The Sunken Place of the African American in Education

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in English

By

Janice Monica Robinson

May 2019
The graduate project of Janice Monica Robinson is approved:

__________________ __________________
Dr. Sharon Klein Date

__________________ __________________
Dr. Sandra Stanley Date

__________________ __________________
Dr. Nicole Morris Johnson Date

__________________ __________________
Dr. Harry Hellenbrand, Chair Date

California State University, Northridge
Table of Contents

Signature Page ii
Abstract iv
The Sunken Place of the African American in Education

By

Janice Monica Robinson
Master of Arts in English

In the movie Get Out, director/producer, Jordan Peele introduces a metaphor for the besieged consciousness of the African American. Peele terms this state of consciousness as the “The Sunken Place.” Peele states, “The sunken place means we're marginalized. No matter how hard we scream, the system silences us.” He elaborates, “… it separates the consciousness of the victim from control of the body” (The Wrap). The sunken place is a master trope in African-America self-reflection. There is no “system” where the sunken place is more prevalent than in America's educational institutions.

Through the lens of Ralph Ellison’s The Invisible Man, Nella Larsen’s Quicksand and Colson Whitehead’s Underground Railroad the method in which this sunken place operates is the focus of this study. The education of the African American is likened to a
lobotomy as occurs in Ellison’s Invisible Man and Jordan Peele’s Get Out. The lobotomy occurs in three phases in the movie Get Out, and this work uses these phases to define how the educational system fails and neglects the African American. The phases are as follows: Phase One consists of hypnosis and brainwashing. Phase Two is the process of mental preparation, and Phase Three is the actual lobotomization/ transplantation. The applied literature and the genre of the horror film/story will serve as the clarification of how each of the phases works to produce a student who walks out of the educational system, factory educated and chased through the whole thing by an invisible monster that they battle alone. It is essential to understand how these “phases” connect as educational lobotomy of the African American and how they work as educational rhetoric.

As an African American woman, that has been a part of the educational system for 17 years as a student, and now a Teaching Associate I will personally document my own experience. The usage of language oppression, visual oppression and the criminalization of the student from the moment they walk into the school system are all facets that create a sunken place where the African American is erased and rendered invisible.