

Reading Notes: Large “If Justice Is Our Objective”: Diaspora Literacy, Heritage Knowledge, and the Praxis of Critical Studyin’ for Human Freedom
Joyce E. King (2006)

1 Overview and Thesis

Joyce E. King argues that true educational justice requires moving beyond mere access to a flawed, ideologically racist curriculum. Instead, educators must embrace **Critical Studyin’**, a praxis rooted in Black Studies that uses **Diaspora Literacy** and **Heritage Knowledge** to liberate learners from dehumanizing myths and foster human freedom.

- **Key Problem:** Post-Brown v. Board education perpetuates the “national mythology of Black inferiority” through distorted knowledge about Africa, slavery, and Black culture.
- **Solution:** Recover “stolen knowledge, labor, and culture” via culturally grounded pedagogy.
- **Moral Imperative:** Educators must counter “dysconscious racism” to realize Brown’s unfulfilled promise.

2 Key Concepts

2.1 Diaspora Literacy

Ability to “read the word and the world” from an informed, indigenous African/diasporic perspective. Decodes alienating narratives in everyday Black life.

2.2 Heritage Knowledge

A people’s collective memory and historical consciousness—a “cultural birthright.” Essential for identity, pride, and liberation (“like a child to her mother”).

2.3 Critical Studyin’

Praxis inspired by enslaved Africans “studyin’ freedom.” Morally engaged teaching that frees cognition and emotion from ideological constraints. “Practice-to-theory”: theorizes Black experience to reconnect dismembered realities.

2.4 Alterity and Perspective Advantage

Black people’s “second sight” (Du Bois) or “perspective advantage” (Wynter) from living as the dehumanized “Other”—enables critique of white supremacy’s costs to all humanity.

3 Examples of Ideological Distortions

- **Textbooks:** Africans “sold their own people” into slavery (ignores lineage, European wars); Cro-Magnon “looked just like us” vs. African origins.
- **Slavery Narratives:** Ignores trauma, portrays as “salvation” or benign.
- **Conceptual Blackness:** “NHI” (No Humans Involved); biological inferiority myths (The Bell Curve).

4 Critical Studyin' Examples

1. **Songhoy-senni “barnya” (slave):** “Someone who doesn’t even have a mother”—highlights lineage protection absent in chattel slavery.
2. **Aunt Jemima:** Counternarrative recovers agency of enslaved women who preserved rice knowledge (Carolina Gold).
3. **Stolen Culture:** Black music (spirituals, blues) appropriated (Elvis, Eminem); Douglass/Brown as moral symbiosis.
4. **Boondocks:** Satirizes power via Black cultural signs (Ebonics, signifying).

5 Discussion Questions

1. How does “dysconscious racism” limit teachers’ moral agency? Examples?
2. Compare Diaspora Literacy to “adding multicultural content”—what’s missing in the latter?
3. Why does King say miseducation harms white students too? Evidence?
4. Analyze one example (e.g., Songhoy-senni): How does it rewrite knowledge?
5. Position: Are educators obligated to teach heritage-centered praxis? Defend with text.

6 Position Statement Template

If justice is our objective, educators must/need not engage in Critical Studyin’ because [thesis with evidence].

Challenge: [counterargument]. Response: [King’s framework]

7 Terms to Know

Dysconsciousness Impaired thinking accepting dominance as normal.

Nihilated Identity Total denial of humanity via racial subordination.

Will to Blackness Chosen cultural identification resisting nihilism.

8 Further Reading

- Woodson, *The Miseducation of the Negro* (1933)
- Wynter on “genre of the human”
- Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*