

Foreword

“Young, Gifted, and Black: Keeping Your Soul Intact” by Alicia L. Moore and La Vonne I. Neal

What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? Or fester like a sore - And then run? Does it stink like rotten meat? Or crust and sugar over - like a syrupy sweet? Maybe it just sags like a heavy load. Or does it explode?”¹ - Langston Hughes

According to the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC), this is the federal definition of gifted students originally reported in the 1972 Marland Report to Congress:

“Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities.

Note: States and districts are not required to use the federal definition, although many states base their definitions on the federal definition.”²

In 1970, at the height of the Black Power movement, singer-songwriter Nina Simone released a song that would not only become a top 10 R&B hit, but also would join the ranks as a Civil Rights anthem. In partnership with lyricist Weldon Irvine, Simone wrote this song in memory of her friend Lorraine Hansberry, author of *A Raisin in the Sun*, and titled the song “To Be Young, Gifted and Black” after Hansberry’s unfinished play of the same name. The song preceded the 1972 federal definition of gifted students, but the lyrics inspired people to include African Americans in the discourse about students who are gifted and talented.

*“To be young, gifted and black,
Oh what a lovely precious dream
To be young, gifted and black,
Open your heart to what I mean.”³*

In this anthem, Simone alludes to her personal struggles with the U.S. educational system. For example, during her final year in high school, she studied at Juilliard, a school for the arts in New York,

but in 1951 she was not admitted to the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. Simone recalls this affront when she sings,

*“Young, gifted and black
How I long to know the truth
There are times when I look back
And I am haunted by my youth”⁴*

Just as Simone was not accepted for study at the Curtis Institute of Music in 1951, today many young African American students are still being denied access to programs that could nurture and promote their own unique gifts and talents. According to Fred A. Bonner, II, and Michael Jennings in their article, “Never Too Young to Lead: Gifted African American Males in Elementary School,” not only do young African American students have disproportionately high representations in special education programs, but “despite the efforts at broadening the definition to include multifaceted categories and criteria in the identification of giftedness, we continue to see widespread underrepresentation of African American students in gifted and talented programs.”⁵ Nina Simone understood this dichotomy when she sang,

*“You are young, gifted and black
We must begin to tell our young
There’s a world waiting for you
Yours is the quest that’s just begun.
When you feel really low
Yeah, there’s a great truth you should know
When you’re young gifted and black
Your soul’s intact”⁶*



Although there is increased focus on reducing the achievement gap between children of color and their peers who are white, many schools continue to deny African American students access to the very tools that could close this gap by denying them access to the gifted and talented programs. Moreover, African American students who do enter gifted and talented programs are more likely to drop out of these programs due to lack of mentorship and a feeling of isolation when they look for role models. In this issue, Barbara J. Frye and Helen A. Vogt assert that without culturally responsive curricula in teacher preparation programs, perhaps students' bodies are being separated from their souls.

Also, Conra D. Gist discusses the legacy of young, gifted, and black educators as a way to illuminate the history of African American role models. The African American community has a long history of promoting the importance of education to young people—a history that is well documented in slave communities even in colonial America. And today's pre-service teachers should study and understand this rich legacy of education if they are to understand their own key role in today's educational system. As suggested by Theresa Newsom, the importance of leadership in gifted and talented programs is one area that is often neglected, but should be emphasized as a major component where a culturally responsive curriculum can indeed make a difference.

In 1978, Nina Simone became so disillusioned with racism in America that she moved to Europe and America lost one of its most celebrated talents. But in the intervening years, Simone, ever confident in her own gifts, continued to inspire such great talents as Aretha Franklin, India.Arie, and Norah Jones, just to name a few. In 2003, two days before her death, Simone received news that the Curtis Institute of Music, which had previously denied her admission, had awarded her an honorary diploma, finally recognizing the talents and gifts that Simone had always possessed.⁷ “What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun . . . or does it explode?”⁸

Notes

1. Langston Hughes, *An African Treasury: Articles, Essays, Stories, and Poems by Black Africans* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1960).
2. Federal definition of G & T (still comes from the Marland Report of 1972), <http://www.nagc.org/index2.aspx?id=548>
3. Nina Simone, “To Be Young, Gifted and Black,” *The Best of Nina Simone*. New York: RCA, 1989.
4. Ibid.
5. Fred Bonner II and Michael Jennings, “Never Too Young to Lead: Gifted African American Males in Elementary School,” *Gifted Child Today* 30, no. 2 (Spring 2007).
6. Nina Simone, “To Be Young, Gifted and Black.”
7. Evince Unlimited, *Nina Simone the High Priestess of Soul*, <http://www.ninasimone.com> (accessed February 5, 2010).
8. Langston Hughes, *An African Treasury*.

Teacher Resources:

• Dept. of Education, Current State of Gifted Education (1993) with relevant info on how states determine G & T
<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/DevTalent/part2.html>

• Report on High-Achieving Students in the Era of No Child Left Behind

http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2008/0618_nclb_loveless.aspx

http://www.edexcellence.net/doc/20080618_high_achievers.pdf

• Federal Definition of G & T (the Marland Report of 1972)
<http://www.nagc.org/index2.aspx?id=548>

• History of Gifted & Talented programs in the U.S.
<http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=607>

• Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences:
<http://www.infed.org/thinkers/gardner.htm>

• The biography of Nina Simone:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nina_Simone
<http://www.ninasimone.com>



Alicia L. Moore is an Associate Professor of Education at Southwestern University, Georgetown, Texas.

Email:moorea@southwestern.edu



La Vonne I. Neal is Dean of the College of Education and a Professor of Special Education at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs.

Email:lneal@uccs.edu