

# “Willful Defiance”

By Patrice Hill & Denisha “Coco” Bland

“Willful Defiance” is a spoken-word piece produced in association with the book *Willful Defiance: The Movement to Dismantle the School-to-Prison Pipeline*, authored by Mark Warren.



[Click to watch “Willful Defiance”](#)

They don't care if our babies thrive at school  
Long as they get by at school  
Get by institutionalized racism and intergenerational oppressions systems  
That keep prison pipelines thriving  
Disguised as willful defiance  
I'm trying  
To figure out why urban schools have the highest rates of incarceration  
Instead of culturally relevant curriculum that should be motivation leading  
to liberation

Suspensions from school feel like eternity  
Strategically guide the black and brown kids out  
When we truly come to school with the intention to get free  
Stifle academic and social/emotional education  
I'm just saying  
Could this be racially motivated?

Outcomes means primarily black and brown youth become  
academically stagnated

Leading to suspensions, expulsions, less school participation  
Stereotypes perpetuated

Is your school pedagogy student discipline or human elevation?

Discipline data from the Department of Education  
Found that Black girls are over five times more likely than white girls to be  
suspended at least once from school

This data infuriating

When Black girls are seven times more likely to receive multiple  
out-of-school suspensions

Where is the healing, motivation and rebuilding?

How do we stand in our confidence after is it disciplined away  
How do I come to school ready to learn when you are trying to strip my  
intelligence and make it seem like I am insane?

Black girls three times more likely to receive referrals to law enforcement when  
white girls are getting away with behaving the same way.

And we already know what they are doing to Black and Brown boys it's insane  
Just check the data it's been staying the same  
I mean steady increasing it's definitely a shame  
Do we want to teach Black boys or do we want to lead them away  
To trajectories that don't lead to trade school or higher education degrees  
Schools act like they are paid to lead them to the police  
When it's supposed to be a safe haven to keep the youth off the streets  
Expand opportunities increase the chances to succeed  
Shouldn't school be focused on how to keep young people engaged and excited  
to be in their seats?

Stop mistaking our pride for reasons to collide us with suspensions, infractions  
eventually leading to police

We are attempting to dismantle the school to prison pipeline

Restorative practices instead of going to court to testify  
Why my child deserves to be at school  
Why does it seem like only the students of color are always breaking the  
school rules

Is it willful defiance or a term disguised as a way to label black and brown kids?  
That engage in school determined behavior infractions  
Exile them  
Profile them  
Initiate wrap sheets cause they speak in a way you may not understand  
Demenors may not be what you deem appropriate but school learning should  
be cultural so teachers can comprehend

Who their students are and the environment they are living in  
What students have to go through when they go home and live through before  
they can make it back to school again.  
Have you taken out the time to comprehend  
The life experiences of the children you are teaching and how your experience  
greatly differs from them.  
We have to remember school can empower or be a major hindrance  
Is your school pushing towards prison or the most beautiful existence

This difference is we fighting for educational justice  
Trust us  
We won't stop until we get our babies free  
Educational liberation means we have to fight for what we believe  
You can't suspend the truth out of our youth and you can't expel a generation  
that's meant to prevail  
We demand an education where we can be more than our ancestors  
wildest dreams  
We want to go to school and truly be free

### **Can somebody explain to me?**

Why!  
we try to go to school  
As soon as we enter the class  
the teacher says, "Bye-bye, we're not getting paid enough, why should I  
Care for kids who don't care for self?  
That's just one less person of color  
We have to worry about getting wealth."

### **Can somebody explain to me?**

Why! Our young sista's being suspended disproportionately?  
Hands bounds with zip ties for throwing a tantrum,  
Kicked out of zoom for sending messages.  
Pipe down black girl; you're too domineering!  
Push out; harshly disciplined; over criminalized.  
Schools not meant for a black girl to shine.

**Can somebody explain to me?**

Why! all my beautiful Black and brown faces,  
 Sitting in the courtrooms over classrooms.  
 Juvenile offenders, minors, underage,  
 Facing life rather than graduating.  
 Something is wrong with this country's education?

We're losing our babies,  
 Perpetuating racism in a system  
 That is supposed to be set up for us to win.

If parents don't send their kids to school,  
 They criminalize them.  
 It's clear to me  
 Education is not for liberation;  
 It's for disciplining

**Can somebody explain to me?**

Why!

Officer on campus arresting teens,  
 Place the minors in custody,  
 Body slamming youth to prove inferiority.  
 It's a shame we live in a nation,  
 That doesn't invest in education.

**Can somebody explain to me,  
 WHY?**

Being black in school is a crime.  
 My skin ain't willful defiance,  
 It's just a dirty trap used,  
 To keep us stuck in the School-to-prison pipeline.

---

*Patrice Hill is director of Sacramento Area Youth Speaks. She is a community based educator and activist scholar and serves as a steering committee member of the People's Think Tank for Educational Justice.*

*Denisha (Coco) Bland is associate director of Sacramento Area Youth Speaks. She is a community based educator and activist scholar and serves as a steering committee member of the People's Think Tank for Educational Justice.*