

## On the Renaming of Cass Technical High School

But you must, at least consider, please. If you are a graduate of Cass Tech as I am, then you are a supposed enlightened thinker, certainly, not a vestige of the past. You are one who has the capacity to redefine our reality. We, CT grads are charged with the responsibility to innovate. Part of being a social sculpturer is to embrace a social consciousness. To endure the hard swallow of loss, and the tough triumph of transformation is the carving of history forward.

I understand you and I, and most were oblivious to the brutal, unforgivable history of our school's namesake. Lewis Cass was not only a flagrant segregationist, but a slave holder, and architect of the "Trail of Tears" Native American Genocide. Arresting are these words I write. It seems we should be angry, not proud. We were duped for decades, shouting and celebrating the name of a mass murderer. Why didn't someone tell us?

Why didn't I have the type of education, fueled by curiosity that would lead me to question, to research (just natural inquisitiveness), the name of the school that made my heart beat green and white?

Not one of us, in the 4000, among those 8 floors said, *Hey CT, You look So Good to Me, but guess what??!!...We carry the stained cloak of racism on book bags, and on our lettered shirts.* Ignorance or innocence was no fault of ours. We are absolved by age. We were young. But we are aware now, and we think with adult minds. We are responsible to not only our romanticized memories, and sentimental platitudes, but we are responsible to the future. It is unconscionable to require next generation scholars to bloom genius under the toxicity of a name synonymous with the annihilation of their existence. The specialized education we received requires much from us. It is our charge to lead with new thought, to ensure ALL Children are afforded the opportunities, I pray were not squandered upon us.

Identity.

We must reckon with identity in the same manner we demanded the state of Mississippi reckon with its past, and abandon the confederate flag. Many Southerners say that flag is heritage. However, we know the confederate flag is a symbol of the delusion of white superiority. We know; and the world knows. Symbolism, words, labels, and named edifices speak a mega-phone of belief. Many Technicians want to maintain the name; as now, it represents to many— Black

excellence. Our pride, our legacy, our experiences translate into the identity of exceptionalism that we strive to maintain. After all, it is the anti-thesis of everything for which the namesake stood. Oh we proved the beastly soulless wrong, just look at us! However, there arrives a time when this type of "proving" and validation seeking is obsolete. This is the time to redefine our identity, in a more imaginative and expansive global manner. It is time to reconnect our history, our Black excellence, Detroit experiences with the entire world community.

If after deep contemplation and study, if after a panoramic viewing, a complete look at this African American driven movement, happening right now with Black Lives Matter, and Allies, if after considering the 450 year choke hold of White supremacist systems, if after all of that, Technicians, and Alumni cannot shift, and remake, and by remaking, redefine, and thus rename our true legacy into something larger, and more connected, and powerful, then I fear Cass Tech did not fulfill those lauded ideals of excellence.

For excellence is not stagnant. Excellence soars on the wings of time. The agenda of the day requires each of us to rise above the torrents of life, and jubilantly throw off the cloak of racism, and command an illuminated evolved future. The renaming should be celebration, not fraught with doubt and worry. We are stepping into a new cultural reality; old paradigms are shifting. First they shift, then they Fall!

Semaj Brown  
Flint, Michigan's First Poet Laureate  
*Author of **Bleeding Fire!***  
*Tap the Eternal Spring of Regenerative Light*