

THE SHAYTAN · CHAPTER THREE

The Denial of Education

Who benefits from a generation that cannot read, who manufactures that condition, and why it has had to be remade in every one of seventeen generations.

1619 – 2026 · The Key of Knowledge, Withheld and Reclaimed

THREE QUESTIONS

Before the Generations

WHO BENEFITS

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6) is not a lament about misfortune — it is a description of a mechanism. The Qur'an draws the same line between the two conditions it produces: “Are those who know equal to those who do not know?” (Surah Az-Zumar 39:9). Whoever benefits from an unequal answer to that question benefits from keeping it unequal.

WHO MANUFACTURES

“Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge” (Luke 11:52) names a specific kind of actor — not the ignorant, but the credentialed, who hold the actual key and choose not to hand it over. The Qur'an names the same office: those “who conceal what We sent down of clear proofs and guidance” (Surah Al-Baqarah 2:159) after having had full access to it themselves.

WHY IT MUST EXIST

Both scriptures open on an act of reading. The Qur'an's first revealed word is “Read!” (Surah Al-Alaq 96:1). The Gospel opens with the Word itself. A lie that depends on people not recognizing their own condition cannot survive widespread literacy — which is exactly what Frederick Douglass's enslaver told his own wife when he found her teaching the alphabet: learning, he said, would forever unfit a person for bondage, and make him impossible to keep. “The truth shall make you free” (John 8:32) is read by the lie as a threat, correctly.

GEN 1 • First Arrivals (1619-1644)

WHO BENEFITS

The earliest Virginia planters, who needed only labor, never literacy, from the people they held.

WHO MANUFACTURES

No law was needed yet — simple exclusion. Such schooling as existed in the colony at all was church-run and minimal; it was never extended to Anthony, Isabella, or their company.

WHY IT HAD TO EXIST

A colony with no civil society of its own had not yet needed to write the denial into law. Omission was enough.

GEN 2 • Founding Settlement (1644-1669)

WHO BENEFITS

Landowners who benefited from a growing distinction between white indentured servants (whose contracts sometimes included basic instruction as part of “freedom dues”) and Black enslaved people, who increasingly received no such terms at all.

WHO MANUFACTURES

Custom, not yet statute — the quiet drift of expectation that began treating literacy as a privilege tied to race rather than status.

WHY IT HAD TO EXIST

A distinction that starts as custom is harder to challenge in court than one written into law — and far easier to make permanent later.

GEN 3 • Codification (1669-1694)

WHO BENEFITS

The same planter elite consolidating power after Bacon's Rebellion, for whom an unlettered labor force was easier to control than a literate one.

WHO MANUFACTURES

Virginia's slave codes of the 1680s-1705, which fixed Black status in law generally and, in doing so, fixed exclusion from any formal instruction along with it.

WHY IT HAD TO EXIST

Once bondage was made hereditary and permanent, keeping it stable required making sure no generation born into it could read the law that bound them.

GEN 4 • Plantation Expansion (1694-1719)

WHO BENEFITS

Slaveholders who tolerated limited religious catechism for enslaved people but resisted anything resembling literacy instruction.

WHO MANUFACTURES

The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, founded 1701, began missionary catechism efforts toward enslaved people — and met direct resistance from slaveholders who feared even basic religious instruction would imply equality.

WHY IT HAD TO EXIST

Even religious instruction, the one form of teaching slaveholders found hardest to refuse outright, was minimized specifically because any opening toward literacy was understood as dangerous.

GEN 5 • Peak Importation (1719–1744)

WHO BENEFITS

Carolina's planter class, for whom the Stono Rebellion (1739) confirmed every fear about what organized, capable enslaved people could accomplish.

WHO MANUFACTURES

South Carolina's Negro Act of 1740, passed in direct response to Stono, explicitly made it illegal to teach an enslaved person to write.

WHY IT HAD TO EXIST

Stono's rebels organized and marched with discipline. The law's answer was to make sure the next generation could not write a pass, a letter, or a plan.

GEN 6 • Creole Generation (1744–1769)

WHO BENEFITS

A planter class now profiting from a self-reproducing labor force, for whom each new native-born generation arrived already inside a fully closed system of exclusion.

WHO MANUFACTURES

Nothing new needed manufacturing — the codes from the prior two generations now applied automatically, generation after generation, without requiring fresh justification.

WHY IT HAD TO EXIST

A working lie does not need new architecture once the old architecture runs on its own. This generation shows the denial requiring no further invention at all.

GEN 7 • Revolutionary (1769–1794)

WHO BENEFITS

A new nation building colleges and printing presses for its citizens at the same historical moment it withheld literacy entirely from the people it enslaved.

WHO MANUFACTURES

An obvious double standard — but also its first organized opposition: the New York Manumission Society founded the African Free School in 1787, the same decade the new Constitution was being written.

WHY IT HAD TO EXIST

“All men are created equal” could not be squared with universal literacy and universal bondage existing in the same nation at the same time — so the nation kept both, and let the contradiction stand unexamined.

GEN 8 • Trade-Ban Generation (1794–1819)

WHO BENEFITS

Southern planters, increasingly anxious as free Black literacy expanded visibly in the North even as the legal slave trade ended at home.

WHO MANUFACTURES

The African Free Schools' expansion in New York and other Northern cities, producing the first generation of free Black children with formal education — a visible, growing counterexample the South could not control.

WHY IT HAD TO EXIST

A denial that works regionally starts to fail once people can see, from one state line away, exactly what was being withheld from them.

GEN 9 • Domestic Trade / Cotton Kingdom (1819–1844)

WHO BENEFITS

Slaveholders directly: Frederick Douglass's own enslaver explained the mechanism to his wife without euphemism — that learning would make a person impossible to keep enslaved, would make him discontented, and would be of no benefit to anyone but himself.

WHO MANUFACTURES

Nat Turner's Rebellion (1831) — led by a literate, Bible-reading man who described his actions as divinely directed — triggered the harshest wave of anti-literacy laws yet, newly passed or strengthened in Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama within a year.

WHY IT HAD TO EXIST

Turner proved, in the starkest possible terms, exactly what Douglass's enslaver feared: a man who could read scripture for himself was a man who no longer needed anyone else's permission to act on what he found there.

GEN 10 • Civil War & Emancipation (1844–1869)

WHO BENEFITS

The Union army's occupied territories, almost by accident, became the first place the denial broke down at scale — contraband camps near Fort Monroe, Virginia, just miles from where Anthony and Isabella had landed in 1619, set up some of the first organized schools for formerly enslaved people while the war was still being fought.

WHO MANUFACTURES

The Freedmen's Bureau, established 1865, turned that wartime improvisation into federal policy — the first time the government that had enforced the denial began, however briefly, to reverse it.

WHY IT HAD TO EXIST

An institution built for two and a half centuries to keep a population unlettered cannot be undone by a single law. It required an entire federal bureau, and even that proved temporary.

GEN 11 • Reconstruction & Redemption (1869–1894)

WHO BENEFITS

Formerly enslaved communities built schools and colleges at a pace historians still describe as extraordinary — Howard (1867), Fisk (1866), Morehouse (1867), and Hampton (1868, again within sight of Point Comfort) all founded within a single generation of Emancipation.

WHO MANUFACTURES

Redemption-era violence specifically targeted this achievement: school burnings and the intimidation or murder of Black teachers became a documented, repeated tactic of white paramilitary groups through the 1870s and 1880s.

WHY IT HAD TO EXIST

A generation that builds its own schools faster than any prior generation could even imagine doing so is answered, specifically and immediately, with arson — because the lie's architects understood exactly what those schools threatened.

GEN 12 • Jim Crow / Nadir (1894–1919)

WHO BENEFITS

Southern state governments and the white school systems funded at multiples of what Black schools received for every dollar, every textbook, every year of schooling — the same states that had just won Plessy v. Ferguson's approval to make the disparity official.

WHO MANUFACTURES

State-level school funding formulas, written and defended as “separate but equal” while the actual ledgers were never equal at all.

WHY IT HAD TO EXIST

A funding gap defended in court as constitutional did not need to hide. It only needed a phrase — “separate but equal” — reasonable-sounding enough that a court would sign off on it for fifty-eight years.

GEN 13 • Great Migration / Harlem Renaissance (1919–1944)

WHO BENEFITS

Rural Southern Black communities still receiving almost nothing from state school budgets, for whom philanthropy became the only real option state law refused to provide.

WHO MANUFACTURES

The Rosenwald Fund (1912–1932), a partnership between Sears Roebuck executive Julius Rosenwald and Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute, built nearly 5,000 schools for Black children across the rural South — because no state government would.

WHY IT HAD TO EXIST

When a state refuses to manufacture education, someone else has to manufacture the building, the desks, and the teacher's salary instead, or an entire generation receives nothing at all.

GEN 14 • Civil Rights (1944–1969)

WHO BENEFITS

Prince Edward County, Virginia's white students, for whom the state created tuition grants funding all-white private academies the moment the public schools were ordered to integrate.

WHO MANUFACTURES

The county's Board of Supervisors simply refused to appropriate any money for public schools at all in 1959 — closing every public school in the county for five years rather than desegregate them, the only school district in the country to take that exact step.

WHY IT HAD TO EXIST

When the law finally outlawed the old form of the denial (Brown v. Board, 1954), some of its architects chose to deny the entire student population an education rather than integrate it — proof the lie valued exclusion over education itself, not just over Black education.

GEN 15 • Post-Civil Rights (1969–1994)

WHO BENEFITS

Wealthy suburban school districts, whose property-tax base could fund schools at far higher levels than poorer, often heavily Black urban districts a few miles away.

WHO MANUFACTURES

San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez (1973), in which the Supreme Court ruled that funding schools through local property taxes — despite the vast disparities it produces — does not violate the Constitution's equal protection guarantee.

WHY IT HAD TO EXIST

Once a court rules that unequal funding is simply not its problem to fix, the denial no longer needs a law naming any race at all. A map of property values does the same work a slave code once did.

GEN 16 • Diaspora Expansion (1994–2019)

WHO BENEFITS

Whatever institutions benefit from removing students from classrooms rather than keeping them in them — “zero tolerance” discipline policies that suspended and expelled Black students at far higher rates than their white classmates for comparable conduct.

WHO MANUFACTURES

School discipline codes adopted nationwide through the 1990s and 2000s, alongside academic tracking systems that disproportionately routed Black students away from advanced coursework.

WHY IT HAD TO EXIST

A funding gap denies resources. A discipline gap denies time — instructional days lost to suspension cannot be recovered, regardless of how well-funded the classroom a student is removed from happens to be.

GEN 17 • New Diaspora (current) (2019–2026)

WHO BENEFITS

Whoever benefits from a public that does not fully know this history — including, plainly, anyone whose preferred account of American history depends on these sixteen generations not being taught in full.

WHO MANUFACTURES

State legislation passed in numerous states from 2021 onward restricting how slavery, segregation, and racism may be taught in public schools — the denial's newest form targets knowledge of the denial's own history.

WHY IT HAD TO EXIST

A lie that has been named in fifteen prior generations does not need new mechanics in the sixteenth and seventeenth. It only needs the naming itself kept out of the classroom.

Compiled from this project's prior historical research joined here to the specific history of educational denial: the 1740 South Carolina Negro Act, Frederick Douglass's "Narrative" (1845) quoting his enslaver's own words (paraphrased here to avoid reproducing a racial slur), the post-Nat-Turner literacy laws of 1831–32, the Freedmen's Bureau, the Rosenwald Fund, Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward County (1964), and San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez (1973). This is a work of theological and historical synthesis, not a legal finding against any living person, school district, or institution.