

Curriculum of the Redeemed

Phyllis Kyei Mensah
Miami University

LET ME TELL YOU HOW IT BEGAN,
They said I needed a “Christian” name
To proclaim to the world that I was indeed saved
What I did learn was that I needed an English name
To distinguish me from my damned, heathen, and savage race
So, when you happen to stand on my grave
The epithet will proudly read
The name that covered my shame

Then they taught me their language
To ease our communication
But I learned to forget the “uncultured” and “unsophisticated” gibberish I call my native tongue
To exemplify the “civilized” African, successfully molded in their image
But not quite in their intelligence and privilege
So, when you hear me rant and rave fluently in your language
And wonder how I came to speak it to such “perfection”
I will proudly proclaim that I learned it from my masters
And it has given me immeasurable advantage

Next, they taught me colors
To awaken my creative spirit (wonders)
But I learned that there are good colors
And black is certainly not one of them
So, when you see me aspire to whiteness
And wonder why I see color even in a blank(ness)
I will apprehensively query
Why do I not deserve a shot at “rightness”

They taught me texture
To help me appreciate the variety and diversity of touch
But when I saw your straight hair
And touched my “nappy,” “unkempt” wool
I learned that the only beauty worth beholding
Lay in the eyes of the straight-haired beholder
So, when you wonder why I endure the pain of the hot comb and relaxers
And you scold my self-indulgence in the beauty shop
Remember, that my life goal is to be created in the image of Barbie

They taught me to look up to the Metropole
For whence “salvation” abides
And we can be made whole
So, if you wonder why I squander my life savings
And even sacrifice my life
To cross the Mediterranean
I should let you know
That all my life, my only wish
Has been to taste a sandwich
And to lay on the land, where God has saved the Queen

But now I know
When schools teach us
We learn everything...
The explicit theory, the implicit systems
I know that education is more than the teacher
And curriculum, more than the lesson plan
I have learned that the world is our classroom
And its curriculum, ours to critique

