Schools Have a Misafropedia Problem

Hari Ziyad's *Black Boy Out of Time* is a rich text that explores Ziyad's experiences with faith, being of a low-socioeconomic class, and gender among many other things that we will dive into over the course of this month. However, one of the most interesting things about the book is the author's coining of the term "misafropedia" or "the anti-Black disdain for children and [the] childhood[s] that Black youth experience" (Ziyad). Being apart of a demographic that has been directly impacted by this, I think it would be of value to share my experience and thoughts on the blatant examples of this in the American school system.

When the lack of care for black children's well-being is combined with racial bias, a lack of financial resources to provide appropriate educational help, and a chronically overworked population of educators, teachers are left frustrated and sublimate this anger onto their students in various ways. I have seen this happen firsthand, not only in my experience, but disproportionately in the experience of other Black and Latino children. It has been especially prevalent with Black boys like myself (Skiba et al.). I attended Indiana Math and Science Academy North from kindergarten till ninth grade. IMSA North is a majority-minority institution with a 94.9% minority enrollment rate, with 58.7% and 28.9% of that group being Black and Latino students, respectively. 87% of the student population is economically disadvantaged (US News).

Ad-Break

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Numerous stories of teacher burnout due to unfair wages, alleged racial bias, and prison-like conditions are swirling in my head right now, but none are more poignant than my seventh grade math-teacher yelling "Victory, I hate you!" directly into my face with flecks of spit flying from her enraged mouth. She was a Turkish Muslim woman, and I still remember the way her hijab swayed while she screamed. Looking back, she had been overwhelmed trying to manage so many children and teach at the same time. She had simply redirected her anger at me, but that didn't change how it made me feel. I had been a student that finished all work early in every class, which left me with copious

amounts of free class time. I felt disrespected, disgusted, and slightly afraid. I was afraid that this outburst due to my talkativeness might lead to another office visit, another call home, or a suspension. I was and am an outspoken student, after all. At this time, I was not consciously aware of the school-to-prison pipeline and how it sucked eccentric young black boys like me into punitive alternative education programs and juvenile detention centers. But, the signs of it lurked all around me. The way we would walk with our hands across our chests and bubbles in our mouths from class to class, even in the eighth grade, the lunchroom guards that would watch our every move and silence us if we got too loud, the incessant encouragement to simply be quiet were all quite telling. The worst part of it all was that I did not even know that these things were not normal until I went to a predominantly white institution where they were allowed to go to the bathroom without asking, eat their lunch wherever on the campus they pleased, and were encouraged to speak out in classes—not to mention the fact that they had a licensed counselor on campus, a resource that I heavily utilized in order to reach my scholarly goals. This casual misafropedia leaves many young black students susceptible to the effects of not only the school-to-prison pipeline, but the prison-industrial complex at large.

This is why when I got the opportunity to volunteer at IMSA North during my first semester of university, I jumped on it. I finally could come back as an adult and give little black boys like me the attention and patience they deserved. And that, I did. During my first week of volunteering, I witnessed a few of the same issues. The most pronounced was with a teacher being so overwhelmed that she did not have the patience to spare

for her third-grade students in an after-school program, a sentiment showcased by her not having the energy to be graceful when her students did something she did not like. It led to an unnecessary amount of verbal hostility when redirecting students. However, because I was there, I was able to engage with the students in ways the teacher simply could not manage. The effects were more positive than I could imagine; their faces lit up and they became more openly curious. I ended up having lovely hour-long conversations with the two students I was working with throughout the week, teaching one Spanish and practicing subtraction with another. This leads me to wonder: what if all Black and Latino students had access to that grace? That personalized encouragement in doing difficult work? That cultural understanding that could only be given by another individual who had grown up in the same skin, in the same neighborhoods? I plan to answer as much of that question as I can through my continued volunteer work with Black and Latino children. Thank you, Jameel and Anthony, for reminding me of how important early encouragement is, and how I should not forget about all the boys who did not manage to wrench themselves out of a predatory system by the skin of their teeth.

Interview w/ Hari Ziyad

You wrote a book that has had a clear impact in your life, but has also had a clear impact on mine. Reading this story brought me an unexpected amount of peace knowing that there have been other Black people that have shared a similar life experience. Thank you for writing things and having the courage to publicize them.

- **You mentioned in an interview with Team Rayceen Productions that you have been “interested in exploring larger social and political questions through personal story”, and that in order to tell your story it took three years of writing and therapy. How has it felt to have Black people like myself that can identify with your story utilize your book as a starting point for introspective journeys of their own?**
- **In this video, I discuss misafropedia in conversation with the school-to-prison pipeline and the prison-industrial complex. How do you think gendered nonconformity has positively and/or negatively impacted your experience with these systems?**
- **In your memoir, you speak about your own experiences with misafropedia, but have there been any memorable incidents that have happened to other people that you still remember from your childhood? If so, how might some of them have related to the school-to-prison pipeline, the prison-industrial complex, or both?**

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