Though the charts represent the top 10 songs played by station and finally (Figure 4) nationally they show a pattern of similarity between DC's stations and the national list that belies any notion that Black-owned or Black-targeted radio infuse anything different or distinct from what is the imposed norm.

Figure 1

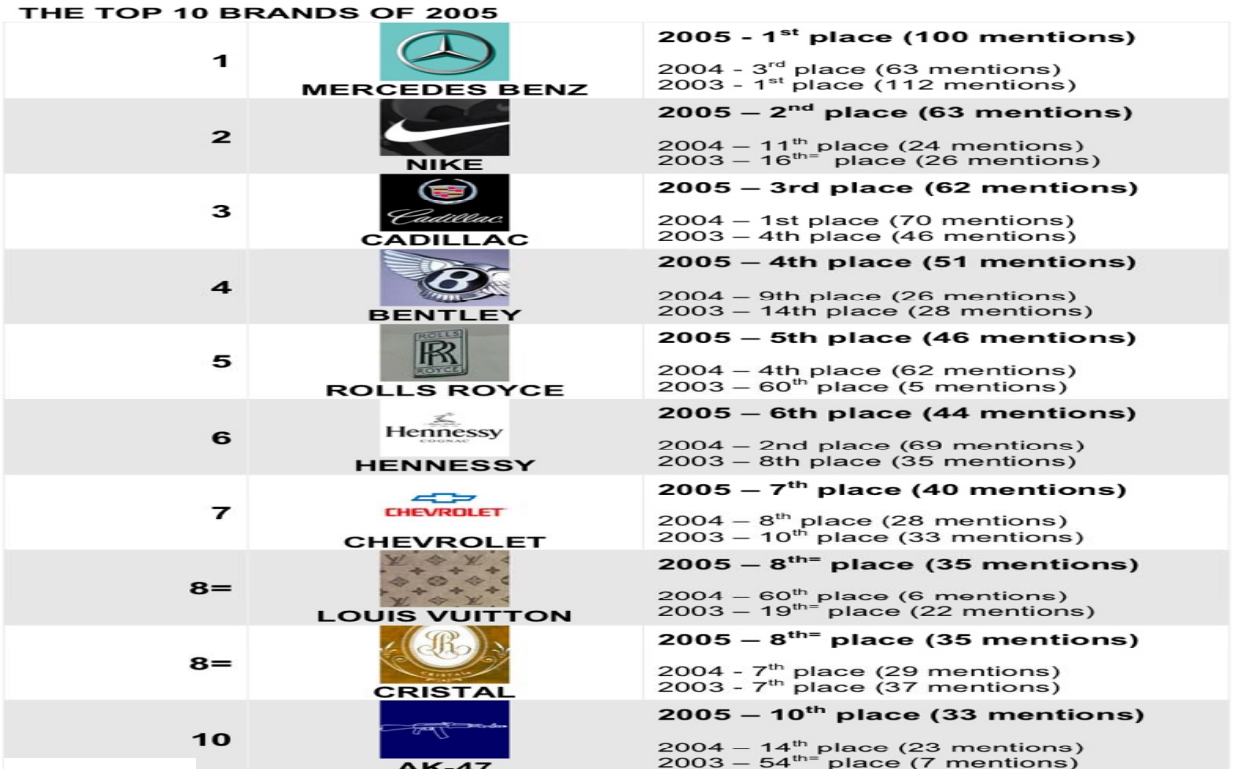

Figure 2

MEDIABASE 247 7 Day Station Playlist
CBS Radio
PD:Graham Dillard
MD:
PH:301-918-0955

WPGC-FM
Washington, DC - 95.5 FM (Rhythmic)
by This Week Spins
C&R

Home | View Another Station

ALL ACCESS MUSIC GROUP

LW: Feb 24 - Mar 1 **TW: Mar 2 - Mar 8** **Updated: Sun Mar 9 5:08 AM PST**

Station Rank				Spins			Audience
lw	TW	Artist	Title	TW	lw	+/-	Reach/ Mill
1	1	THE-DREAM	Falsetto	52	50	2	1.3335
7	2	J. HOLIDAY	Suffocate	51	44	7	1.3196
5	3	FAT JOE	I Won't Tell (f/J. Holiday)	45	46	-1	1.1961
8	4	KEYSHIA COLE	I Remember	44	42	2	1.1111
2	5	CHRIS BROWN	With You	43	49	-6	1.2095
10	6	JAY-Z	I Know (f/Pharrell)	42	41	1	1.1227
3	7	ALICIA KEYS	Like You'll Never See Me Again	40	48	-8	0.9308
6	8	SHAWTY LO	Dey Know	39	45	-6	0.9299
13	9	MARY J. BLIGE	Just Fine	37	35	2	1.0578
17	10	RAY J/YUNG BERG	Sexy Can I	37	30	7	0.9645

Figure 3

WKYS-FM
Washington, DC - 93.9 FM (Urban)
by This Week Spins
C&R

Home | View Another Station

LW: Feb 24 - Mar 1 **TW: Mar 2 - Mar 8** **Updated: Sun Mar 9 5:08 AM PST**

Station Rank				Spins			Audience
lw	TW	Artist	Title	TW	lw	+/-	Reach/ Mill
1	1	KEYSHIA COLE	I Remember	60	60	0	1.2746
12	2	FAT JOE	I Won't Tell (f/J. Holiday)	58	38	20	1.2927
8	3	JAY-Z	I Know (f/Pharrell)	58	46	12	1.1968
6	4	CHRIS BROWN	With You	57	52	5	1.3365
3	5	J. HOLIDAY	Suffocate	56	58	-2	1.2543
2	6	ALICIA KEYS	Like You'll Never See Me Again	54	59	-5	1.1508
11	7	RAY J/YUNG BERG	Sexy Can I	54	39	15	1.2181
4	8	THE-DREAM	Falsetto	53	58	-5	1.1887
5	9	MARIO	Crying Out For Me	48	54	-6	0.9779
25	10	ASHANTI	The Way That I Love You	40	20	20	0.7338

Figure 4

Top 40
Mediabase - Published Panel
Past 7 Days - by Overall Rank

Currents Only

Charts Menu | Taking Off | Jump!

▲ Up In Spins

LW: Feb 24 - Mar 1 **TW: Mar 2 - Mar 8** **Updated: Sun Mar 9 5:08 AM PST**

Rank			Mediabase Sortable Stats™ - Click any Blue Header		Spins			Aud.
lw	TW	Artist	Title	TW	lw	Move	/mill
1	1	FLO RIDA	Low (f/T-Pain)	10416	10547	-131	63.859
2	2 ▲	CHRIS BROWN	With You	10384	10085	299	63.458
3	3 ▲	RIHANNA	Don't Stop The Music	9644	9282	362	58.565
4	4 ▲	SARA BAREILLES	Love Song	8838	7896	942	51.637
6	5 ▲	BUCKCHERRY	Sorry	7018	6751	267	31.922
5	6	SEAN KINGSTON	Take You There	6388	6949	-561	33.422
11	7 ▲	MILEY CYRUS	See You Again	5953	5417	536	35.144
7	8	TIMBALAND/ONEREPUBLIC	Apologize	5923	6610	-687	32.677
13	9 ▲	JORDIN SPARKS	No Air (f/Chris Brow...	5866	5167	699	41.548
10	10	LINKIN PARK	Shadow Of The Day	5458	5618	-160	30.651

Conclusion

Complacency is a far more dangerous attitude than outrage.
- *Naomi Littlebear*

Those concerned with any form of societal change must be concerned with the ability to disseminate ideas or the "popularization of revolutionary culture" (Jackson 1971). In part this will necessitate a reordering of how media, their function and structure, journalism and associated forms of study are interpreted and acted upon. A reemergence of the history of the tradition of journalism and media analysis is necessary. A recognition, specifically for African America, that even within the fields of communication or media studies that much of the brightest and theoretically challenging analyses are omitted from the canon. In other words, the long-standing tradition of criticism of the press (Clarke 1961, DuBois 1907), the relationship of media to Black image and identity (Dates and Barlow 1993), culture and colonialism (Fanon, 1964; Memmi, 1965; Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967; Kofsky, 1970; Tabb, 1970; Blauner, 1972; Cabral, 1973; Atkinson, 1993, Barker, et al., 1999, Kunjufu, 2002), of the stage and screen (Baldwin 1955), television and radio (Barlow 1999) among so many others need to revisited to expand the narrowly-held theoretical/historical discussion in popular (), even "radical" or "progressive" scholarship (Downing and Husband 2007, Berry and Theobald 2006) or canonized academia (Mattelart and Mattelart 1999).

More attention must also be paid to the struggles over dissemination of ideas. Low-power FM, pirate radio, mix tapes, perhaps even a return to news-lettering and flyers as sources of critical/emancipatory journalism with connections to grassroots political organizing all must be developed and supported. Low-technological, lesser mass media forms not at all unimportant or hopeless even in the face of an increasingly high-technological and pervasive mass media system. They represent people reconnecting with one another in unsanctioned forms which is what is required of mass movements.

In interviews with representatives of Empower DC and the Youth Education Alliance respondents Parisa Nourisa, and Jonathon Stith each noted their organization's inability to have local Black-targeted radio play a supportive role in bringing wider attention to or support for their work or the issues (personal communication August 10, 2007). Stith in particular noted the outright antagonistic relationship YEA has with the most popular commercial radio in the city due both to their refusal to promote issues of concern to the organization but also to the antithetical fare offered day in and day out. With few exceptions[xxiii] Black-targeted radio, "the people's station{s}" offer little support to organizations working to improve the material lives of DC residents, particularly youth.

Finally, theorizing the relationship of mass media to African America via a model of colonialism encourages other analogous descriptions. The United Nations definition of genocide is roughly 80% focused on actions outside of physical violence. Much of their definition includes "slow death measures" or policies towards communities which deny adequate access to healthcare, decent housing, etc. Included in this roughly 80% are policies enacted against a community preventing that group from properly developing culturally (Churchill 2004). If we add to this a focus on media which mirrors that of what has been described as "Shock Doctrine"[xxiv] policies the goals of which are to use moments of societal-wide trauma (natural disasters, terrorist attacks, etc.) to impose further restriction on a population's political and social freedoms or certainly the historic use of propaganda to manipulate ostensibly "free" and "democratic" societies (Snow 2001, Wolf 2008[xxv]) there are even more aggressive critiques to potentially be brought to bare on Black-targeted media. For, given the broader history of African people in the United States, the enslavement, lynching, police brutality, mass incarceration, poverty, lack of healthcare decent housing and education, if the aforementioned structure and final product of Black-targeted mass media is at all accurate it could then be said that such mass media equate to genocide and terrorism.

Certainly a no news and narrowly-held/constricted form of popular cultural expression, heaped upon an already weakened population with tremendous repetition appears similar to those propaganda techniques employed historically and with seeming familiarity in efforts today (Wolf 2008, Heibert 2003). Infused is this propaganda into an existing mass media environment whose own trends toward fragmentation are increasing whereby increasingly society is divided into "demographic groups" each of which receive media from the same entities but tailored to appear more natural or authentic (). And what results are precisely what are encouraged by those seeking mass "compliance" whose research suggests that keeping people silent, separate and confused eases the process by which they are made so (Klein 2007). The "silence" in our immediate investigation could be equated to what has been described above as essentially acceptable noise. The division of population occurs already as mass media technologies (television, personal computers, personal music devices and phones, video players, etc.) encourage individual or small group engagement all fed with media designed specifically for each various segment of the population.

And if then mass media is equated to genocide and terrorism what forms of response are acceptable or adequate? If there is to be an increase in any form of suppressed communication, certainly a logic and language of Black liberation, new spaces will have to be carved, hence, the earlier suggestion of community, low-power, even pirate radio or the use of mix tapes, pamphlets, newsletters, etc. Cues will need to be taken from the those traditions of journalism and even those who points of struggle were within academic circles.[xxvi]

The agency represented within a logic and language of Black liberation is aggressively suppressed and must be understood to be outside that which can ever be allowed regular (if any) airing in the popular culture of a colonial society. Those interested in a flourishing of such a logic and language will need to engage a mass media environment at the levels of production and dissemination should that expression ever be able to take hold and become transformative.

Notes

[i] I mean not to gloss over or at all dismiss the wider debates over nationalism () or the prescient analysis of "intercommunalism" in which Newton () accurately complicates colonialism as a model considering the imperial origins of the nation-state, a singular U.S. global hegemony and the fact that for African America there is no nation to which to decolonize.

[ii] Including what has been termed the greatest loss of African American (as well as Latin American) wealth in the nation's history. Upwards of $200 billion lost to these communities through the sub-prime lending scandal or predatory lending (UFE, 2008).

[iii] Often also described as the "Third World."

[iv] It certainly is not the capitalism of Adam Smith the oft-cited father of modern capitalism (whether or not Smith's model is desirable).

[v] Bruce Cosby makes important points about the difference between "gadgets" and "technology" demonstrating that the former is a byproduct of the latter and is all that those colonized have access to. This lays bare the sophomoric and elitist and yet popular call from the Bill Cosbys and Bomani Armahs of the world who call for poor African Americans to spend more wisely and buy more property as if any of this was actually available to a colonized population.

[vi] Both slogans of Free Press (freepress.net) a leading "media reform movement" organization.

[vii] See also Hawk, 1992 and Allimadi, 2002.

[viii] US Census Bureau statistics http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/24/24033.html

[ix] Though decreasingly so causing this to be a particular issue for activists within Washington, DC. "WASHINGTON, DC – February 25, 2008 – On Friday, February 15, Superior Court Judge Judith E. Retchin handed plaintiffs in Tingling-Clemmons v. Fenty another victory when she ordered the District government to "provide language for relief" in settlement of the final count of the suit over the future of the Benning Library. Judge Retchin's order will, in effect, require the government to address community concerns about the size and services of the new library, the rumored sale of the library land for redevelopment, and the loss of the book collection, including an important collection of African-American literature" http://upsetthesetup.wordpress.com/2008/02/26/judge-tells-district-to-settle-benning-library-case/), See also, http://www.capitalcommunitynews.com/publications/eotr/2007_July/html/Ward7News.cfm)

[x] Though continued battles over "net-neutrality" demonstrate colonialism's adaptation to new technologies.

[xi] As exemplified in the recent and first-ever report produced on ad revenue spent on Black-targeted media that radio is used "more than any other medium" to reach Black audiences. $805 million was spent between 10/1/06 and 9/30/07 on Black-targeted radio or 35% of the total $2.3 billion spent on Black-targeted media during that same time frame (http://www.insidebrandedentertainment.com/bep/article_display.jsp?JSESSIONID=2v0jHLkhpvwnxny2wTVtY1S382l9JSLNTbXsyTTLzRYTGHL32Wnl!1158789824&vnu_content_id=1003703403)

[xii] Point 5 of the 1966 FBI COINTELPRO (Counter Intelligence Program) document specifically targets Black youth as potential threats and called for special efforts to protect against their radicalization (Churchill, Vanderwall).

[xiii] The most recent (Winter, 2007) combined ratings (9.5) of WPGC (5.5) and WKYS (4.0) trump that of WHUR's (6.9) (http://www.arbitron.com/home/content.stm).

[xiv] Glen Ford is now Editor-in-Chief of BlackAgendaReport.com http://www.blackcommentator.com/44/44_cover.html

[xv] Leah Taylor conducted the interview during her tenure as student intern with the author during the Fall of 2007 at Morgan State University.

[xvi] Fall, Winter, Spring and Summer sessions from 2005-2006. The projects were designed to create awareness through detailed monitoring of content precisely the kinds of images, stereotypes and imbalances between substantive political content in music or "news." Students kept diaries, charts, and sent written and phoned-in complaints to the FCC when thought necessary and then made end-of-the-semester presentations on their findings.

[xvii] To the extent that any such programming exists. All commercial or dominant media programming is to one extent or another an "advertisement" of sorts, be that a specific product or a promotion of sanctioned conceptions of reality.

[xviii] Though Bennett made his comment about advertising to deflect criticism from his paper's inconsistency he was awfully consistent in his use of his newspaper to promote the virtues of African enslavement).

[xix] This may also help explain the persistent Enough Is Enough campaign led by Reverend Delman L. Coates, Ph.D. targeting Debra Lee of BET for protests against negative imaging (http://www.enoughisenoughcampaign.com/).

[xx] Speech given to Black radio deejays in Atlanta, 1967. http://odeo.com/audio/5430283/view.

[xxi] http://blog.foreignpolicy.com/node/3007

[xxii] A Chicago University study on the subject shows upwards of 60% of Black youth dislike and want change to the popular hip-hop and R&B they are forced to hear due to the herein described process of popularization and apparent lack of awareness of alternatives (February 2007, blackyouthproject.com).

[xxiii] Zein Elamine of Save Our Neighborhood Schools Coalition has spoken very highly of the support his organization has received from DJ and host EZ Street from WPGC (3/9/08).

[xxiv] Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*.

[xxv] Though I disagree with Wolfe's assertion that racism is "irrelevant" to the larger goals of a "fascist" or "closing society" (McChesney).

[xxvi] See the histories of the development of the African Heritage Studies Association (AHSA), the Association for the Study of {Negro} African American Life and History, The Harlem History Club/Blyden Society, 1st World Lecture Series, among others.

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