



# Reading 'Race' in Bourdieu? Examining Black Cultural Capital Among Black Caribbean Youth in South London

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## Abstract

This article extends Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital in relation to 'race' and ethnicity by exploring the significance of black cultural capital among middle class black Caribbean young people in a large state school in south London. Black cultural capital is here defined as the appropriation of middle class values by black ethnics. Based on a 14-month-long ethnography, with specific attention to three focus group and 13 in-depth interviews with middle class black Caribbean young people, this piece outlines the benefits of and backlash to black cultural capital that students encounter from white middle class teachers for deploying black middle class tastes and styles in the classroom. The findings suggest that while black middle class pupils draw on black cultural capital to access advantages in formal school settings, they are also invested in challenging the terms of class privilege that marginalise the black working classes.

## Keywords

black identities, Bourdieu, cultural capital, middle class, 'race'

## Introduction

Bourdieu's most popular works do not substantively account for 'race' and ethnicity in much the same way that they consider social class. In fact, there remains considerable scepticism about whether or not Bourdieu considers 'race' and ethnicity effectively or at all (Go, 2013). Although pieces like *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1996) represented France as ethnically undifferentiated due to political restrictions on ethnic identification (Bennett

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et al., 2009), works such as *The Algerians* (Bourdieu, 1962), Bourdieu's introductory ethnographic account of Algerian life during the war of independence, showcases his sensitivity to 'race' and racism as social factors that complicate class (dis)advantage. As such, while an awareness of 'race' and ethnicity does not pervade all, or even most, of Bourdieu's oeuvre, his discussions of 'race', racism and segregation in select works reveal that considerations of racial and ethnic inequality were not altogether absent (Puwar, 2009). Although critical and postcolonial readings of Bourdieu explain the contextual constraints that limited his theorisations of 'race' in relation to social class (Bennett et al., 2009), Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit (habitus, field and capital) offers tools for unearthing the complexities of, and contributions to, social (dis)advantage, including their racialised dimensions (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). One such tool of increasing utility is Bourdieu's signature concept: cultural capital (Modood, 2004).

In sociological and educational research, cultural capital has been used to account for the impact of family background on social and educational outcomes (Crozier, 2006; Mirza and Reay, 2005), racialised and gendered class disparities in educational attainment (Reay, 2007; Rollock, 2007), and increasing inequality in an age of austerity (Priour and Savage, 2011) – analyses that are in keeping with Bourdieu's analytics on social stratification. When Bourdieu conceived of the term cultural capital in France in the mid-1970s, he did so to explain the role of culture and education in the reproduction of social inequality (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). He defined cultural capital as 'instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 488) with 'the capacity to reproduce itself, produce profits, expand and ... persist' (Bourdieu, 1986: 241). Cultural capital functions as a stock of high-value status symbols – a set of convertible resources – developed and exchanged within schooling systems, home contexts and related social fields that produce returns (Priour and Savage, 2011; Robbins, 2005).

'Race' can (and often does) influence experiences and expressions of cultural capital. To justify this claim, this article elaborates on a racialised iteration of cultural capital – black cultural capital – within a multicultural school in south London. Although there are competing definitions of black cultural capital, the concept is operationalised in this article as dominant tastes and expressions adopted and adjusted by the black middle classes to signal class status and racial identity simultaneously. In so doing, this article builds on Rollock et al.'s (2015) description of black cultural capital by developing the conceptual argument in a more detailed fashion and centring the voices of black middle class pupils, as opposed to parents. First, I examine readings of 'race' in Bourdieu's scholarship to justify discussions of cultural capital in raced terms. Then, I clarify the definitions of black cultural capital, outline the nature of the study, and ultimately explore the benefits of, and backlash to, black cultural capital.

### *Reading 'Race' in Bourdieu's Scholarship: From the (Post)colonial to the 'Post-Racial'?*

The notion that Bourdieu had anything to say about ethno-racial domination is a relatively new pronouncement. Recent postcolonial scholarship has challenged popular

perceptions of Bourdieu's work as class-conscious but colour-blind. Go (2013), Puwar (2009) and Loyal (2009), for example, maintain that such perceptions are arguably rooted in limited readings of Bourdieu's work, rather than Bourdieu's limited readings of 'race' and ethnicity. Failure to consider Bourdieu's lesser-known selections, such as *The Algerians* (Bourdieu, 1962) and 'On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999), can (and frequently does) produce mis-readings – claiming that Bourdieu did not consider 'race', and ignoring his context-specific readings of 'race'. Reading 'race' in Bourdieu's scholarship requires clarity on Bourdieu's framing of 'race' and a close examination of how Bourdieu operationalised 'race' in research. The remainder of this section turns its attention to these imperatives.

'Race' mattered to Bourdieu, but his understandings of 'race', and language for it, did not fit neatly with dominant logics of the time. Bourdieu was arguably disinterested in interpretations of 'race' as a fixed biological category – perspectives that though scientifically disproven, remained popular in the mid-20th century when Bourdieu began his fieldwork in Algeria (Bourdieu, 1962, 1979). Owing to the then predominant bio-logic of 'race' (Go, 2013), Bourdieu perhaps found the term 'race' limiting, and opted instead for a more expansive framework that moved beyond the common 'black' or 'white' labels of western race relations. Bourdieu invested in an understanding of caste – a typology of 'race' or ethnicity – which highlighted the social construction of racialisation and power inequality in French international governance.

Bourdieu not only recognised that social groups were differentially racialised, but that caste influenced divisions in Algerian life. Commenting on 'segregation' in colonial Algeria between Europeans, the market-dominant minority, and Arabs, the politically displaced native majority, Bourdieu explains that the caste system is:

... composed of two distinct, juxtaposed 'communities' which have not united to form a larger group ... The two societies are placed in a relation of superior to inferior ... Relations between members of the two castes seem to have been reduced to an irreducible minimum ... Hence a *de facto* racial segregation has developed. The function of racism is none other than to provide a rationalisation of the existing state of affairs so as to make it appear to be a lawfully instituted order. (Bourdieu, 1962: 132)

As evidenced above, Bourdieu registers a critical reading of caste as a consequential construct influencing segregated spatial arrangements, hierarchical social relations, and structures of suffering in Algerian society. Bourdieu maintains that caste is entrenched in colonial Algeria, not through legislation, but through a set of informal laws – a strict social script that determines domination and often necessitates political struggle. Additionally, Bourdieu demonstrates an acute awareness of the social and economic costs of caste. He argues:

Although there are no racial laws in Algeria, although the Algerian can travel in the same buses and in the same railway compartments, go to the same hotels or send their children to the same schools as Europeans, the differences in cultural traditions ... and in economic standard as well as the frequent separation of residential districts, tends to create a real form of segregation ... (Bourdieu, 1962: 132)

Bourdieu signals here the (re)production of significant social divisions by caste and class. The dynamics Bourdieu describes of mid-20th century Algeria could be related, in some sense, to our contemporary period of post-racialism – a time of material, social and political exclusion of racial and ethnic minorities despite continued denial of racism’s durability in the 21st century due to marginal class advances of some ethnic minorities. Comparisons of colonial Algeria and the postcolonial/‘post-racial’ West are not meant to inspire false senses of sameness, but to note the intersections of caste/‘race’/ethnicity and class across time and space – or to highlight how caste-only analyses render class dynamics insignificant.

While the economics of colonialism influenced hierarchical social class relations globally, Bourdieu gave analytical primacy to caste, not class, in localities across Algeria. According to Go (2013: 57), Bourdieu ‘emphasised that the colonial system was based on “caste” (by which he meant “race” supported by political privilege) rather than “class”’. However, it should be noted that, in centring caste, Bourdieu did not undermine the interrelationship between race and class relations. After all, Bourdieu reasons:

... each caste is itself divided into classes. But while each caste has its own system of graded social positions, and each individual is permitted to climb the rungs of the social ladder of his caste, it is practically impossible to cross the abyss that separates the ladders. Caste spirit stifles class-consciousness ... (Bourdieu, 1962: 133)

In this regard, Bourdieu confirms that caste functioned as more than an alluring logic of differentiation, but also as a definitive feature of class and colonial conditions. Bourdieu also acknowledges that caste can impede cognisance of class relations, which arguably include class conflict and the politics of belonging. In the colonial order, structural racism and class inequality are deeply interconnected. Speaking of the linkages between racism and colonialism, Bourdieu asserts:

It would indeed be useless to hope to abolish racism without destroying the colonial system of which it is the product; it would be the height of pharisaism to condemn the racism and the racists spawned by the colonial situation without condemning the colonial system itself. (Bourdieu, 1962: 50)

Bourdieu’s anti-racist framework was squarely rooted in a radical anti-colonial position. He envisaged anti-colonialism and anti-racism as interrelated liberation projects. It is conceivable, then, that Bourdieu’s critical orientation towards colonialism extended beyond French cultural and political occupation of Algeria to broader understandings of colonialism shaping a global, racialised field of inequality (Go, 2013).

### *Reading ‘Race’ Beyond Algeria*

Bourdieu’s view of ‘race’ and racism cannot be relegated to *The Algerians* (Bourdieu, 1962). Bourdieu recognised that logics of colonialism and practices of racism created conflicted cultures, representations and identities, in Algeria and beyond – not in uniform terms, but in distinct national forms. Accordingly, his readings of ‘race’ avoided ‘false

universalisations' and demonstrated the regional relevance of 'race'. In 'On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999), for example, Bourdieu and Wacquant criticise the perceived American imperialist logic in Michael Hanchard's *Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1945–1988* (1994). Bourdieu and Wacquant challenge Hanchard for seeking to undo the particularities of 'race' and racial classification in Brazil to (re)frame them according to the bi-polar character of US 'race' relations. Commenting on what they understood as 'ethnocentric intrusion', Bourdieu and Wacquant (1999) advocated a focus on the dynamics and divisions of 'race' in Brazil in keeping with 'local usage'. They maintain:

In Brazil, racial identity is defined by reference to a continuum of 'colour', that is, by use of a flexible or fuzzy principle which, taking account of physical trait such as skin colour, the texture of hair, and the shape of lips and nose, and of class position (notably income and education), generates a large number of intermediate and partly overlapping categories (over a hundred of them recorded by the 1980 Census) and does not entail radical ostracization or a stigmatization without recourse or remedy. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999: 45)

One need not subscribe wholly to Bourdieu's conclusions to acknowledge that 'race' can function differently across social and national fields. 'Race' in Brazil created a colour-coded class hierarchy that did not resemble in its details 'race' relations in Algeria, the US, the UK and elsewhere. From his early work in Algeria to his later critiques of the globalisation of US 'race' relations in Brazil, Bourdieu's readings of 'race' centred local understandings of 'race' and embraced an expansive vocabulary for describing racialised class structures.

But why did Bourdieu's arguably radical readings of 'race' fade in his works following *The Algerians*, only to return almost four decades later in a critique of *Orpheus and Power*? Was the weight of 'race' in the colony (Algeria) lost upon his return to Paris? Did the demography and dynamics of France cause Bourdieu to see 'race' differently, or not at all? Such questions cannot be fully addressed without understanding the socio-historical conditions of France following Bourdieu's return home. Bennett et al. (2009) suggest that political restrictions on ethnic identification in schools, research surveys, and across the French state may have stifled Bourdieu's sociological voice on ethno-racial distinctions. But the French government's restrictions alone cannot account substantively for the decades-long disappearance of Bourdieu's reading of 'race'. It is no wonder then that some would not consider Bourdieu's assessment of 'race' and racism as a steady and serious feature of his work (Rollock, 2007).

Although Bourdieu did not offer a systematic treatment of 'race' that was as consistent as his analyses of class, his 'light touch' analysis of 'race' and racism in colonial Algeria and postcolonial Brazil provide a precedent for reading 'race' in Bourdieu's scholarship. Reading 'race' in Bourdieu's work must recognise Bourdieu's use of more expansive language and greater focus on locality than is popularly perceived. Put plainly, the examination of 'race' as an analytical frame is not an imposition on Bourdieu's scholarship. Contemporary extensions of Bourdieu's theory of practice in relation to 'race' and racism therefore fall in a critical tradition – a contribution Bourdieu initiated himself (Bourdieu, 1962, 1979). It is foreseeable, then, that Bourdieu's early emphasis on 'race'

can be infused with his later theoretically mature formulations of cultural capital to represent Bourdieusian tradition *and* innovation.

### *The Development of Black Cultural Capital(s)*

As sociologists of education have sought to account for the profound influence of ethno-racial diversity on class relations, they have proposed new formulations of cultural capital that both keep with Bourdieu's development of this tool and move beyond traditional Bourdieusian orthodoxies. These extensions include transnational cultural capital (Ball et al., 2003), multicultural capital (Reay et al., 2007), ethnic capital (Modood, 2004; Shah et al., 2010) and Islamic capital (Franceschelli, 2014), among others. These nuanced renditions of cultural capital are fundamentally about persistent racialisation – about the stratified hierarchies that influence symbolic and substantive meanings attached to 'race' and ethnicity. Black cultural capital can be situated among such contemporary advancements, particularly for asserting the joint operation of 'race' and class in expressions of cultural capital.

To date, there are two distinct definitions of black cultural capital documented in sociological research. The original formulation conceptualised by Prudence Carter in her 10-month-long ethnography of 62 African American and Latino youth in New York, conceives of black cultural capital as the range of cultural practices and tastes deployed by low-income black youth in schools and other social institutions to improve their social status in peer networks, legitimise their racial authenticity, and garner recognition in local contexts. Carter (2005) contends that cultural capital is not the sole preserve of a largely white upper and middle class majority; she asserts that there are valuable resources that can be found among racial and class minorities – a non-dominant species of cultural capital that orders social relations in informal spaces. By ignoring other stocks of capital useful in local settings, traditional conceptualisations of (dominant) cultural capital can easily, and perhaps unintentionally, frame minority communities from deficit perspectives – emphasising what they 'lack' in schools and society without fully accounting for the complex histories of racial domination that influence their social positions (Gillborn, 2005).

The second variant of black cultural capital, mentioned only briefly in Rollock et al.'s *The Colour of Class* (2015: 25), considers the ways in which black middle class parents marshal their class resources and high status cultural codes for increased social mobility despite the multiple micro-aggressions they confront throughout British society. In their identification of black cultural capital, Rollock and her colleagues are primarily concerned with how cultural capital (academic and professional qualifications, dispositions and cultural resources), as used by the 62 black Caribbean middle class parents in their study, informs educational strategies for successfully navigating schools. This version of black cultural capital is about how blackness shapes experiences of dominant cultural capital and influences social reproduction. Rollock et al.'s findings suggest that the black middle classes often encounter class advantages in ways that differ greatly from their white middle class counterparts. In this regard, 'race' and racism can constrain experiences and uses of cultural capital.

Although Rollock et al.'s (2015) and Carter's (2005) iterations of black cultural capital are different, they are complementary. They are both part of an on-going project to

challenge durable deficit narratives about black and ethnic minority young people and to produce asset-based perspectives (Youdell, 2003). In the rich and varied experiences of black youth from all class backgrounds in the UK and US, both versions of black cultural capital coexist (Carter, 2005); both allow black youth to recognise *and* resist the mainstream. Based on Bourdieusian conceptions of capital, both illustrate that black cultural capital is not a fixed, static resource, but that its meanings shift according to social fields. Accordingly, Carter argues: '[c]ultural capital is context-specific and its currency varies across different social spaces, where struggles for legitimation and power exist' (Carter, 2003: 137). Dominant and non-dominant variants of black cultural capital take impetus from Bourdieu and provide a new calculus for understanding the co-constitution of racial and class resources. Like Carter (2003) and Rollock et al. (2015), I find that there is a disfigured perception of cultural capital that often synchronises *and fixes* expressions of cultural capital with whiteness. However, neither Carter (2003) nor Rollock et al. (2015) centre readings of 'race' in Bourdieu's scholarship as *entrées* into the development of black cultural capital. This piece offers such an intervention and suggests that reading 'race' in Bourdieu marks the oft-invisible impact of whiteness on class relations. I call attention to black cultural capital not as an analytical frame that views blackness in singular, essentialist terms. I summon black cultural capital, however, to centre 'race' and racialisation in black middle class youths' experiences of cultural capital. The next section of this article casts its attention to the study's design and then to Rollock et al.'s rendition of black cultural capital – elaborating on what they mentioned briefly.

## The Study

The data and findings discussed in this article are drawn from a 14-month-long cross-national ethnography of the educational experiences of working class and middle class second-generation black Caribbean young people in London and New York City. This comparative study examined the national, political, historical and cultural factors that position black Caribbean youth as 'underachievers' in London and 'high achievers' in New York City. The project explored the role of various social agents (parents, teacher and pupils) in shaping educational expectations, aspirations and outcomes of black Caribbean young people. The study was formulated and conducted by a black Caribbean man of working class heritage who studied and worked in the UK and US. The analysis in this article is centred exclusively on the London case – and the middle class pupils within it. I use 'middle class' to refer to participants whose parents self-identified as such ( $N = 5$ ) or indicated through degree earnings (BA and above), housing and professional or managerial occupation (e.g. NS-SEC 1 and 2), a higher social position than the working classes ( $N = 8$ ) – based on the UK government's *Standard Occupational Classification Manual*. In defining 'middle class', I centre educational attainment irrespective of income in the classification of my sample given the links between education, cultural capital and social mobility as outlined by Bourdieu (1996).

The participants in the London sample were Year 10 and Year 11 pupils at a large state comprehensive school in south London. The institution, Newton Secondary (a pseudonym), has historically served the white working classes since its founding in the mid-20th century. In the last two decades, however, the school has seen a significant increase



in its in-take of black Caribbean children and other ethnic minorities due to demographic changes in the school neighbourhood. In the 2012/13 academic year, ethnic minorities comprised 46.2 per cent of the school population, with students registered as black Caribbean accounting for the largest group. Additionally, just fewer than 35 per cent of pupils qualified for free school meals (FSM).

With the aim of focusing specifically on second-generation black Caribbeans, pupils whose parents consented to their participation completed screening questionnaires, the data from which provided clarifying information on the pupils' class standing and generational background. Over a seven-month period in London, between 2012 and 2013, 382 black Caribbean pupils participated in the 'generational screening' exercise, 115 of whom were British-born children of immigrant parents from Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Antigua, Grenada, Guyana, Barbados, Montserrat and the Bahamas. These young people participated in focus group interviews, detailing the gendered, classed and raced dimensions of their educational trajectories. All focus group respondents were invited to engage in one-on-one, semi-structured, in-depth interviews and 30 of the invited participants agreed and returned additional parental consent forms to ensure full disclosure to parents of pupils' continued involvement in the project. Pseudonyms are used throughout this article for the sake of the protection and anonymity of the young people.

Of the 30 young people who participated in in-depth interviews, 17 were from working class families (based on FSM eligibility, parental employment and parents' post-16 academic and professional credentials) and 13 participants were from black middle class families (determined by parents' university completion and professional ranking). Sixteen of the core participants were female and 14 were male. Although I concentrate on middle class black Caribbean boys' and girls' one-on-one interviews, understandings of black cultural capital, as experienced by participants, are enriched by the study's multilayered data, including interviews with 11 middle class parents and three focus groups with middle class boys and girls. In-depth interview and focus group times ranged between 55 and 85 minutes, with the average interview lasting 65 minutes. All interview data were audiotaped, transcribed and carefully analysed using NVivo 8. Analysis employed a modified grounded theory approach in two phases (Strauss and Corbin, 1998): (1) open coding to identify broad categories such as 'cultural advantages and disadvantages', amongst others; and (2) focused coding such as 'being and acting black in school', which included sub-codes like 'tensions between class advantage and racial identity' to deepen the analysis. With open and focused coding, nuances about racialised experiences of cultural capital emerged.

## Findings

Although Bourdieu did not explicitly discuss cultural capital in raced terms, the findings suggest that there is an urgent need to 'think with Bourdieu ... beyond Bourdieu, and against him ...' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: xiv) in order to better account for the varied experiences easily simplified by single-axis class analyses that assume 'race' neutrality. The data showcased below illustrate the strategies, scripts and styles that a particular group of black Caribbean middle class youth draw on to elevate their status in



school. In the empirical analysis that follows, I explore the benefits of and backlash against black cultural capital to spotlight the tensions between class elevation and racial subordination.

### *The Benefits of Black Cultural Capital*

Black cultural capital reflects the simultaneous negotiations of 'race' and class in the acquisition of resource advantages that more often than not are defined by white middle class interests. Middle class black Caribbean pupils draw on acquired bodies of knowledge and dispositions to improve their social and academic performance, and, in so doing, challenge the widespread stigmatisation and homogenisation of black identities in school (Rollock, 2007; Youdell, 2003). The examples below underscore the parent-approved embodied class scripts (codes of walking, speaking, dressing, and behaving) that black Caribbean pupils engage in based on their perception of teachers' racial biases at Newton Secondary. Akilah, a Year 10 pupil explains:

Since I started going to Newton, my mother takes a week or so before school to drill me about what I need to do. How I should shake my teachers' hand and look them in the eye ... how to make sure that I answer at least one question on the first day of class and elaborate on what I know. Like if my teacher is talking about British history, I can raise my hand and tell her what I know about Henry VII and Queen Elizabeth II, and also add what I have learned about black people in British history ... I also know how to answer them all the time with 'Yes, Miss', 'No, Sir'. You can't just say yes or no ... That's how you get ahead ... My time at Newton is proof that this works ...

Akilah's commentary underscore efforts of the black middle classes to assert their racial identity while using cultural capital – to infuse black history and style with traditional embodied expression of cultural capital in pursuit of recognition, respect and upward social mobility. Traditional handshakes, well-timed eye contact, and knowledge of 15th century British history may register as conventional illustrations of cultural capital. However, the intentional integration of black history marks an attempt by black middle class pupils to de-code and re-code dominant cultural capital to better reflect their racial background as class subjects (Rollock et al., 2015).

Akilah's remarks on the cultural capital sets she used to offset potential marginalisation in the classroom are not at all unusual among the black Caribbean middle classes in this study. In fact, while their approaches differed, they all subscribed to a complex class curriculum, the components of which included planning (with parents), practising (at home and/or in supplementary school), and performing (at Newton Secondary) a set of styles that reflected pupils' racial and class backgrounds and ultimately enhanced their relationships with teachers. Another example of the thorough planning and near-ritualistic rehearsing of class codes comes from an interview with Devon, a 16-year-old Year 11 student-athlete. He reports:

I go to three schools. Newton is one, obviously yeah. CMCC [supplementary school] is one, and my home is another. My mother is active in all of them. Every day when I come home after CMCC, it's like going to school again. She asks about all my classes and my interactions. She's

like, 'What did you say to that?', 'What did you do when your teacher said that?', 'Did you talk to Miss Oliver after you got a C on your last test?'. She tries to correct me on everything she thinks I did wrong. My other [supplementary school] teacher does the same thing. After doing that every night during the school year since I started Newton 4 or 5 years ago, I know not to be too loud; not to show anger; not to argue with my teachers, especially not white teachers ... to build relationships with them, to talk to them one-on-one, to learn their culture and to share mine ... I don't know why they don't just teach this on day one ... these are the skills you need for life, for uni[versity] and for jobs ...

Devon's and Akilah's responses point out that in racialised contexts, the modification of youth styles based on parent-to-pupil pedagogy is useful and urgent for the black Caribbean subjects (Mirza and Reay, 2005). In consultation with their parents, Devon and Akilah acquired the dominant habits of speech, senses of self, and relational practices of engagement in spaces where authority is often over-determined by the white middle classes (Reay, 2007). A reading of 'race' in Bourdieu's work confirms that the (post)colonial history and 'post-racial' reality of class relations is one of white interest domination. The extension of such relations can produce tensions in the experiences of the ethnic minority middle classes – a conflict that invites some ethnic minorities to modify their expressions and endure symbolic violence or risk socio-political exclusion and suffer structural violence (Rollock et al., 2015).

Despite the degrees of symbolic violence that expressions of black cultural capital can engender in contexts ordered by whiteness (Schubert, 2008), respondents like Devon and Akilah learn in multiple social fields (home, supplementary school and secondary school) how to effectively shape their educational and economic futures through the enactment of embodied practices that signal simultaneously their black Caribbean heritage and their middle class status. In this regard, black cultural capital is contextually acquired knowledge, tastes and styles that index expansive possibilities attached to being middle class and the looming liabilities of being racialised (as black Caribbean) in British society where middle class identity is often synonymous with whiteness (Reay et al., 2007; Rollock et al., 2011).

The study's findings also reveal that middle class black Caribbean pupils strategically shared interactional codes, aesthetic values and speech styles with their teachers to forge ties that would influence positive teacher–student relations and support their academic advancement (Lacy, 2007). Respondents showcase an awareness of the dominant symbolic economy that governs their school and a suspicious willingness to partake in the conversion and exchange of its currency. The following extract from Joseph, a Year 11 pupil, illustrates the strategic thinking some black Caribbean middle class participants deploy in pursuit of academic success and teacher recognition:

I realise, yeah, that teachers are gatekeepers to success ... they can really mess things up for you ... but they can help me get ahead ... so I talk to my teachers after class. I try to get to know them. I make sure I am on time, and I try to be professional like my Mum and Dad. I know they [the teachers] will understand and respect that. I share what I know about being Caribbean and answer questions they have about my culture, my food, the way we talk, everything ... I'm learning, yeah, that a good reputation with a couple of these teachers will spread to the rest ... so, I try to invest in good relationships with teachers and be myself. That's how I can get some

power and respect from them ... With all the rubbish me and my mates have to deal with from the FEDs [police], and in school, this is an easy burden to deal with ...

Students like Joseph have developed a sharp power analysis of the social actors in their schools. Joseph draws on habits of professionalism, punctuality and partnership as a shared set of comprehensible codes that teachers appreciate. He sees his teachers as potential advocates or adversaries, and commits cultural and social resources to shape relationships with teachers, so that they can help secure advantages. This form of calculated collaboration with teachers to offset racial stigmatisation in the school and criminal justice systems based on one's social class assets is arguably an expression of black cultural capital.

Another Year 11 student, Kayla, confirmed Joseph's and Akilah's claims, pointing out that in some instances she has just as much clarity on what she should not do as she does on what it actually takes to secure recognition from, and relationships with, school authorities. She explains:

Over time, I learned not to shout, not to roll my eyes, not to be late, not to avoid my teachers, not to talk back and not to develop a bad relationship ... I try to see my teachers as real people ... It's like school is a big game, and they are the referees. I get my card from them by getting to know them, getting advice from students in sixth form about how to deal with my teachers during GCSEs ... you have to learn from people ahead of you so that you can be successful not just in school, but in life as well ... It works ... now a lot of teachers are more interested in me ... they see my success as part of their success ...

The aforementioned remarks from black Caribbean middle class pupils like Kayla indicate that key benefits of black cultural capital include *the awareness* of how informal relational skills influence teachers' perspectives of black pupils, *the ability* to marshal social networks and economic resources to garner recognition from teachers, and *the agentic practices* of black middle class students to deploy their class advantages based on parental instructions amidst racial inequalities.

### *The Backlash to Black Cultural Capital*

There are consequences to racialised class distinctions (Bourdieu, 1996). In addition to the rewards associated with black cultural capital, participants suggest that there are unintended penalties for using black cultural capital in schools, chief among which is the marginalisation of the black working classes by school officials based on comparisons among black students. In classroom settings, the comparisons teachers make among black students de-centre 'race' and 'racism' as an explanatory variable for social outcomes among black ethnics; at the same time, teachers' ethno-racial comparisons often ignore the variation in class (dis)advantages that contribute to the contrasting outcomes among black pupils. Such erasures can fuel class conflict and/or intra-racial tensions. However, the middle class black Caribbean pupils in this study (Rollock et al., 2015) question the class conditions that undermine their black working class peers. Within this case study, black middle class pupils express a critical suspicion of the dominant racialised class codes in society, not necessarily because of a staunch commitment to racial

equality irrespective of class standing, but due mainly to their own mixed class heritage and the diversity of their family's social class composition (Moore, 2008).

The importance of cross-class advocacy among black ethnics at Newton was highlighted during focus group interviews with black middle class participants and reiterated throughout one-on-one interviews. The following extract offers insights into some of the participants' critical awareness of the backlash to black cultural capital and the limits they pose to black working class pupils in school and society:

Kayla: I'm glad I know what I should not do and what I should do to get support from my teachers ... I can have teachers listen to me, to me [repeated emphasis], and respect me inside the classroom ...

Interviewer: What do you mean by having your teachers listen to you?

Kayla: Well, um, I mean, I can be proper like they want me to be and still show what I know about being black, bring books about the Caribbean, new books about black British history that my mum loves to read, stories by Zadie Smith ... my teachers don't expect that. So when they see that, they pay attention and show respect.

Joseph: But that's a problem.

Kayla: I know.

Luke: Yeah.

Kayla: 'Cause what if you don't have those books, yeah? What if you don't have pounds like that to keep books or have a library? Then what? You don't have a defence mechanism against the stereotypes that teachers have. That's what happens to my friends who don't have it like that ...

Joseph: Yeah, I'm glad you said that. I mean, my Mum worked hard to be a nurse and my Dad has classical training, so of course, Mr Brown [the music teacher] will give me nuff respect when I can read music, play the guitar and know Thelonious Monk ... I just get upset when he acts like he wants to take the mic of my mates because they can't read music or never heard of Bach. I'm like, that's not on ... Not because they don't have money and parents with that kind of knowledge don't mean you can compare them to me and treat them that way.

Michelle: Zeen. True tings dat.

Joseph: My family has plenty of people who don't have money, diplomas and t[h]ings. My Mum and Dad are constantly giving money to my aunts, uncles, grandparents and bear [lots of] people in my family who don't have it like that. What if my Dad didn't do well and he didn't teach me to read music notes? Mr Brown would treat me just like the rest of black yutes dem.

Michelle: The same thing happens in my family. When I see my teachers trying all of that stuff, it makes me want to say things, but I know how to say it so that they don't think I'm a rebel. They can't come for me too tough when I'm polite. But I'm like, yo, those students could be anyone in my family ...

Luke: Same thing for me. Mr Brown is like Ms Colwell, my English teacher. She judges us by the books we read ... But, all these teachers need to change. Our school needs to change. The schools in this whole borough need to change. Why should we look down on people because of what they don't have? That's discrimination ...

Although Kayla and her Year 11 colleagues are reflexively aware of the advantages of black cultural capital (e.g. reading classical/jazz music scores by black composers) and the benefits it affords (e.g. garnering respect from teachers), they recognise that their black working class peers negotiate class domination and racial subordination not only at Newton, but throughout schools in inner cities, where racialised narratives of working class pupil and parental deficiencies further limit students' success (Ingram, 2011; Vincent et al., 2012). Additionally, they consistently draw on an awareness of their family's class diversity to justify their efforts to avoid intra-racial class conflict or classification struggle (Kennelly and Dillabough, 2008). Bourdieu (1996) suggests that those marginalised in the state, engage in struggles to classify themselves against those deemed less worthy in order to secure recognition. The black Caribbean middle class pupils in this study acknowledge and navigate racialised class hierarchies in schools but appear to resist classificatory pressures, and the 'race fractions' they create, as a result of the social class variations in their extended families (Desmond and Emirbayer, 2009). In other words, they engage in inclusionary boundary work (Lacy, 2007) – an egalitarian approach that calls into question the legitimacy of unequal class politics and the racialisation of the social order (Gillborn, 2005; Stahl, 2015).

The middle class black Caribbean participants' descriptions of their immediate and extended families indicate that they represent a particular *kind* of black middle class people: the multi-class-minded middle class. Challenging reductionist programmes that homogenise the identities of 'the' black middle class, Moore (2008) highlights two competing forms of black middle class identity: the multi-class minded and the middle class minded. The participants associated with the latter are often the ones most willing to accept white middle class ideology and differentiate themselves from the black working classes. However, those linked to the former acknowledge 'the class differences between them and less privileged blacks' (Moore, 2008: 505) and more readily identify with disadvantaged blacks. Most parents of black middle class participants in this study are of first-generation middle class heritage ( $N = 23$ ), but all identified as having extended families with a multi-class composition (albeit largely working class). The class heritage of the pupils and their parents arguably points to the fragility of their class status, particularly in a context of austerity measures in Britain (Vincent et al., 2012). Perhaps the recent global financial crisis which occurred during the data collection process heightened class anxieties among black middle class participants and forced them all, irrespective of their class generational background, to consider the precariousness of their 'middle classness' and forge symbolic, psychic and familial ties with black ethnics experiencing resource constraints (Rollock et al., 2015). In sum, participants suggest that despite the modest class advantage afforded them as part of the middle classes, their multi-class heritage and black identities make them acutely aware of racist classism in schools.

## Conclusion

In Britain and elsewhere, 'race' matters in the negotiation and (re)production of cultural capital (Lacy, 2007; Rollock et al., 2015). This article calls attention to the ways in which black Caribbean middle class pupils in an inner-city school appropriate cultural capital to cultivate relationships and garner recognition from school authorities to better reflect their racial identities. Through presenting a genealogy of 'race' and ethnicity in Bourdieu's scholarship, I highlighted the significance of 'caste' as a preferred concept in his early work in Algeria, and later 'race' in his co-authored critique of imperialist logic in assessments of racism in Brazil. I trace this important – though thin – thread in Bourdieu's work to assert that the critical explication of 'race' and racism through a Bourdieusian framework is not a theoretical stretch or an analytical imposition. Reading 'race' in Bourdieu corpus is an intrinsic, but much-ignored, feature of Bourdieu's early and later scholarship (Go, 2013).

'Race' is not only important in Bourdieu's oeuvre; it matters in the operationalisation and accumulation of cultural capital as well. The notion of black cultural capital challenges the implicit assumption of cultural capital as synonymous with whiteness. I highlight two distinct but related iterations of black cultural capital – framed differently in the US and UK. The original formulation by Carter (2003) advocates for the appreciation of non-dominant stocks capital among low-income African American young people. I elaborate on the more recent iteration by Rollock et al. (2015) by considering the value of black cultural and symbolic assets legitimated among the middle classes and recognised as black – including the consumption of high-quality black British literature, the development of black classical and jazz music literacy, and the incorporation of Caribbean and African histories in classroom contexts. Both interpretations of black cultural capital point to the complex ways in which blackness is understood and experienced jointly with social class across multiple fields of power.

The data reveal that there are benefits to the use of black cultural capital in schools. The participants strategically deploy their funds of knowledge on black history and acquired relational skills to develop a good rapport with teachers and challenge the low expectations teachers have of black pupils. The primary benefit of such desired positive engagement with teachers is the improved social standing pupils experience among school authorities. Although these benefits are arguably marginal, the reach of teachers' power on subject choice and university chances should not be underestimated. These participants are aware that such immaterial assets can influence the acquisition of economic and social resources in their post-secondary futures. An appreciation for black cultural capital is transmitted to pupils from their parents through consistent training on how to express black taste and style in the classroom to alter power dynamics. Across home and school contexts, middle class black Caribbean pupils subscribe to a class curriculum modified to express their racial identity.

But at Newton Secondary, black cultural capital is not invoked without consequences. Participants suggest that there is a backlash to the use of black cultural capital based on the comparisons teachers make among black students without giving due weight to black pupils' differing class backgrounds. Although black middle class participants benefit from black cultural capital, they reject the widespread depreciation of the black working



classes. There is some evidence that these participants are multi-class minded, for though they are middle class, they maintain strong cross-class connections to economically disadvantaged and working class black individuals through family networks. They are sensitive to the ways in which racism and classism co-mingle to shape the educational experiences of ethnic minorities.

Discussions of 'race' and ethnicity in Bourdieu's work need not be as rare as they are. Although Bourdieu's attention to 'race' and ethnicity has not been as consistent as his theorisations of social class in the trajectory of his scholarship since *The Algerians* (1962), he has nevertheless provided some insights into the discriminatory processes of racialisation that are applicable to contemporary studies of class. While acknowledging the limits of Bourdieu's reading of 'race', this article challenges interpretations of Bourdieu's body of work as void of 'race' analyses and highlights black Caribbean middle class pupils as strategic, capital-carrying subjects in schools (Rollock et al., 2015). Furthermore, the study shows that some black middle class pupils are not only invested in playing the game, but are also committed to challenging the terms of the game that contribute to the demotion of the working classes.

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