Postindustrial capitalism and the problems with Bourdieu’s social and cultural capital in understanding the Black/White achievement gap in the United States and United Kingdom

Paul C Mocombe
West Virginia State University, USA

Abstract
This hermeneutical essay demonstrates why and how Pierre Bourdieu’s social reproduction theory is neither an adequate explanation for understanding praxis nor the Black/White academic achievement gap in contemporary postindustrial economies like that of the United States and the United Kingdom. The underlining hypothesis of the work is that the origins of Black academic underachievement vis-à-vis Whites in the United States and United Kingdom is structural and grounded in what Paul C. Mocombe refers to as “a mismatch of linguistic structure and social class functions” in postindustrial economies, which renders Bourdieu’s theory problematic. In other words, the structurally differentiated divergent identities created by the lack of (social and cultural) capital among Blacks vis-à-vis the capital of the upper-class of owners and high-level executives are no longer marginalized, but are celebrated and commodified in postindustrial economies to produce surplus value for capital, status, and upward economic social mobility. Hence, underclass cultural capital is reified along with bourgeois cultural capital as appropriate praxes for consumption in postindustrial societies, which makes the need for Blacks to succeed academically null and void.

Keywords
praxis theory, mismatch of linguistic structure and social class function, Black/White academic achievement gap, opportunity gap theory, structural Marxism

The Black–White test score gap is an empirical problematic that dates back to the 1940s. On many standardized tests the mean scores of Black students on average are typically at least 1 standard deviation below the mean scores of White students (Fryer and Levitt, 2004; Jencks and Phillips, 1998; Mocombe and Tomlin, 2013). As Fryer and Levitt (2004) point out,
a wide variety of possible explanations for the test-score gap have been put forth. These explanations include differences in genetic make-up, differences in family structure and poverty, differences in school quality, racial bias in testing or teachers’ perceptions, and differences in culture, socialization, or behavior. The appropriate public policy choice (if any) to address the test score gap depends critically on the underlying source of the gap. (p. 447)

Contemporarily, the public policy choices of standardization of curriculum, mentoring, and after-school programs of school boards throughout the nation have been implemented in light of the predominance of John Ogbu’s cultural, socialization, or behavior explanation; “burden of acting white”; and Pierre Bourdieu’s social reproduction theory as adopted by James Coleman, Karolyn Tyson, and Prudence Carter (Carter, 2003, 2005; Fryer and Levitt, 2004; Mocombe and Tomlin, 2010). In this article, using Paul C. Mocombe’s structural Marxist “mismatch of linguistic structure and social class function” hypothesis, I suggest that in the postindustrial (consumer) service economies of the United States and United Kingdom where the lack of social, political, economic, and cultural capital among the Black poor has produced a practical consciousness among the Black underclass that is reified, commodified, and celebrated by corporate finance capital for capital accumulation, however, the adoption of Pierre Bourdieu’s praxis theory to explain the Black/White academic achievement gap is problematic. To speak of the lack of capital, social, cultural, political, and so on as a barrier to upward economic mobility and status in postindustrial capitalist consumer societies, in other words, is no longer the case and politically incorrect. The postmodern identities and fields structurally created among poor Black youth by the lack of cultural, economic, social, and political capital have been, contemporarily, reified and commodified by corporate capital and the Black underclass as hip-hop culture and come to serve as means to acquiring status, economic gain, and upward economic mobility for Blacks in postindustrial capitalist consumer societies. Hence, both underclass and bourgeois capital become reified and commodified in postindustrial societies and serve as means to economic gain, status, and upward mobility. Education as the means to economic gain, status, and upward mobility is emphasized by the latter, but not the former which focuses on athletics, hustling, and the entertainment industry as the means to success.

Be that as it may, this continual need to develop a cultural realm to explain agency within capitalist relations of production as Bourdieu has done with his theory of praxis actually negates the agential moments of the Black underclass actors through the commodification of their structural position, which brings Bourdieu’s theory and the actions of those who lack bourgeois capital back to the structural realm of analysis, and subsequently fails to explain the persistence of Black academic underachievement, which is a result of two factors, linguistic structure and role conflict (Mocombe, 2005a, 2005b, 2010; Mocombe and Tomlin, 2010, 2013). This hermeneutical essay, using Paul C. Mocombe’s structural Marxist paradigm that posits structural differentiation and reproduction in capitalist societies of the contemporary world-system to be a result of the mode of production and its ideological apparatuses (education, the church, the streets, prisons, and athletic and entertainment industries), demonstrates why and how Bourdieu’s social reproduction theory is, therefore, neither an adequate explanation for completely understanding praxis nor the Black/White academic achievement gap in contemporary postindustrial economies like that of the United States and the United Kingdom. The underlining hypothesis of the work is that the origins of Black academic underachievement in the United States and the United Kingdom is structural and grounded in what Paul C. Mocombe (2007, 2009, 2010, 2011) refers to as “a mismatch of linguistic structure and social class functions” in postindustrial economies, which renders Bourdieu’s theory problematic. For Mocombe, the divergent identities or practical consciousnesses created by structural reproduction and differentiation via the mode of production and its ideological apparatuses produce the lack of capital among many Blacks (the Black underclass in particular), which are no
longer marginalized. Instead, the practical consciousnesses produced by the lack of capital are reified, commodified, integrated, and celebrated in postindustrial consumer economies to (re)produce surplus value for corporate capital, status, and upward economic social mobility for Black youth who no longer view education, an ideological apparatus for bourgeois domination, as their sole or dominant means to economic gain, status, an upward mobility. Instead, their practical consciousnesses as determined by ideological apparatuses such as the streets, prison industrial complex, and the athletic and entertainment industries are their means to economic gain, status, and upward mobility.

**Background of the problem**

Contemporarily, the public policy choices of standardization of curriculum, mentoring, and after-school programs of school boards throughout the United States and the United Kingdom to offset the Black/White academic achievement gap have been implemented in light of the predominance of John Ogbu’s cultural, socialization, or behavior explanation; “burden of acting white”; and Pierre Bourdieu’s social reproduction theory as adopted by James Coleman, Karolyn Tyson, and Prudence Carter (Carter, 2003, 2005; Fryer and Levitt, 2004; Mocombe and Tomlin, 2010). The logic behind these two socialization (culture of poverty) positions, which emerge out of the United States, is based, on one hand, on the assumption that African American students view academic success as the purposive-rationality of White Americans and therefore do not apply themselves to academically succeed for fear of being labeled acting White by their Black peers (Ogbu, 1974, 1994a, 1994b). On the other hand, the lack of social and cultural capital position is based on two assumptions: first, that Black American students enter school lacking the dominant social, linguistic, and cultural capital or values of middle-class America, which is required for them to succeed academically; second, there is an opportunity gap in terms of funding and resources of inner-city schools vis-à-vis suburban schools that contributes to the Black–White test score gap (Carter, 2003, 2005; Coleman, 1988). In both instances, educational practitioners seek to resolve this burden of acting White, lack of middle-class values or capital, and opportunity gap by prescribing equitable funding of schools and teaching African Americans the dominant cultural and social capital, which are viewed as race neutral and are assumed by schools, required to become successful in school at the expense of their non-dominant Black cultural forms (Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey, 1998; Cook and Ludwig, 1998; Downey and Ainsworth-Darnell, 2002; Farkas et al., 2002; Gordon, 2006; Ogbu, 1991; Steele, 1997; Tyson et al., 2005; Wilson, 1998), that is, push for equitable funding of schools and resources, and teach Black students through social, community, and parental involvement (social capital) the linguistic and cultural competencies (cultural capital) of middle-class parents that schools require while undermining or overlooking their non-dominant cultural capital of the inner cities (Carter, 2003). This same logic holds true for Black British Caribbean students in the United Kingdom as well (Mocombe and Tomlin, 2013).

These solutions of teaching and prescribing low-income African American and Black British Caribbean youth the political, economic, social, and cultural capital required to attain social mobility and status within the contemporary American and British social structure of class inequality are, however, problematic. The practical activities, that is, mentoring programs, equitable funding of schools, cultural activities, teaching Standard English (SE), and after-school programs, implemented in schools in order to give Black American and British Caribbean students the middle-class cultural and social capitals required to become academically successful and close the achievement gap becomes paradoxically self-defeating in attempting to resolve the Black–White achievement gap in contemporary postindustrial (consumer) societies like the United States and United Kingdom. That is, Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984) praxis theory of social reproduction refers to several
forms of “capital” (cultural, economic, symbolic, and social). The “capital” references refer to the institutional norms, resources, connections, and so on that one needs in capitalist societies to participate in its cultural, economic, political, symbolic, and social life. Bourdieu posits that the possession of, for the most part, middle-class “capital” is assumed by the educational system in contemporary society, but is not taught. Thus, education theorists such as James Coleman (1988), who have operationalized Bourdieu’s concept in the case of America, concludes, poor African American students enter school at a disadvantage (they lack “middle class social, political, economic, and cultural capital”), which leads to their “poor” academic achievement and opportunity gap. The solution from this perspective has been, to date, to teach and orient these poor students to more middle-class values and norms so that they can achieve like their White counterparts. Other Bourdieuan reproduction theorists such as Prudence Carter (2003, 2005) see the conflict among low-income minority youth between the dominant cultural capital forms and the non-dominant cultural capital forms with which Black students enter school as the locus of causality for the Black–White achievement gap. That is, the reluctance of poor Black American students to completely adopt the dominant cultural capital forms at the expense of their non-dominant forms lead to conflict and the perpetuation of Black academic underachievement. However, unlike Coleman who emphasizes the social and cultural capital of Bourdieu’s theory, Carter and Tyson focus on the political and economic capital as the determining factor in contributing to Black academic underachievement. These processes, Mocombe, Tomlin (2010, 2013); Mocombe, Tomlin and Showunmi (2016) demonstrate have also been applied to understanding the Black/White academic achievement gap as it pertains to Black British Caribbean youth in the United Kingdom. Yet in spite of these countless efforts to resolve the gap as it exist in the United States and United Kingdom, the problem persists and has become more profound. This essay suggests that the reason for the persistence of the problem rests on the application, without reevaluating it, of Pierre Bourdieu’s praxis theory to postindustrial economies.

That is to say, in globalization and postindustrial economies, the need for Blacks to acquire the social and cultural capital of middle-class America through education is irrelevant due to the fact that their lack of social and cultural capital has become the means to economic gain, status, and upward economic mobility. As many globalization theorists of the postmodernist variety have demonstrated (Arrighi, 1994; Bell, 1976; Giddens, 1990; Harvey, 1989; Jameson, 1991; Kellner, 2002; Sklair, 2001), the contemporary (1970 to the present) condition in the United States and United Kingdom, for example, is no longer characterized or driven by the industrial means for accumulating capital, which dominated the social relations of production of the last 100 years; instead, the present globalization condition in the United States and the United Kingdom is driven by postindustrialism (consumerism) – the new means for accumulating capital – and in such “developed” societies like the United States and the United Kingdom is characterized not by the industrial organization of labor, which have been outsourced to semi-periphery nations but rather by capitalist service occupations (60%–70% gross domestic product (GDP) in both nations) catering to the consumerist demands of a dwindling multiethnic (transnational) middle-class.

The rate of economic gain for its own sake or profit has fallen in industrial production due to labor laws and ecological cost in developed countries like the United States and United Kingdom, in other words. Hence, the practice now among investors operating out of the United States and United Kingdom is on financial expansion “in which ‘over-accumulated’ capital switches from investments in production and trade, to investments in finance, property titles, and other claims on future income” (Trichur, 2005: 165).

Globally, the economic bifurcation defining this current conjuncture, which began in the 1970s, is characterized, on one hand, by an expansion of industrial production into developing or periphery and semi-periphery countries (China, Brazil, Mexico, India, and South Africa), where
industrialization and the rate of labor exploitation have risen, given their lack of labor laws, and, on the other hand, consumerism of cheaply produced goods and high-end financial service occupations have come to dominate developed societies (United States, Western Europe, Japan, and Australia).

Hence, socially, the major emphasis among governing elites in this US-dominated global economy or social relation of production has been participation or integration of “others” (specifically “hybrids”) into the existing configuration of power relations in order to accumulate profits by servicing the diverse financial wants and cultural and luxurious needs of commodified cultural groups throughout the globe that constitute a multiethnic transnational capitalist class. This multiethnic transnational capitalist class lives a “bourgeois” middle- and upper-middle-class lifestyle at the expense of their ethnic masses working in low-wage agricultural, manufacturing, and production jobs or not at all given the transfer of these jobs overseas to developing countries. Amid their exploitation as inexpensive labor concomitantly, the underclass cultures or practical consciousnesses of the ethnic masses become cultural markets for the entertainment industry of postindustrial economies that is marketed by the upper-class of owners and high-level executives in developed (postindustrial) countries like the United States and United Kingdom to the multiethnic transnational bourgeois class for entertainment and conspicuous consumption. Be that as it may, the consumerist globality of postindustrial capital fosters the participation of the cultural sites that lack economic, political, social, and cultural capital. These cultural sites, that is, the meaning and new identities allowed to be constructed within the capitalist social space in core nations such as the United States and United Kingdom, are used to extract surplus value from their consumer representatives. That is, cultural sites, under US and UK economic global hegemony, become markets, structured (through education) within the dictates of the protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism, to be served, by their predestined (capitalist class) “hybrid” representatives, transnational multiethnic bourgeois capitalist class. This hybrid class, working for the upper-class of owners and high-level executives, services their respective “other” community as petit-bourgeois middle-class “hybrid” agents of the Protestant ethic who generate surplus value, for global capital on two fronts: first, through the consumption of cheaply produced products coming out of periphery or developing nations and, second, as cultural markets with capital to be serviced by high-finance capital operating out of the United States and United Kingdom. As such, no longer is the “other” alienated and marginalized by capital; instead, they (i.e. those who exercise their “otherness” as hybrids) are embraced and commodified so that the more socialized of their agents can (i.e. through hard work, and calculating rationality) obtain economic gain, status, and prestige in the global marketplace, while oppressing the underclass of their communities, as commodified cultural markets with comparative advantages of the upper-class of owners and high-level executives can commodify, cater to, service, and consume in and through their entertainment industry.

To this end, these hybrids, characterized by their ethnic middle-class-ness or embourgeoisement, are pawns for capital, an administrative bourgeoisie that increases the rate of profit for capital through conspicuous consumption, and by servicing the desires, wants, and needs of the oppressed masses of their ethnic communities who within the dialectic of the postindustrial mode of production in core nations like the United States and United Kingdom become workers, consumers, and cultural producers for the upper-class of owners and high-level executives who commodify and market their cultural products to the transnational multiethnic bourgeois capitalist class for entertainment and conspicuous consumption. In this sense, the discourse and discursive practices of racial, class, gender, and sexual identities in postindustrial economies like the United States and United Kingdom are commodified and reified around their social relations to the mode of production constituting a social class language game, so that finance capital can cater to and service their consumption needs while simultaneously commodifying their discourse and discursive
practices for consumption by global others who are similarly situated. Hence, inequalities and identities within racial, class, gender, and sexual groups in postindustrial economies are institutionalized around their inequalities and identities and they (their inequalities and identities) become the means by which their respective members must attempt to seek economic gain, status, and prestige in the societies. Be that as it may, in the postindustrial service economies of the United States and United Kingdom where the lack of social, political, and cultural capital is commodified and celebrated for capital accumulation, Bourdieu’s theory is problematic in that to speak of the lack of capital, social, cultural, political, and so on as a barrier to upward economic mobility and status in capitalist society is no longer the case. The identities and fields created by the lack of cultural, economic, social, and political capital have been commodified by capital and come to serve as means to acquiring status, economic gain, and upward economic mobility. Hence, this need to develop a cultural realm to explain agency within capitalist relations of production as Bourdieu has done with his theory of praxis negates the agential moments of the actors through the commodification of their structural position, which brings Bourdieu’s theory and the actions of those who lack capital back to the structural realm of analysis. This renders Bourdieu’s theory problematic for two reasons. First, it fails to account for social agency outside of that of structural reproduction and differentiation. Finally, the divergent identities created by the lack of capital are no longer marginalized, but are celebrated and commodified in postindustrial economies to produce surplus value for capital and the members of the group. In such a social system, Blacks will continue to academically underachieve because their underclass identity is commodified around their underachievement and marketable skills, athletes, entertainers, and hustlers, which becomes their consumptive means to economic gain, status, and upward social mobility for them in the society.

**Theory and method**

From roughly 1975 to the present, an enormous strand of critical writings, expounding a great many strands of theoretical schools of thought, combined to understand and challenge the post–World War II behavioral matrix dominating the social sciences which denied alternative agencies, outside the relational logic of a structure, to social actors (Archer, 1985; Crothers, 2003; Giddens, 1984; Habermas, 1984 [1981]; Ortner, 1984). Some were advanced by rationalist thinkers seeking to preserve the humanist and cognitivist idea of individuals as solitary thinkers who act in a purposive rational way, while others were offered by theorists dedicated to preserving the tenets of behaviorism (Giddens, 1984; Habermas, 1984 [1981]). In light of this action-oriented response to account for the different provinces of meaning within systems or structures of signification, the term praxis or structurationist theorists was used in the social sciences as the dominant label for the arguments expounded by prominent theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu, Marshall Sahlins, Anthony Giddens, and Jürgen Habermas (Crothers, 2003; Ortner, 1984).

Beginning in the 1980s, neo-structuralists or structurationists in the likes of Pierre Bourdieu (1990 [1980], 1984) with his theory of practice (habitus), Marshall Sahlins (1976, 1995 [1981]) through mythopraxis, Anthony Giddens (1984) through his theory of structuration, and Jürgen Habermas (1987 [1981], 1984 [1981]) with his theory of “communicative action” attempted to do just that “explain the relationship(s) that obtain between human action, on the one hand, and some global entity which we may call the system, [or social structure, structure, or culture] on the other” in order to capture the nature of human social reproduction, transformation, and differentiation within structures of signification (Crothers, 2003; Ortner, 1984). They attempt to do so, for the most part, through “the central notion of the ‘duality of structure’ which refers to ‘the essential recursiveness of social life, as constituted in social practices: structure is both medium and outcome of the reproduction of practices’” (Archer, 1985: 60). That is, structures are not only external
to social actors but are internal rules and resources (“form of consciousness”) produced and reproduced by actors “unconsciously” (intuitively) in their practices. From this perspective, accordingly, structure, that is, culture or, sociologically speaking, social structure, “may set conditions to the historical process, but it is dissolved and reformulated in material practice, so that history becomes the realization, in the form of society, of the actual [(embodied rules)] resources people put into play” (Sahlins, 1995 [1981]: 7). In this understanding, the structure is not an epiphenomenon of the structure of the mind, but is a result of the internalization by social actors of external (social structural) rules of conduct which are sanctioned, recursively organized and reproduced in material practice for their ontological security. Structure and subject are interdependent. Thus, structure, culture, social structure, human action, meaning, and consciousness are united together as “practical consciousness.”

This central notion of the duality of structure in Pierre Bourdieu (1990 [1980]) is described as a “dialectic of objective structures and incorporated structures (habitus) which operates in every practical action” (p. 41; insert added). Action, therefore, is a result of the habitus of individuals, an “embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history …” (p. 56); a “system of structured, structuring dispositions” (p. 52) that are “deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action […]” (p. 54) derived from “the conditionings [(fields)] associated with a particular class of [material] conditions of existence …” (p. 53). In his practical application and evaluation of this theory to capitalist society in his work Distinctions (1984), cultural, economic, political, and social capital become the system of structured, structuring dispositions that are deposited in social actors in their form of schemes of perception, thought, and action that differentiate them and their conditioning fields from each other in the society. More concretely speaking, the bourgeois class of capitalist society possesses the capital forms, social, economic, cultural, and political capitals, which get distributed throughout the society and differentiates the middle and working classes based upon the amount of capital they possess. Albeit, all classes in the society seek to possess the capital of the bourgeois upper classes whose institutions or ideological apparatuses transmit these structuring dispositions. Bourdieu and all subsequent Bourdieuan scholars in essence culturalize the structural differentiation produced by the capitalist social structure of class inequality.

Although Bourdieu’s materialization/culturalization of social structure by synthesizing the objectivity of the latter with the subjectivity of action is able to capture the actual nature of human social action and societal reproduction, the movement of the body as a result of the embodiment of a “system of structured, structuring dispositions” within “fields” associated with a particular class of material conditions, his theory is only able to capture the origins and nature of structural reproduction and differentiation produced by the relational logic of the “[capitalist] system of structured, structuring dispositions” and not the origins and role of difference arrived at through the deferment of meaning in the incorporation process. In other words, Bourdieu’s praxis response is unable to account for Jacques Derrida’s notion of différance, alternative structures of signification and actions that are outside the structuring structure of capitalist structural differentiation, for example, but arise as a result of the deferment of meaning in ego-centered communicative discourse. So in the end, Bourdieu is not accounting for social agency in and of itself. He is demonstrating how capitalist societies are structurally reproduced and differentiated among social actors in material practice.

Discussion

Social and education theorists who adopt Bourdieu’s concepts to explain the reason why Black American and British Caribbean students academically underachieve vis-à-vis their White counterparts highlight the lack of middle-class capital as to the origins of Black academic underachievement. In doing so, they are demonstrating structural reproduction and differentiation among Black youth in capitalist societies.
(Wilson, 1998). As a result, in maintaining their theoretical frames within the cultural reproduction theory of Bourdieu, they under analyze the origins of Black praxis and the Black/White academic achievement gap.

Social and education theorists who adopt Bourdieu’s cultural, social, economic, and political capital concepts to explain the reason why Black American and British Caribbean students academically underachieve vis-à-vis their White counterparts offer two explanations. On one hand, they build on the work of James Coleman (1988), who have operationalized Bourdieu’s concepts to explain the Black/White academic achievement gap, and conclude, poor African American students enter school at a disadvantage (they lack “middle class social and cultural capital”), which leads to their “poor” academic achievement. Thus, the solution from this perspective is to teach and orient these poor students to more middle-class linguistic and cultural values and norms so that they can learn the dominant linguistic and cultural capital of the society and achieve like their White counterparts. Other Bourdieuan reproduction theorists such as Prudence Carter (2003, 2005), on the other hand, see a conflict between the dominant cultural capital forms and the non-dominant cultural capital forms with which Black students enter school. However, they are more likely to place emphasis on the opportunity gap. That is, scholars operating out of this second position argue that the reluctance of Black American and British Caribbean students to completely adopt the dominant cultural capital forms at the expense of their non-dominant forms may lead to conflict and the perpetuation of Black academic underachievement. But the overwhelming reason for the achievement gap is economic grounded in the fact that the schools the majority of Blacks attend are poorly funded, lack adequate resources, and so on, compared to their White counterparts.

In spite of countless efforts since the 1960s to fund schools equitably, provide adequate resources, and prescribe, through mentoring and after-school programs, the dominant cultural capital to Black American and British Caribbean students, the achievement gap persists and has widened since the 1980s (Wilson, 1998). Prudence Carter (2003) is correct to point out how the interplay between the attempt to prescribe the dominant cultural capital forms to Black American students and their attempts to navigate among their non-dominant form affects their prospects of mobility. However, in highlighting the non-dominant cultural capital forms of poor Black American youth as cultural, within the logic of Bourdieu’s reproduction theory, and not structural, she overlooks how paradoxically the non-dominant cultural forms is both the reasons for Black academic underachievement, social mobility, and status in the consumer postindustrial economies of the United States and United Kingdom. In other words, not only is Bourdieu’s Neo-Marxist praxis theory problematic in accounting for alternative practical consciousnesses outside the structural reproduction and differentiation of capitalist organization, but in the postindustrial service/consumer economies of the United States and United Kingdom where the practical consciousness produced as a result of the lack of social, political, economic, and cultural capital is dialectically reified, commodified, integrated, and celebrated for capital accumulation by corporate capital, Bourdieu’s theory as adopted by Coleman and Carter is also problematic in explaining the Black/White academic achievement gap, social mobility, and status among Black youth. That is to say, to speak of the lack of capital, social, cultural, political, and so on as a barrier to upward economic mobility and status for Blacks in capitalist society is no longer the case. The structurally differentiated identities and fields created by the lack of cultural, economic, social, and political capital in postindustrial consumer societies have been reified, commodified, and integrated by corporate finance capital and come to serve as means to acquiring status, economic gain, and upward economic mobility for groups that once lacked the society’s capital. Hence, this need to develop a cultural realm to explain agency within capitalist relations of production as Bourdieu has done with his theory of praxis negates the agential moments of the actors through the reification and commodification of their structural position, which brings Bourdieu’s theory and the actions of those...
who lack capital back to the structural realm of analysis. This is clearly highlighted in the attempt to understand the Black/White achievement gap as a product of the lack of social and cultural capital among young Black American and British Caribbean adolescents, whose lack of social and cultural capital, reified as Hip-Hop culture, in contemporary postindustrial societies is the means to economic gain, status, and upward economic mobility for them in the society.

The Black/White achievement gap in America and the United Kingdom is an epiphenomenon of the dialectic of the global capitalist social structure of class inequality as reinforced by education, the Black church, the streets, prisons, and athletic and entertainment industries as ideological state apparatuses of such a system. In contemporary postindustrial capitalist societies, racial, class, gender, and sexual groups are commodified and integrated around their relations to the mode of production. Integrating, ideal typically speaking, in the society around two social class language games, an embourgeoisé educated professional class of teachers, lawyers, doctors, and so on, who in language and social practices are indistinguishable from the upper-class of owners and high-level executives, and an underclass of unemployed laborers looking to profit from their identities, which is constituted around their linguistic and economic segregation from the educated professional class and upper-class of owners and high-level executives, in the postindustrial economy.

The notion of social class language games utilized here is an adoption of the “language-games” later philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein 2001 [1953] conceptualized within a Marxian understanding of the constitution of identities in contemporary capitalist societies. For the Wittgenstein of the Philosophical Investigations, language is a tool and must be thought of as a rule-governed, self-contained practice, like a game, of activities associated with some particular family of linguistic expressions, which have no point outside themselves, but is simply associated with the satisfactions they give to the participants and their form of life. What I am suggesting here is that in postindustrial economies like the United States and United Kingdom, the identities of racial, class, gender, and sexual groups are commodified by the upper-class of owners and high-level executives around their social class identities determined by their historical relations to the mode of production. That is, they are reified, commodified, and integrated around their class positions and material practices within the capitalist social structure and come to constitute, in essence, two social class language games: one determined by their degree of socialization and assimilation, via the church and education, in the dominant linguistic community or language game of the upper-class of owners and high-level executives, that is, the Black middle and upper-middle classes of both societies; and the other, that is, the Black underclass, determined by their poverty and lack of socialization, via ideological apparatuses such as prisons, the streets, and the athletic and entertainment industries. The latter group, because of its poverty and lack of socialization is segregated from the former and constitutes their own rule-governed, self-contained practice of activities associated with achieving success, like their middle-class and better educated counterparts, within the capitalist social structure, without, however, abandoning their social class language game which, although marginalized by their more embourgeoisé and educated compatriots, is not marginalized by the upper-class of owners and high-level executives who commodify it for profit in the entertainment/service industries of postindustrial economies like that of the United States and United Kingdom. As a result, in postindustrial economies both the underclass and middle-class identities of racial, class, gender, and sexual groups become viable identity markers for achieving economic gain, status, and upward social mobility to the chagrin of middle-class hybrid others who do not view the underclass language game of their community as legitimate. Just the same, members of the underclass hybrid community also do not view the middle-class hybrid identity of their compatriots as legitimate.

However, whereas under industrialism, when Bourdieu developed his praxis theory, the middle-class identity was the bearer of ideological and linguistic domination; in postindustrialism, the
billion-dollar entertainment, consumer, and service economy financed by the upper-class of owners and high-level executives has privileged the underclass identity of racial, class, gender, and sexual groups as the bearers of ideological and linguistic domination. Hence, the language game of the middle-class hybrid other, with its emphasis on speaking SE, education as the viable means to economic gain, upward mobility, and status, and emulating the lifestyles of the upper-class of owners and high-level executives, is no longer the sole basis for success, status, and social mobility it has been supplanted by the social class language game of the underclass identity of racial, class, gender, and sexual groups. It is this social class linguistic factor, mismatch of linguistic structure and social class function, that must be seen as perpetuating the Black/White academic achievement gap in postindustrial economies like that of the United States and United Kingdom, and not the lack of social, cultural, or political capital which is no longer a prerequisite for economic gain, upward mobility, and status in postindustrial societies.

Conclusion

In the global economy under American hegemony and America’s postindustrial economy, Black Americans following desegregation and the civil rights movement of the 1960s became both role models (agents of socialization) and a model for socialization: a model for integrating ethnic others into the capitalist world-system as hybrid others and agents of socialization for other Black ethnic others within the capitalist world-system. This dual role of Black Americans within the capitalist world-system has subsequently perpetuated the Black–White academic achievement gap in the United States and globally as can be seen in the case of UK Caribbean Blacks.

In other words, the origins of the Black/White achievement gap among Black American and Black British Caribbean youths is grounded in what Paul C. Mocombe (2007, 2009, 2010) refers to as “a mismatch of linguistic structure and social (class) functions” in postindustrial economies like the United States and United Kingdom. Black American and Black British Caribbean youths, contemporarily, academically underachieve vis-à-vis their White and Asian counterparts because early on in their academic careers the poor social class language game or status group, “black American underclass,” who have become the bearers of ideological and linguistic domination for Black youth the world over, created by the social relations of postindustrial consumer capitalism and its ideological apparatuses in the United States produces and perpetuates a sociolinguistic status group that reinforces a linguistic structure (Black English Vernacular (BEV)/African American English Vernacular (AAEV) and Black British Talk (BBT)), which linguistically and functionally renders its young social actors impotent in classrooms where the structure of SE is taught. Thus early on (k to fifth grade) in their academic careers, many Black American inner-city youth struggle in the classroom and on standardized test because individually they are linguistically and grammatically having a problem with comprehension, that is, “a mismatch in linguistic structure,” grounded in their (BEV or AAEV) speech patterns (Mocombe, 2007, 2009, 2010). In other words, there is a phonological, morphosyntactical, and semantical mismatch between BEV/AAEV and the SE utilized in schools. Given the segregation and poverty of Blacks growing up in the inner cities of America, they acquire the systemicity of Black English and early on in their academic careers lack the linguistic flexibility to code switch between BEV/AAEV and SE when they take standardized tests. As a result, many Black youth have a problem decoding and understanding phrases and sentences on standardized tests (Johnson, 2005; Kamhi et al., 1996; Mocombe, 2010).

Later on in their academic careers as these youth become adolescents and acquire the linguistic flexibility to code switch between BEV/AAEV and SE, they are further disadvantaged by the social class functions (a mismatch of function of the language); this status group, Black American
underclass, reinforces against those of middle-class Black and White America. That is, success or economic gain and upward mobility among this “black underclass,” who speak BEV/AAEV, is not measured by status obtained through education as in the case of Black and White American bourgeois middle-class standards; on the contrary, the streets, athletics, music, and other activities not “associated” with educational attainment serve as the means to success, economic gain, and upward economic mobility in the US’ postindustrial society. Thus, effort in school in general suffers, and as a result test scores and grades progressively get lower. Grades and test scores are not only low for those who grow-up in poor-inner cities, it appears to have also increased as academic achievement and/or social-economic status (SES) rises. “In other words, higher academic achievement and higher social class status are not associated with smaller but rather greater differences in academic achievement” (Gordon, 2006: 25).

It is this epiphenomenon, “mismatch of linguistic social class function,” of the “mismatch in linguistic structure” many scholars (Coleman, 1988; Ogbu, 1974, 1990, 1991) inappropriately label “the burden of acting white” among Black adolescents, who as they get older turn away from education, not because they feel it is for Whites, but due to the fact that they have rationalized other racialized (i.e. sports, music, pimping, and selling drugs) means, financed by the upper-class of owners and high-level executives, to economic gain for its own sake other than status obtained through education (Mocombe, 2005a, 2005b, 2007, 2011; Mocombe and Tomlin, 2010). In America’s postindustrial economy, Black American youth look to athletes, entertainers, players, gangsters, and so on, many of whom are from the Black underclass, as role models over professionals in fields that require an education. Historically, this is a result of their relations to the mode of production, and its ideological apparatuses, in America.

In agricultural slavery beginning in the early eighteenth century, Black America was constituted as a racial caste in class dominated by the social class language game of the Black bourgeoisie (E. Franklin Frazier’s term), the best of the house servants, artisans, and free Blacks from the North, which discriminated against the practical consciousness and linguistic system (social class language games) of field slaves and newly arrived Africans who constituted the Black underclass. The industrialization of the northern states coupled with Black migration to the north from the 1800s to about the mid-1950s gave rise to the continual racial-class separation between this urban, educated, and professional class of Blacks whose practical consciousness and linguistic system mirrored that of middle-class Whites, and a Black underclass of former agricultural workers seeking, like their Black bourgeois counterparts, to be bourgeois, that is, economic gain, status, and upward economic mobility, through education and industrial work in Northern cities. However, racial discrimination coupled with suburbanization and the deindustrialization, or outsourcing of industrial work to Third World countries, of northern cities left the majority of Blacks as part of the poor Black underclass with limited occupational and educational opportunities. Consequently, America’s transition to a postindustrial, financialized service, economy beginning in the 1970s positioned Black American underclass ideology and language, hip-hop culture, as a viable means for Black American youth to achieve economic gain, status, and upward economic mobility in the society over education. That is, finance capital in the United States beginning in the 1970s began investing in entertainment and other service industries where the segregated inner-city language, entertainment, and athletic culture of Black America became both a commodity and the means to economic gain for the Black poor in America’s postindustrial economy, which subsequently outsourced its industrial work to semi-periphery nations thereby blighting the inner-city communities.

Blacks, many of whom migrated to the northern cities from the agricultural south looking for industrial work in the north, became concentrated and segregated in blighted communities where work began to disappear, schools were under funded, and poverty and crime increased due to deindustrialization and suburbanization of northern cities (Wilson, 1993). The Black migrants, which
migrated North with their BEV/AAEV from the agricultural South following the Civil War and later, became segregated sociolinguistic underclass communities, ghettos, of unemployed laborers looking to illegal, athletic, and entertainment activities (running numbers, pimping, prostitution, drug dealing, robbing, participating in sports, music, etc.) for economic success, status, and upward mobility. Educated in the poorly funded schools of the urban ghettos, given the process of deindustrialization and the flight of capital to the suburbs and overseas, with no work prospects, many Black Americans became part of a permanent social class language game, AAEV speaking, and poorly educated underclass looking to other activities for economic gain, status, and upward economic mobility. Those who were educated became a part of the SE-speaking Black middle-class of professionals, that is, teachers, doctors, lawyers, and so on (the Black bourgeoisie), living in the suburbs, while the uneducated or poorly educated constituted the Black underclass of the urban ghettos. Beginning in the late 1980s, finance capital, in order to avoid the oppositional culture to poverty, racism, and classism found among the Black underclass, began commodifying and distributing (via the media industrial complex) the underclass Black practical consciousness for entertainment in the emerging postindustrial service (consumer) economy of the United States over the ideology and language of the Black bourgeoisie. Be that as it may, efforts to succeed academically among Black Americans, which constituted the ideology and language of the Black bourgeoisie, paled in comparison with their efforts to succeed as speakers of Black English, athletes, “gangstas,” “playas,” and entertainers, which became the ideology and language of the Black underclass living in the inner cities of America. Authentic Black American identity became synonymous with Black underclass hip-hop ideology and language as financed by the upper-class of owners and high-level executives of the entertainment industry over the social class language game of the Black middle-class.

Hence, contemporarily, in America’s postindustrial service economy where multiculturalism, language, and communication skills, pedagogically taught through process approaches to learning, multicultural education, and cooperative group works in school, are keys to succeeding in the labor market, Blacks, paradoxically, have an advantage and disadvantage (Mocombe, 2001, 2007, 2008, 2010). On one hand, their linguistic structure growing up in inner cities are influenced by the Black underclass who in conjunction with the upper-class of owners and high-level executives have positioned athletics and the entertainment industries as the social functions best served by their linguistic structure in the service (consumer) economy of the United States, which subsequently leads to economic gain, status, and upward social mobility for Blacks in the society. This is advantageous because it becomes an authentic Black identity by which Black American youth can participate in the fabric of the postindustrial social structure through the commodification and consumption of the athleticism and Black cultural/linguistic form. On the other hand, their linguistic structure inhibits them from succeeding academically given the mismatch between their linguistic structure and the function it serves in the postindustrial labor and consumer market of the United States, and that of SE and the function of school as a medium to economic gain, status, and upward social mobility for Blacks in the society.

School for many Blacks, in other words, is simply a place for honing their athletic and entertainment skills and hip-hop culture, which they can subsequently profit from in the American postindustrial economy. Many Blacks in America enter school speaking BEV or AAEV. Their linguistic structure in schooling in postindustrial education, which values the exchange of cultural facts as commodities for the postindustrial consumer economy, is celebrated along with their music and athletics under the umbrella of multicultural education. Therefore, no or limited remedial courses are offered to teach them SE, which initially leads to poor test scores on standardized tests because the phonology, morphology, and syntax, or the way its expressions are put together to form sentences, of BEV/AAEV juxtaposed against that of SE prevents many Black Americans early on in
their academic careers from grasping the meaning or semantics of phrases and contents of standardized tests, which are written in SE. As Blacks matriculate through the school system, with their emphasis of succeeding in music and athletics, those who acquire the systemicity of SE and succeed become part of the Black professional class celebrating the underclass culture, from whence they came, of those who do not make it and therefore dropout of school constituting the Black underclass of poorly educated and unemployed social actors looking to the entertainment industry (which celebrates their conditions as a commodity for the labor market) and the streets as their only viable means to economic gain, status, and upward social mobility in blighted inner-city communities.

Globally this action plays out in the United Kingdom, for example, via globalizing forces and the media industrial complex under American hegemony. Given the rise of globalization under American hegemony and the rise of America’s postindustrial economy, which focuses on entertainment and service/consumer industries, Black American criminals, athletes, and entertainers have become the bearers of ideological and linguistic domination for Black youth consumer culture around the globe. Thus, in postindustrial economies like the United Kingdom, Black British Caribbean youth attempt to achieve economic status and upward economic mobility in the society by emulating the language and behavioral patterns of Black American athletes and entertainers who, paradoxically, have become global stars and pariahs in the global social relations of production.

So it is in the historical and structural evolution of the social relations of production, and its ideological apparatuses, of the capitalist world-system under American hegemony that the Black/White achievement gap in America, the United Kingdom, and globally for that matter must be understood. Black American underclass practices have been commodified by the upper-class of owners and high-level executives in the United States for capital accumulation and consumption in their postindustrial economies. In doing so, they have positioned Black underclass ideology and language as the basis for social integration in their society and the world, thereby perpetuating the underachievement of Black s, which began in slavery in the Americas.

Thus, in postindustrial economies like the United Kingdom and other countries around the globe, Black youth attempt to achieve economic status and upward economic mobility in the society by consuming and emulating the language and social actions of Black American criminals, athletes, and entertainers who have become global stars in the global social relations of production. Be that as it may, the social division of labor in globalization is dominated around images of Whites as your upper-class of owners and high-level executives, Asians as doctors and engineers, and Blacks as hustlers, athletes, and entertainers, which is ever-increasingly leading to the global academic underachievement of Black youth seeking to achieve economic gain, status, and upward mobility as hustlers, entertainers, and athletes via the entertainment industry of postindustrial economies in the likes of the United States and the United Kingdom.

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