

Mind/Mine the Gap

Black Students, Gap Year of Discernment and a Global Mindset



A WHITE PAPER

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Mind/Mine the Gap¹: A Year of Black Discernment

THE PROBLEM

“The future of underrepresented students in higher education hangs in the balance” (Parents, 2023)

The Summer 2023 Supreme Court ruling essentially ending Affirmative Action in some college admissions has been met with an avalanche of litigated vitriol and negative public discourse around anything that seeks to prioritize the diversity of thought, person, and perspective in institutions of education, human services, and business.

In my blog, [The Color of Language](#), I discuss this from a world language classroom perspective, but that jumping-off point ripples out to other aspects necessary to create global citizens.

Specifically, in July 2023, I explain we must continue to highlight the diversity of our students and the populations we are teaching them about despite the outside factors that may be doing their darndest to prevent it. Which leads me to my all-time favorite quote from this dissent:

"With let-them-eat-cake obliviousness, today, the majority pulls the ripcord and announces 'colorblindness for all' by legal fiat. But deeming race irrelevant in law does not make it so in life." (Jackson, 2023, p. 25)

The surge of multinational corporations such as Microsoft and international media outlets such as CNN dismantling, dissolving, and extinguishing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access programs and units and the emergence of the 900+ page conservative manifesto, Project 2025, introduces an intellectual threat to Black excellence, Black curiosity and Black achievement being situated on a playing field that allows for competitive yet equitable access.

This has added yet one more barrier to the entry of Black students and youth to even the basement of global citizenry. With all of the requirements

¹ The author chose this title from her travels to London, but learned in research that Judith Cline (2013) has a Masters' Thesis with a similar title. The author acknowledges this similarity.

needed to be an impactful global citizen, the limits and obstacles being placed on Black youth in particular add unnecessary and undue stress on academic achievement for Black students.

Becoming a global citizen involves developing a broad set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that enable individuals to engage effectively with the global community. Specifically, we want our children to graduate with:

- An ability to communicate effectively across cultural and linguistic boundaries.
- Proficiency in at least one international language.
- Critical thinking skills to assess complex global issues and evaluate diverse perspectives.
- The ability to contribute to solving global challenges through innovative and sustainable solutions
- The skills to work collaboratively with people from diverse backgrounds and perspectives.
- The flexibility and adaptability to navigate different cultural, social, and professional contexts.
- A proficiency in using digital tools for communication, research, and collaboration.
- An ability to critically evaluate and analyze information from various media sources.

Acquiring these skills in k-12 can impose immense pressure in classrooms. Making sure students have the language courses, world history, and literature classes, plus seeking international and service experiences can be daunting for both parents and students. As parents, we understand this is a temporary sacrifice and momentary intensity, but there are other factors we do not always consider, especially for the Black student. As Black parents, we have embodied the “200%” mantra so intensely that we understand this as necessary to compete with the privilege of mediocrity ascribed by cultures in power in the United States -- this even prior to the events of 2023. By senior year, many students are running on academic fumes but still have a desire to make their mark and stake their space in this world.

Some individuals may feel the need for a break from the academic environment to prevent burnout. A gap year allows them to recharge, gain

new perspectives, and return to their studies with renewed motivation and focus.

Unfortunately, there's a stigma surrounding taking time off after high school to travel. Too many people believe that not heading directly to a university means that a young person is destined to never live up to what they believe is their full potential and return to school.

However according to Gap Year Association (yup it's a frfr organization) data, 90% of students who take time off after high school enroll in a four-year institution within one year of completing their gap year break.

"Studies have shown that taking a gap year not only are tied to increases in college GPAs, but more significantly is tied to improved job satisfaction," they note. "In short, taking the time to figure out what success looks like is a surefire way to be directed in achieving it."

Addressing the underrepresentation of Black students in gap year and study abroad programs involves dismantling systemic barriers, providing financial support, fostering community partnerships, ensuring representation, offering mentorship, and maintaining cultural sensitivity throughout the process. It requires a commitment to inclusivity, accessibility, and equity in educational opportunities.

It requires we take a stance in direct opposition to those who are against the policies, practices, and support that elevate Black students. But why is a Gap Year one of those viable solutions?

THE GAP YEAR

The gap year is not a new thing. In fact, it is CENTURIES old. According to Cline (2013), "the gap year as it is known today dates back to the 17th century, in what used to be known as The Grand Tour." (p. 7) She further explains, "the start of this trend began with wealthy families utilizing gap years due to their capacity to fund extensive travel and cultural experiences." (p. 7) Yet, even as we recognize the historical roots of this practice, we must also consider how today's students, particularly Black students, navigate the intense demands of modern education.

It seems all well and good when we enroll our children in dozens of extracurricular activities, advanced placement, and honors classes because we are clear in the long run, these experiences will be a benefit later. But we miss a critical component that also comes with this - **burnout**. Burnout from the competitive pressure of high school and a desire “to find out more about themselves,” are the top two reasons students take gap years, according to a survey of 280 people who did so by Karl Haigler and Rae Nelson of Advance, N.C., co-authors of a forthcoming guidebook on the topic.

About 12% of 1,100 high school students surveyed said they want to take a gap year (as opposed to the 3% of first-year college students who typically take a gap year). The after-effects of COVID-19 have ushered in a new era of education that has many colleges and families evaluating the traditional academic path. Research on gap years in the United States has been a growing area of interest, reflecting a shift in how students approach their educational and personal development journeys.

In the United Kingdom and the United States, students who had taken a Gap Year were more likely to graduate with higher grade point averages than observationally identical individuals who went straight to college, and this effect was seen even for gap year students with lower academic achievement in high school (Crawford & Cribb 2012; Clagett, 2013).

Some individuals use a gap year to acquire new academic qualifications, skills, or certifications. This can enhance their competitiveness in the job market or prepare them for advanced studies.

But, much like with statistics surrounding study abroad, gap year students are typically disproportionately, white, female, and from middle or upper-middle socioeconomic households.

“AIN’T NO TIME FOR THAT:” THE BLACK EXPERIENCE WITH THE GAP YEAR OPTION

In the Black community, the additional stigmas and lenses of systemic racism and oppression make the option of a gap year impossible. For many students of color, a college education can feel like an obligation to ensure access to networking opportunities, stability, and security for the future.

But here's what it is also true:

**ONLY 25% OF BLACK STUDENTS ENTER COLLEGE AND ALSO GRADUATE
NATIONWIDE**

In other words, of all the Black students who apply, get accepted, and enroll in college only 25% complete their degrees. Yes, chances are increased for HBCUs, but the overall national percentage stays consistent (shout out to HBCUs!)

Institutions do not provide necessary and substantive academic AND social support to ensure the success of all their students regardless of background and experiences. This can make the college experience disheartening. HBCUs are poised for Black support in that those characteristics are embedded in curricular design and thus have a low rate of students who opt for gap years. For example, Howard University in Washington, DC, has less than 1% of students who request deferred enrollment.

But we know not every Black student will enroll in an HBCU and quite frankly, not every student wants to attend college. How do we continue to perpetuate excellence with Black youth with this understanding and not despite it?

**WHAT IF YOU COULD FEEL ASSURED ABOUT YOUR CHILD BEING READY FOR
THE WORLD EVEN IF THEY CHOOSE NOT TO GO TO COLLEGE RIGHT NOW?**

**BILINGUAL BROWN BABIES GAP YEAR PROGRAM:
THE YEAR OF BLACK DISCERNMENT**

At Bilingual Brown Babies, we believe that allowing Black youth an opportunity to focus squarely on their racial positioning in this world will provide them with greater success in both college and career. We firmly stand on the principle that EVERY Black child is entitled to exposure to different cultures and environments to foster a global perspective. Individuals gain a deeper understanding of global issues, cultural diversity, and the interconnectedness of the world.

Despite being a break from formal education, a gap year can still support your academic, professional, and personal development. A gap year can certainly be a transformative experience, but it requires thoughtful planning and

intentionality. It should not be seen as a break from responsibilities but as an opportunity to gain valuable experiences and personal growth before moving forward with your educational or career path.

A well-structured gap year with clear goals and objectives can avoid many of these potential drawbacks and make the experience more enriching and valuable in the long run.

Asks and answers the questions:

- Who am I?
- What is this world?
- Who do I want to be in this world?

Our Objectives with the Year of Back Discernment

By the end of our gap year program students and graduates will:

- Create a network of like-minded students of color who are seeking options outside of the collegiate checkbox or the 17-year non-stop education plan.
- Enhance employability and provide a competitive edge in the job market.
- Identify and articulate their interests, passions, and values outside of the structured academic or work environment.
- Develop resilience and problem-solving skills that contribute to greater self-assurance.
- Experience their position in this world through first-hand global experiences beyond being a tourist.

Our Program centers on Black bilingualism by offering support in Spanish and French that will encourage not only bilingual employment opportunities but also offer research-based assessments for realistic placement in language courses should they choose to pursue further studies.

In addition to providing a language focus (Spanish or French), this program also offers a language teaching training series that would allow your student to apply for language-based summer jobs at schools, camps, and after-school programs!

This program is open to graduating high school seniors and 1st-year college students seeking a clear plan for their future success. This program offers a

tract for those who ultimately want to attend college and a tract for those who wish to progress into the workforce.

College Tract Units

- Black Like Me
- Great (Black) Books
- College Major Exploration
- City as Text ©
- Theory-based Multimedia Experiential Portfolio

Ready-to-Work Tract Modules

- Black Like Me
- Cultural Identity & Place
- City as Text ©
- Service Unit
- Entrepreneurial Project with PitchFest Competition

Overcoming the challenges and uncertainties of a gap year prepares individuals for handling ambiguity and change in their future academic or professional pursuits. It builds resilience and adaptability.

After a gap year, individuals may return to formal education or work with renewed motivation and focus. The experiences gained during the gap year can fuel a greater sense of purpose and direction.

Taking a break allows individuals to step back and reflect on their life choices. This reflection can lead to more informed and intentional decision-making about academic and career paths.

Addressing the underrepresentation of Black students in gap year and study abroad programs requires a multifaceted approach that considers various factors contributing to this disparity.

A multitude of interconnected factors shape the decision-making process for Black students regarding gap years. Addressing this disparity requires addressing systemic barriers, providing financial support, increasing awareness, and fostering an environment that recognizes and values diverse educational pathways.

It's crucial to acknowledge the systemic barriers that hinder access to such opportunities for Black students. This includes financial constraints, lack of information, and limited representation in promotional materials. Initiatives should be developed to increase awareness about the benefits of gap years

and study abroad among Black communities, addressing the information gap. Bilingual Brown Babies seeks to fill that void.

“But what are they gonna do though?”: Sample Itinerary

It's important to note that the benefits of a gap year can vary based on individual circumstances and how the time is utilized. The key is to plan the gap year purposefully, aligning activities with personal and professional goals.

Year-at-a-Glance

	Ghana (10 Days)	Guatemala/ Costa Rica* (10 Days)	Spain* (10 Days)	College/ Career (16 weeks)	Cultural Identity (16 weeks)
College Tract Focus	Black Like Me	City as Text ©	Great (Black) Books	College Major Exploration	Portfolio Exhibition
Career Tract Focus	Black Like Me	City as Text ©	Cultural Identity	Service Unit	PitchFest Competition

**International travel is contingent upon safety and security as deemed by the US Department of State.*

Taking time off allows you to refine your goals for college, career, and life, so you can make more informed decisions when the time comes. A structured gap year that combines language and travel experiences with targeted training modules offers Black students a unique opportunity to expand their horizons, both personally and professionally.

This period of intentional growth can foster essential skills like cultural competence, adaptability, and global awareness, which are increasingly vital in our interconnected world. By stepping outside their familiar environments, students can gain new perspectives, build confidence, and cultivate a sense of agency that will serve them throughout their lives.

As future global citizens, they will be better equipped to navigate diverse settings, contribute meaningfully to international communities, and advocate for justice and equity on a broader scale. This transformative experience can lay the foundation for lifelong success, empowering Black students to lead with purpose in an ever-evolving global society.

For more information about this program, or to receive access to the program application, contact this author in the following ways:

[Bilingual Brown Babies on IG](#)
[Bilingual Brown Babies by email](#)

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ARE YOU READY FOR A GAP YEAR? - A Reflective Moment

Cost to participate in Gap Year Programs:

Bilingual Brown Babies: \$9,000

Other Gap Year Options

1. _____: \$ _____
2. _____: \$ _____
3. _____: \$ _____

Are you able to financially commit to any of these options? ____ Yes ____ No

- Will you have any other financial support from your family?
____ Yes ____ No

College Acceptance

Have you already been admitted to college ____ Yes ____ No

- If yes, do you know the school's deferral policy for admissions?

Did you get any scholarships? ____ Yes ____ No

- Will they still be available after your gap year? ____ Yes ____ No

Employment Offer

Have you been offered a position with a company or organization?
____ Yes ____ No

- Are they willing to let you delay your start date to accommodate a gap year? ____ Yes ____ No

Do you have sealed copies of the following:

- Academic transcripts
- Letters of recommendation
- References (for employment or volunteering)

Remember you will need a set for any and all scholarships and opportunities you will be applying for.

Deadlines and Due Dates for Post-Gap Year Planning

Month	Activity	Deadline/ Due Date	Completed?	
			Yes	No
January			Yes	No
February			Yes	No
March			Yes	No
April			Yes	No
May			Yes	No
June			Yes	No
July			Yes	No
August			Yes	No
September			Yes	No
October			Yes	No
November			Yes	No
December			Yes	No