

## Race and school desegregation: Contemporary legal and educational issues

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I will begin with a quotation by W. E. B. Du Bois, who wrote in 1936, the following:

“Theoretically the Negro needs neither segregated nor mixed schools. What he needs is education. But he must remember that there is no magic either in mixed schools or in segregated schools. A mixed school with poor and unsympathetic teachers with hostile public opinion and no teaching concerning Black folk is bad.” (Quoted in Woodson, 1977) Unfortunately, the experiences of our children in public school desegregation have often been very bad.

This lecture is being presented forty-five years after the passage of the historic *Brown* decision. But also, it is fifty-five years since the publication of Myrdal’s monumental study of American Race Relations, *An American Dilemma* (1944). Myrdal’s study dominated the discourse on race relations for almost a generation. His most ardent critic was the sociologist Oliver Cromwell Cox who earned his Ph.D. in sociology at the University of Chicago. And, as an aside, I must point out that Professor Cox entered the university in 1928 to study economics. In 1929 the great depression caused him to change his major; he decided that any discipline that could not predict an event as monumental as the great depression was not worthy of study, therefore he changed to sociology. However, sociology, my own discipline, was not much better because neither sociologists, nor psychologists, nor anthropologists, nor economists --- none of us predicted the Civil Rights Revolution. The contemporary wisdom when I was in graduate school was that it was impossible to legislate social change in attitudes, behaviors, and customs regarding segregation in a society like the United States that had accepted legalized and de facto segregation in most of the nation for several generations. Social scientists contended that change had to come gradually and, following Myrdal’s lead, that it had to come about by changing the hearts and minds of White Americans. You all know that history, and you all know how wrong all of us social science experts were about that. According to Cox (1948), “Myrdal conceives of . . . race relations in the United States as primarily a moral issue of conflicting valuations.” Cox continued: “Myrdal continued to describe the vicious circle, White prejudice keeps the Negro low in standards of living, which give support to White prejudice. White prejudice and Negro standards both virtually cause each other.” Cox noted that the point that Myrdal overlooked is that both prejudice and the status of African Americans are dependent variables, not independent variables. Both are dependent on a set of powerful economic interests. It is surprising that Myrdal, an economist, ignored the economic basis of race relations and racial discrimination.

The decision by the United States Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which ordered the dismantling of the legal system supporting segregation of schools, largely in the South and Border States, marked the beginning of a new era of American race relations. The American dilemma would be confronted head on. No longer could the gap between the American Creed and the reality of racism be ignored. However, ten years later, Charles Silberman, in *Crisis in Black and White* (1964), wrote:

There is no American dilemma. What we are discovering, in short, is that the United States, West as well as East --- North as well as South, is a racist society in a sense and to a degree that we have refused so far to admit, much less face. Twenty years ago Gunnar Myrdal concluded that the “American Negro Problem was a problem in the heart of the American,” Myrdal was wrong. The tragedy of race relations in the United States is that there is no American dilemma. White Americans are not torn and tortured by the conflict between their devotion to the American Creed and their actual behavior. They are upset by the current state of race relations not because of justice being denied, but because their peace is being disturbed and their privileges challenged.

Now, that was written in 1964, but it could have been written yesterday. In a similar vein, the Report of the Riot Commission (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders) in 1968 was produced by a group of scholars almost as impressive as the group that did the research reported in *An American Dilemma*. The Commission concluded rather grimly “. . . that our nation is moving toward two societies, one Black, one White, separate and unequal. Discrimination and segregation have long permeated much of American life. They now threaten the very future of every American.” In the introduction to the Bantam Book edition of the Commission Report, journalist Paul Wicker cited another conclusion of the report:

What White Americans had never fully understood but the Negro can never forget, is that White society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it; White institutions maintain it, and White institutions condone it. In a country where the economy, and particularly the resources are predominately White, a policy of separation can only relegate Negroes to a permanently inferior economic status.

However, the Commission stopped short of a recommendation for the integration of American society. They recommended a policy that combined “ghetto enrichment” with gradual and selective integration into the main stream. Again, these comments could have been written yesterday.

One final quotation, from a 1969 book by Whitney Young called *Beyond Racism: Building an Open Society*, stated, “The very fact of racial concentrations of Black people relentlessly segregated into impoverished overcrowded ghettos is in itself explosive. It leads to a ‘we-them’ attitude. Emphasizing the apartness of the isolated group, it sets into motion feelings of hostility and suspicion, leading to irrational acts that endanger us all.” He ended with the following sentence: “The threats of being imprisoned in an atmosphere of externally imposed inferiority result in unbearable tensions within the ghetto, tensions that explode into riots and violence.” Again, that could have been written very recently.

Now, on to desegregation. Thanks largely to the work of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a series of court cases from 1966 to 1971 established the legal foundation for desegregation. Remember that the first *Brown* decision was passed in 1954 and the second decision (*Brown II*), in 1955. The second decision said that “desegregation must progress with all deliberate speed.” We know that “all deliberate speed”

had progressed for ten years with almost no desegregation (see, for example, Clark, 1969). It was not until 1966 that the Federal enforcement apparatus became serious and said, “the desegregation plan has to take steps that will make it work. If the plan does not yield results, it is not an acceptable plan.” It was only at that point that desegregation actually began. We had more than ten years from the decision to the serious beginning of school desegregation.

In subsequent cases, the Supreme Court ruled that desegregation plans must be realistic and promise to work. Only unitary systems without vestiges of the historic dual system could meet the standard. The final obstacle to desegregation of schools was residential segregation. In *Swan v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971), the Supreme Court ruled that desegregation plans could not be limited to neighborhood schools. Mandatory transportation could be used by school districts to bring about a unitary system. Busing was born. Following this ruling, desegregation in the South proceeded rapidly. Outside the South, not much was happening. Northern districts claimed that the segregation that occurred in these systems was natural because of housing problems and personal preferences. Since *de facto* segregation existed because people of different races lived in different neighborhoods, the *Brown* decision did not apply. However, in *Keyes v. School District No. 1* (1973), the Supreme Court ruled that Denver had assigned teachers and students to schools on the basis of race. The finding that a pattern of “intentionally segregative school board actions in a meaningful portion of a school system . . . creates a presumption that other segregated schooling within the system is not adventitious” paved the way for desegregation litigation in Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Indianapolis, etc (p. 210). So Northern school desegregation became subject to the ruling of *Brown*. Where resistance was strong, for example, in Boston, federal judges appointed monitors to administer desegregation plans for school officials who were unwilling to comply with desegregation orders.

In 1975, Lewis Killian, a sociologist, in a book called *The Impossible Revolution Phase II*, concluded that “To subscribe to the general principle of racial equality is one thing, to pay the personal price in terms of sharing traditionally white held advantages is quite another (p.175)”. In countless instances White people proclaim dedication to the abstract principle of racial equality but resist application of this principle when they perceive that their own neighborhoods, their children’s schools, their job opportunities, or their political power or tax bills will be affected.

The general consensus of scholars by 1970 was that the courts and the enforcement apparatus had done their job. However, the resistance to school desegregation was followed by White flight in the 70’s and 80’s leaving the majority of African Americans and Hispanics attending segregated public schools. As Gary Orfield and his colleagues at Harvard point out annually, schools today are more segregated than they were 25 to 30 years ago (e. g., Orfield & Eaton, 1996). The only remedy that might make a difference would be a desegregation plan that included all of the contiguous suburbs of a metropolitan area. That remedy was essentially made impossible for most urban areas by the Supreme Court ruling in *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974, 1977), the 1974 decision pertaining to Detroit, because it required plaintiffs to demonstrate that the state, county, or other school districts were involved in actions that contributed to the segregation of the system. A few districts were found guilty even with that restriction, for

example, Indianapolis, Wilmington, Delaware, Louisville, Kentucky, St. Louis and Kansas City, Missouri.

To give an example, the Louisville case was quite simple because Jefferson County, in which Louisville is located, had a long-standing practice of sending its African American high school students into Louisville to attend Central High School rather than provide a high school for them in the county. There was clearly collusion between the county and the city to provide segregated schooling, therefore, it was an easy case for the justices to decide. The others were not quite that simple. The St. Louis and Kansas City cases were based on the fact that the state of Missouri had required legal segregation of schools before 1954. Therefore, the state was directly involved in creating the segregated condition of the urban school systems. Therefore, in both St. Louis and Kansas City, the state of Missouri was required to pay substantial amounts of money in support of desegregation plans.

Leaving history and getting to the present status of desegregation, in the 1990's school districts are going into court asking for release from desegregation plans based on the claim that these school systems now meet the requirements of unitary status, therefore exempting them from court ordered desegregation. These claims are made even though the majority of African American students still attend racially isolated schools. The Supreme Court decisions in *Board of Education v. Dowell* (Oklahoma City, 1991) and *Freeman v. Pitts* (1992) have enabled school systems to return to segregation without violating the law. Following *Pitts*, it is only necessary for school districts to demonstrate that they have shown "good faith effort," and have attempted to comply with the requirements of desegregation plans to the extent that they have done everything "practicable" to remedy the effects of a dual system of segregated schools. Isn't that interesting? If the school district has decided that it has done all that is practical, it can now be excused from the desegregation plan, *even if there is no desegregation*. That is amazing!

These decisions set the stage for resegregation of America's public schools. Just last month, a Federal Judge concluded that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg district, the district of the historic *Swann* (1971) decision, has fulfilled the purpose of its desegregation order and declared the district unitary. The district did not ask to be released from this order. This case came about because disgruntled White parents felt their children were being denied access to high quality education because the district had a pupil assignment plan for certain magnet schools that relied on racial quotas to assure adequate representation of African American students. The judge ruled (*Belk et al. v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools*, September, 1999) in spite of the evidence provided by the school district that there was still the need to maintain the desegregation plan because Black students were still not receiving equal education, that the district was "unitary." In other words, the judge said, you do not have to do it any more. In fact, if you do it, it is illegal." This decision removed the district from costly busing provisions and ended race based admission to the district magnet school. And this is not an isolated case.

In Boston, the First U. S. Circuit Court of Appeals, in a case called *Wessmann v. Gittens* (1998; see also, *Wessman v. Boston Sch. Comm.*, 996 F. Supp. 120 [D. Mass. 1998]), reversed a lower court decision that upheld the Boston School Committee's policy of using race as one of the criteria for admission to Boston Latin School (and two other "examination" schools). "Thus, the majority decision in *Wessmann* seeks to make illegitimate nearly every concept and tool devised

since *Brown* to fashion a remedy to racial and ethnic student assignment discrimination” (Dentler, 1999, p.16). Dentler also reported that:

[t]he Boston School Committee voted unanimously on February 3, 1999 to not ask the United States Supreme Court to decide on its Latin School assignment procedure in an appeal from the First Circuit decision . . . [in order to avoid] the making of bad law by a court known to be hostile toward affirmative action policies in general. . . . At the same meeting, the committee chose by a vote of 4-2 to discontinue the use of any factor except achievement test scores in the selection of students for Advanced Work Classes, Boston’s method of prepping students for competitively high secondary school achievement after elementary school . . .(p. 17).

The mayor then announced his intentions to return the system to neighborhood schools within six years. That’s where we are today. The Boston School Committee did not appeal the decision because several legal scholars argued that this is not a good case to send to the Supreme Court, and that they did not want the decision in this case to become a precedent for future decisions on affirmative action. They decided that it would be wiser to wait for a better case. I think this was a wise decision.

One final example of the retreat from desegregation; this is from Rockford, Illinois which has a controlled choice desegregation plan (*People Who Care v. Rockford Board Education School District No. 295*, 1994). During the first two years of this court ordered controlled choice plan, segregation was reduced at the elementary school level from 15 schools to 4 schools, and one secondary school has become resegregated. If this controlled choice plan is rescinded and the district is returned to neighborhood schools, Rockford would have at least 26 segregated elementary schools. If Rockford, then, appeals for relief and becomes a unitary district, it will resegregate more than a dozen elementary schools. In essence, beginning with the Reagan presidency and continuing through the 90’s, the federal government and federal courts as well as state courts and legislatures have proceeded systematically to dismantle the legislative and judicial protections gained by African Americans and subsequently other people of color, women, and the handicapped. Conservative politicians, judges, and the intellectuals who provide them with the conceptual and empirical support for their views take great delight in “turning the tables on the liberals.”

I am reminded of what I learned from my sociology professor, Butler A. Jones, at Taldega College in 1946. He said, “Americans are more concerned with form than with substance, and empirical evidence does not convince self-righteous people.” The myth of equality overshadows all evidence; we read that White males are losing jobs because of affirmative action, yet Black unemployment rates have consistently remained twice as high as those of Whites and rates for Hispanics are almost as high as those for Blacks. We are now told that affirmative action hurts those that it was designed to help in spite of the wonderful book by Bowen and Bok, *The Shape of the River* (1998), which contradicts that statement, “you can’t change the minds of self-righteous people with evidence.” We are told that social class is more important than race in determining life chances of Blacks (Wilson, 1978, 1980). That was 20 years ago, and the author of that proposition has now decided that, yes, there is still discrimination against Black people,

especially in employment. Black people are discriminated against when they apply for jobs; he found that out while studying the ghetto of Chicago, and for that, I admire him. It took twenty years, but he changed his mind. That's what I call great scholarship.

So, what have we learned? What have we gained? What are the gains and losses of desegregation in the last forty-five years? Well, the end of integration is in sight. This was the title of an article in *Time Magazine* in 1997. Let's assess the consequences of the desegregation effort. According to Maureen Hallinan, a sociologist at Notre Dame, in an article she published in the *Ohio State University Law Review* in 1998, "The central question is how desegregation affects student achievement." In the law review article, she reported that assessment of the results of large scale studies of the effects of racial composition on student achievement support the following conclusions:

First, Black students attain higher academic achievement in majority White schools than in predominantly Black or all Black school. Second, Black students attain higher academic achievement in majority White classrooms than in majority non-White classrooms. Third, the earlier a Black student is placed in a majority White school or classroom, the higher the academic achievement. Fourth, Hispanic students attain higher academic achievement in majority White schools than in minority White schools. And (this is most important, but you cannot convince White parents that it's true), fifth, White students do not suffer from lower achievement when they attend schools with Blacks or Hispanics. (But now try and convince a mother of a White child of that.)

I am sorry; I shouldn't indict all White mothers. Many White mothers are quite comfortable if their child is attending an integrated school. What we have to understand, though, is that White mothers' definition of an integrated school is quite different than a Black mother's definition of an integrated school. To the white mother, the school is integrated if it has 10 percent or fewer Black students. It is viewed as becoming threatening when that number rises to 20 percent and it is intolerable if it reaches 40 percent. At that point the school rapidly becomes all Black. That's what is called "the tipping point." Now to Black mothers, the comfort level is right at about 40 percent and it is even better if it is 50 or 60 percent Black. Black mothers are a little uncomfortable at 10 percent Black (the White comfort level), and many are quite uncomfortable with less than 10 percent Black. So, you can see that we have different perceptions of what integration means. Thus, it is not surprising that social science surveys report that 80 to 90 percent of White Americans agree with the principle of integration of public schools and most say they would not object to their child attending a public school that is racially integrated. However, when you begin asking White parents how they would feel about certain percentages of Black children in schools or classrooms you begin to get the perception that their tolerance for the presence of Black children in their children's classrooms is relatively low. There is a psychologist named John Dovidio who (with S. L. Gaertner) has coined a phrase that describes this phenomenon; "aversive racism." By aversive racism, he means that Whites who are not overtly prejudiced or racist, or who do not consider themselves to be prejudiced or racist, have varying tolerances for contact with people of color. And those who can tolerate no contact, you could say are the most extremely aversive racists, while those who can tolerate a little contact are less extreme and so on and so forth until you finally get to the tolerant end of the continuum where you find people who can tolerate a lot of interracial contact. The problem of course is that

comfort zone of 10 percent; and this applies not only to schools, it also applies to housing and this is very important, as we shall see. The idea here is that as long as Whites have low tolerance for social contact with members of the African American racial group, the outlook for support of desegregation of public schools in any community where the school population of minority students is greater than 15 percent is not very good. To some extent this applies to desegregation of Hispanic schools as well. The tolerance for Hispanics may be somewhat greater than that for African Americans, but I'm convinced there is also a tipping point for Hispanics. Even in affluent Chicago suburbs where the average home price is \$250,000.00, if the schools become 40 percent or more African American, White families start moving out to neighborhoods where the home prices are even higher, and the school rapidly becomes predominantly Black; a "majority minority school."

Following up on the gains or losses theme, and still looking at the gains for African American children, according to Dawkins and Braddock (1994), desegregated school experiences provide for the socialization -- the development of the interpersonal skills useful in interracial contexts, and reduce social inertia leading to increased tolerance and willingness to participate in desegregated environments (p. 396). Elementary and secondary desegregated school experiences affect not only social, psychological, and academic achievement outcomes, but also such crucial factors as college attendance and access to broader social networks (social capital) that provide job information, contacts, and sponsorships necessary for career advancement (p. 395). These results are similar to those reported by Wells and Crain (1994) who concluded that the long-term outcome of desegregated educational experiences is to increase the ability of Blacks to work effectively with Whites, live in racially integrated neighborhoods, attend predominantly White institutions of higher education, etc. It appears that early racial integration (pre-school through elementary school) has an inoculation effect; that is, it increases the ability of African American children to cope with the tensions and stresses of day-to-day contact with Whites. Put in a different way, results from longitudinal studies show that Black students who attend desegregated elementary and secondary schools are more likely to enroll in two or four year predominantly White colleges and to have White social contacts in their integrated neighborhoods. Wells and Crain also concluded that Black students who have had substantial experience in desegregated schools are more likely than comparable students (who have not had such experiences) to have desegregated social and professional networks in later life, and are more likely to be working in white-collar and professional jobs in the private sector. It is important to note that these effects are not a direct result of sitting a Black child next to a White child or the racial composition of a school or classroom, but rather, it is the exposure to the "social networks" or social capital that African Americans may not have access to in their home environment. In essence, research suggests that aside from any academic gains, there are social capital and human capital assets to be gained from long-term matriculation in racially integrated schools for Black students.

In another area of interest, the results are mixed. In my reviews of research on racial self-identity, self-concept and self-esteem (e.g., Epps, 1981), some studies find higher levels of self-esteem for Black students in segregated schools, others report higher scores in integrated schools, and still other report no difference. These conflicting reports can be attributed to methodological differences, including the use of many different instruments to assess personality

characteristics, comparisons of different age, sex and geographic groups, and comparisons of results from different time periods. However, a few conclusions are warranted.

First, there is fairly consistent evidence that Black students' sense of personal control is higher in desegregated schools than in segregated schools. Second, Black students' educational aspirations are usually high in both segregated and desegregated schools, and to the surprise of many researchers, they tend to be as high as or higher than the aspirations of White students (however, the actual college attendance rates favor Whites by a larger margin). Third, self-concept of academic ability is also surprisingly high in both types of schools in view of the relatively low performance on standardized achievement tests of Black students. Fourth, Black students' general self-esteem is equal to or higher than that of White students in both segregated and desegregated schools (You might ask how this is so since Blacks are not held in high esteem by the general population. The simple answer is that Black students do not look to the general society for approval; they look to their families, to their communities, and their peers.). Fifth, the self-esteem of Black students is only weakly related to their academic (for the same reason, that they look to their peers for validation.). And sixth, student perceptions of positive interracial classroom climate are associated with higher self-esteem and better academic performance. I think this is a very important finding. It is supported by a recent study by Marcus-Newhall and Heindl that appeared in the *Journal of Social Issues* (1998). It's important because if we are looking for a clue about how to make classrooms effective for Black children (and other minority children), then this idea, this perception of *positive interracial classroom climate*, is, I think, something we can focus on.

Finally, let's look at the losses and costs of desegregation. Desegregation, especially in the South, was achieved largely by closing Black schools and busing the students to predominantly White schools. This resulted in many Black teachers and administrators losing their jobs and being demoted. It estimated that 38,000 African Americans in seventeen states lost their positions as teachers and administrators between 1954 and 1965. The result for many African American children is a loss of an important social resource. African American teachers often represent surrogate parent figures, firm disciplinarians, empathetic counselors, positive role models, and advocates. Current research suggests that lower achieving African American students benefit most from relationships with African American teachers. These results are particularly disturbing because the proportion of all teachers who are African American has steadily declined in the last thirty-five years so that it is now less than 10 percent. The proportion of Hispanic teachers is even lower.

Among the costs of desegregation is the overwhelming burden placed upon Black students and families. Most desegregation plans were constructed with the view of making it as painless as possible for Whites in order to keep Whites from leaving the public schools. What this means, then, is that African American students typically had to travel longer distances than White students (via busing), and that within the schools, they are often segregated through the processes of ability grouping and tracking. There is an interesting story-within-a-story about busing programs. For example, students might be bussed into a school, and then assigned to classrooms on different floors of the building than those to which neighborhood (White) kids were assigned; they might also be assigned to different lunchroom or playground periods. The contact between White students and Black students is, therefore, minimized; White students see the Black

students only when they arrive on the bus and when they get on the bus to return home. We should not be surprised that in such extreme situations racial integration has not been entirely successful.

In addition, Black students have experienced different patterns of discipline, including disproportionately high suspension and expulsion rates. In some nominally integrated schools, Black students have been denied access to higher-level courses, including AP classes. Tracking, ability grouping, and disproportionate assignment to special education are examples of the processes by which Black students are denied equal access to high quality education even when they attend the same schools as Whites. In essence, when Black students have been assigned to predominantly White schools they have not received equitable treatment and have not had access to the quality of resources that were available to White children. Let us be clear: what desegregation was supposed to be about was making the same quality of educational resources available to Black children that were available to White children. This simply has not happened in most instances. For the most part, when Black children were put into the same schools as Whites, arrangements were made to deny them access to the best education that was available to Whites, and the most efficient way of doing this, of course, was by ability grouping and tracking. And, lest we forget, the use of special education as a “dumping ground” for many Black children has been very prevalent. So, where does that leave us in our assessment of forty-five years of experience with school desegregation?

In recent years, opposition by both Black and White parents has resulted in a political climate in which alternatives to busing and other mandatory desegregation measures are being promoted and implemented. Among these are magnet schools, voucher programs, and charter schools. The voucher programs and charter schools have not been studied extensively, but the available evidence suggests that they, too, will leave low-income, low-achieving students behind. What all of these programs have in common is the tendency to separate children or sort them according to social class. Middle-class parents of all racial and ethnic groups have access to better information than lower-class parents, and they have the resources to persist in the application process until they have arranged for their children to be accepted at a “selective” school. Therefore, most racially diverse magnet schools have disproportionately high ratios of middle-class and White students. Critics also contend that magnets and other special admissions schools siphon both human and financial resources from neighborhood schools, thereby creating a form of dual education system within the public schools of a district.

I will give a couple of examples from Chicago. The Chicago magnet school program is a part of its desegregation consent decree. There are twenty-nine magnet schools in Chicago attended by 17,000 students (of approximately 400,000). Of the students enrolled in magnet schools, 19 percent are White, 50 percent are African American, 24 percent are Hispanic, and 7 percent are Asian. Note, however, that Whites make up only about 9 percent of the public school students in Chicago. In addition, there are 93 integrated, desegregated schools in Chicago serving 14,500 students. Of these, 37 percent are White, 16 percent are African American, 34 percent are Hispanic, and 12 percent are Asian. Keep in mind, however, that this is a school district in which African Americans make up two-thirds of the student body; yet, in these integrated schools they comprise only 16 percent of enrollment.

Why is this lack of proportionate representation important? Overall, magnet and integrated schools are the highest achieving schools in the district, based on standardized achievement test scores and college attendance. What some critics would say is, “of course they have higher test scores; after all, the best students were selected to attend these schools.” Thus, the higher test scores cannot be attributed to better quality instruction or curricular; it is simply the case that if students are selected on the basis of test score performance, their test scores will continue to be high (even with mediocre instruction and programs). In essence, the magnet schools are not doing a better job of teaching; they are just getting better students. Why shouldn’t they do better on the test? Of course, magnet school teachers and administrators reply that it’s not that simple; magnet schools are actually doing a better job through better teaching and better programs. The critics’ response is that magnet schools get the best teachers by causing a “brain drain” from the neighborhood schools. These schools get both the best students and the best teachers. Any comparisons with neighborhood schools are, therefore, inappropriate.

In Chicago, it is estimated that magnet schools spend considerably more dollars per student on average compared to dollars per student in neighborhood schools (The exact amount of the disparity is in dispute and I cannot verify the figures.) Thus, overall, magnet schools offer specialized curricula as well as a broader range of educational enrichment programs than neighborhood schools. In addition to more resources, magnet schools can select their teachers and students. And they don’t have to accept special education students or students who have behavior problems. Therefore, we should not be surprised that magnet schools have better achievement. With these advantages, why shouldn’t they be superior?

Now, let’s look at charter schools. There are lots of different kinds of charter schools that provide a wide range of educational alternatives. There are fifteen charter schools in Chicago now that provide additional choices for students. The programs range from Afrocentric to technocentric. I will describe only the Afrocentric school because it represents a vision that is very attractive to some parents and educators, and it is less familiar than other types of charter schools.

The Betty Shabazz International Charter School has an interesting history. Shabazz was created by poet and educator, Haki Madhubuti, and his wife, Safisha (who is also known as Professor Carol D. Lee of Northwestern University; she received her Ph.D. in education with honors from the University of Chicago.). They started this institution as a private school twenty-five years ago, and ran it out of their own pockets with whatever resources they could beg and borrow from their friends and supporters. It was known as the New Concept Development Center, an Afrocentric school based on African principles. In a fortuitous turn of events, at the time they began to have difficulty raising sufficient funds to keep the school afloat, Chicago implemented its charter school program. This school had earned considerable favorable publicity that came to the attention of the Chief Executive Officer of the Chicago Public Schools who suggested that they should turn this Afrocentric institution into a charter school. After investigating the feasibility of becoming a charter school and still maintaining its visionary integrity, the New Concept Development Center became the Betty Shabazz International Charter School, publicly funded, but still an Afrocentric school located on the Southside of Chicago. They still call the women teachers “mama” and the male teachers “baba”.

They also have Swahili names for the students and parents as well as rituals signifying passage from one grade level to another that are based on African traditions. What fascinates me about this school is that the one bright spot that I see about the voucher and charter movements is that African Americans who have the insight and the determination can create their own schools in their own image (or any other they choose). They can use the schools as examples to show the rest of us how to produce achieving students with high self-esteem who have high political consciousness, and who are self-directed independent learners, on the Southside of Chicago, in the heart of the ghetto.

Now, I am not naïve. Clearly, a school that is self-consciously Afrocentric will have a self-selected clientele that is not likely to be comprised of the most “truly disadvantaged” children on the Southside. That is, the students who are most difficult to educate, whose parents are the most uncommitted to education, will in all likelihood remain in neighborhood racially isolated schools with high concentrations of poverty level students. The clients of Betty Shabazz are likely to be the same types of parents who put their children in magnet schools and private schools except for their commitment to Afrocentric principles of education. Therefore, I would be very surprised if this school and others like it are not successful. I won’t give other examples, but the important fact about charter schools, and some voucher schools, for example in Milwaukee, is that the African American community has the opportunity to become a major player in the charter, voucher, private school game. And, if I were a dreamer, I would ask that every Black church of every denomination develop its own school. Perhaps we would no longer need the public schools. But, that’s a pipe dream. On a serious note, given the opportunity, community people, not only Black community people, but community people of all races and ethnic groups could create schools in their own image and, therefore, if the public schools have not been serving them well – and we know they are not serving Black people well, they are not serving Hispanic people well, and they are not serving poor people well – could take advantage of this opportunity to take control of their children’s education and show us experts how it should be done.

I would like to focus on another aspect of resistance to desegregation that has come from Black folk – scholars who are nostalgic about the past. One of my former schoolmates at Dunbar High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, Faustine Jones (Wilson), has written a book that highlights the positive characteristics of this segregated institution. I remember Dunbar as a truly magnificent school (I had little to compare it with at the time.) It was arguably the best “Negro” high school in the state of Arkansas, but we now know that it was not equal to Central High School (the White school that later became the focus of a famous desegregation movement) in facilities, science equipment, curriculum, etc. In the dual system of pre-*Brown* segregated education, separate was never equal; even the best Black school was not equal in resources to its neighboring White school. That’s the aspect of the history of segregated education that the historical revisionists ignore. They also ignore the fact that in many communities, such as the rural village in which I attended elementary school (Woodson, Arkansas in Pulaski County of which Little Rock is the county seat), *there was no high school for Negroes*. School for us ended in ninth grade unless our parents arranged for us to attend private schools or public schools in other school districts (e.g., Little Rock). My parents had to bus my siblings and I to Little

Rock, paying the Greyhound Bus Company for transportation, and then paying tuition to the Little Rock Public School district so that we could attend Dunbar High School. Without that kind of parental commitment, most rural African American students never attended high school during that era. Is that what these scholars want to go back to?

People forget; time and distance erode memory. Yes, there were some bright spots. There were schools like Dunbar in Little Rock, Dunbar in Washington, D.C., Stanton in Jacksonville, Florida, Booker T. Washington in Memphis, the laboratory schools at historically Black colleges, and many others that were doing a good job. These were the places that produced most of the Black doctors, lawyers, and other professionals. But focusing on these beacons of light ignores the vast wasteland of public education experienced by the majority of African Americans under the legally segregated dual system that *Brown* attempted to destroy. For those who are tempted by the revisionist picture painted by the nostalgia buffs, I recommend that you read the dissertation by Sylvia Gist (University of Chicago, Department of Education, 1994), entitled "Educating a Southern Rural Community: The Case of Blacks in Holmes County Mississippi, 1870 to the Present." Dr. Gist concluded: "From 1870 until Blacks began to assume control during the late 1960's, Whites systematically denied Blacks access to educational facilities comparable to those allocated to white pupils." Read the dissertation if you want to know the magnitude of the disparities. Now, ladies and gentlemen, when anybody starts telling you how good things were during segregation, tell them to read this dissertation. Or tell them to talk to me. Because, anybody who believes things were good was not there! Perhaps those who were there are becoming senile by now.

Returning to an earlier theme, a part of the response to the non-segregation of schools in places like Detroit and Milwaukee has been the development of Afrocentric schools within public school systems. In both Detroit and Milwaukee, such schools have been in operation for more than five years. These schools developed as a response to the frustration that Blacks have experienced with urban school districts that have been unwilling to allocate sufficient resources to the reformation of central city schools. Evaluations of these schools have been mixed. I will give you an example from Milwaukee where two Afrocentric public schools were created, an elementary school and a middle school. The elementary school, by all accounts, has been an outstanding success. The middle school has been declared a disaster. It was a clear failure of implementation. When the middle school was transformed into an Afrocentric school, neither visionary leadership nor a committed teaching force guided the effort. Because of seniority provisions in the teacher union contract, senior teachers who wanted to remain in the school could not be removed if they did not endorse the program. Racial balance provisions of the desegregation agreement also prevented the recruitment of African American teachers. The school also experienced high turnover among teachers and administrators as well as interference from the central office. Putting these problems together, it is not surprising that this school is not doing well. The elementary school, on the other hand, had a principal who was dedicated; a visionary, a true believer. This principal selected teachers who shared the vision; of course the parents were believers. The combination of strong leadership from the principal, a supportive and stable faculty,

and strong parent support (as well as “benign neglect” from the central office) resulted in this school becoming a supportive and effective learning environment.

Let me end by saying that we are trying many alternative paths to achieving equality of educational opportunity primarily because the dream of desegregation has not been fulfilled. We went into desegregation expecting to get access to the same quality of education that White kids were getting, but it has not come to pass. It does not appear likely given the current political climate that it will happen in our life times. How did I come to this conclusion? One reason is that in many states 98 percent of the voters have no children in urban public schools. There is little incentive for state legislatures to pass legislation that is friendly to Chicago, Philadelphia or other large urban school districts. The resource rich districts get richer, and the resource poor districts get poorer by comparison. That is a political reality. Even in those states that have been required by state courts to devise more equitable systems for financing public education, the resource gap remains huge. New Jersey has been involved in the process of finance equalization for more than 15 years and still has not been able to eliminate such resource gaps.

All of this makes me a little bit pessimistic. What is the current state of race relations in the United States? I’ll just read the titles of a few recently published books: *American Apartheid*; *The Rage of a Privileged Class*, *The Black-White Test Score Gap*; *Black-Wealth*, *White-Wealth*. These are just a few of the revealing titles. What do these books tell us? First, the country is still divided on racial issues. Second, Blacks and Whites still live their lives largely in separate communities. Third, the institutions serving Blacks and Hispanics and children in urban schools are vastly inferior to those serving Whites. Fourth, Blacks and Whites focus on different aspects of the racial divide. Fifth, the median income of Blacks is substantially lower than that of Whites, but pales in comparison to the wealth gap; whites have substantially greater assets. Sixth, even those Blacks who have followed Mrydal’s advice by becoming educated and acquiring the customs and values of the White mainstream are not immune from racism. There was a recent book by a Black lawyer who had played by the rules, attended the “right” schools; kept his nose clean, did all the right things; he was not militant, had a neat haircut, and wore good suits. But when it came time for him to be promoted to partner in a major law firm, he was told, “You haven’t done the right things.” He responded that he had done everything he was told to do, but he hadn’t been told about these things that he was now being accused of not having done. He sued the firm, but lost. How did he lose? The law firm’s defense was, “We treat everyone like dirt; we didn’t treat this associate any differently.” The firm contended that since all juniors are treated like dirt, and they all have to figure out the rules of the game for themselves without being told how to make good, there was no discrimination; this associate just didn’t figure it out. I think the representatives of the firm lied to the court. I believe White male associates do get help, perhaps subtly, via mentoring, case assignments, etc. However, the firm was able to convince the court that everyone was treated badly, thereby winning the case. If any of you believe, like the majority of White Americans, that America is a “color-blind” nation, you are in for a rude awakening if you happen to be a person of color.

What is the outlook for the future? As the nation becomes more diverse ethnically, some groups are becoming increasingly isolated. According to Gary Orfield and his colleagues, Latino students will soon become the largest non-European racial/ethnic group in the public schools, and like African Americans, they tend to be urban dwellers and disproportionately from lower income families. In addition to all the disadvantages associated with concentrated poverty, these students also encounter language discrimination. Latino segregation is currently more severe than African American segregation. And the relationship between segregation by race and segregation by poverty in public schools is very strong. High poverty schools will have to acquire many additional resources in order to address family crises, safety, and other neighborhood problems. These schools also tend to be served by less qualified teachers, and have greater problems of student and teacher mobility. Schools with high concentrations of poverty level students present the greatest challenge to educational reform. They have very low average academic achievement, and are perceived negatively by the general public (although less negatively by the parents of students attending the schools).

In conclusion, let me make a few recommendations. I have to admit these are puny, trivial recommendations because I am having trouble finding something positive say. Let's put it simply, very simply. A serious recommendation would require restructuring the economic system and the reallocation of resources. We would have to start there, and we would have to talk about a massive redistribution of wealth, and a massive redistribution of power. We would have to change the system fundamentally if we were trying to create a system in which there would be no connection between educational outcomes and race, class, or gender. Realistically, I know that is not politically feasible in the current climate. Therefore, I will talk about a few things that might make life in schools a little better for children.

1. Research supports the proposition that children's relationships with others are important for learning in schools. Thus, programs such as the Comer School Development Program (SDP) can help to improve relationships involving students, teachers, parents and administrators within schools, and eventually, student achievement. There is fairly strong evidence that the Comer Program works.
2. Develop programs and curricular strategies that build upon the cultural backgrounds and strengths of the students served by the school. Building on the cultural strengths of students and seeking to bridge the gap between the school and the community is another promising strategy.
3. Finally, we should develop and mobilize the political and economic resources of communities served by the schools. The schools could become part of an integrated community development effort. You can't really reform the schools by focusing only on schools. Strategies are needed that will improve employment opportunities, reduce concentrations of poverty caused by segregated housing, and provide opportunities for heads of low-income families to upgrade their educational and occupational skills. Only then will schools be able to make a

significant impact on the historical inequalities in education that African Americans continue to experience.

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