

VUE

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THE METROPOLITAN CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON EQUITY AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF SCHOOLS
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY • *Voices in Urban Education*

"With All Deliberate Speed" Reimagining Integration from a Racial Equity Frame

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Choices We Can't Believe In: Race, Schooling, and the American Dream
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***Plus Two Conversations from Paloma Garcia with Hebh Jamal & Faraji Hannah-Jones**

Voices in Urban Education

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Voices in Urban Education (ISSN number) is published twice a year in Spring/Summer and Fall/Winter by the **Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools** at New York University in the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. It features articles and other works of scholarly and general significance to a wide range of interests and communities who experience urban education through a variety of entry points.

Articles seek to cover a wide range of disciplines with a strong emphasis on trans-sectional and transdisciplinary perspectives aimed at examining successes, problems, and questions in policy, advocacy, and teaching and learning practices in urban education. *VUE* pays particular attention to pieces that highlight the experiences, hopes, dreams, and concerns of historically underrepresented and vulnerable groups in education along lines of gender, race, sexual identity, dis/ability, language, ethnicity, religion, and indigenous or immigration status. As an open access journal, *VUE* aims to disseminate important, topical, relevant, and urgent research, thoughts, and commentary to a wide audience.

- **Conversations in Urban Education** consist of interviews (in-person transcripts or electronic correspondence) with thinkers, leaders, advocates, and students at the forefront of struggles for equity in schools. Interviews may contain footnotes but require few or no references and should be vetted for factual accuracy by the interviewer prior to submission. Interviews may range between 3,000 and 5,000 words, but word counts may be adjusted at the discretion of the editors. In addition to completed interviews, *VUE* accepts offers to be interviewed as potential submissions. Potential interviewees should indicate the topic(s) about which they would like to be interviewed, a summary of their relevant background or expertise on the topic(s), and how their interview might add to the body of knowledge around a specific conversation of interest in urban education.
- **Research Perspectives in Urban Education** consist of more traditionally academic research pieces, either studies conducted with an urban education focus or technical commentaries on existing research or strands of research. *VUE* has a preference for transdisciplinary, trans-sectional, participatory or partnership (researcher-practitioner, practitioner-student, practitioner-advocate, advocate-student, etc.) pieces that are inclusive of broader perspectives and experiences within urban education. However, we will consider more traditionally academic pieces that add to the body of knowledge or to important topical conversations around equity, liberation, abolition, and justice in education. Action research and design-based studies with an equity focus conducted by teachers and/or students/parents will be considered. Research pieces should include an abstract, introduction, and up to 40 references (hyperlinked if possible) and may include up to six tables/figures.
- **Commentaries on Urban Education** consist of technical comments, opinions, and narratives of experience and/or guidance from leaders at the forefront of important conversations and issues in urban education, including but not limited to: school integration, school funding, disproportionality, school culture and climate, school discipline, campus safety, racial bias, culturally responsive/sustaining education, the decolonization of education, critical theories in education, etc. *VUE* considers anyone a potential thought leader, from students and non-instructional school staff through district and state leadership, as well as within and beyond the frames of what is traditionally thought of as leadership. Thought leaders' pieces should be between 2,000 and 4,000 words and may contain up to 10 references to scholarly or other contextual sources.

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Voices in Urban Education

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The Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools at New York University
726 Broadway, 5th Floor
New York, NY 10003
Tel: 212-998-5100
Email: metrocenter@nyu.edu
URL: <https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/>
Twitter: @metronyu

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DAVID E. KIRKLAND

In this reprinting of his 2010 study on “the hidden of costs of school choice,” Dr. David E. Kirkland suggests that integration is about conditions that give people true choices, as opposed to acts of desperation that toss them in transit, to places where children find themselves unwanted. Kirkland suggests that integration is the expansion of freedom—both the freedom to move and the freedom to remain still. Thus, it is about conditions that ultimately bring people closer together as opposed to pushing them farther apart.

With All Deliberate Speed: Reimagining Integration from a Racial Equity Frame

For many, 2016 marked a fundamental shift in the world. The outrage following the election of Donald Trump revealed our deep social slumber followed by our collective awakening to a reality that countless of vulnerable woke Americans had already known: The country is deeply divided, splintered along the fault lines of faith, ability, race, socioeconomic experiences, linguistic heritages, geographies, and other expressions of distance and difference that make the U.S. beautifully complicated and petulantly inequitable.

Prior to 2016 and since 1954, the most optimistic of us held onto the belief that the tides of history were pulling the nation, if not the world, forward, breaking down the invisible boundaries that held in place systems of confinement—the concentration of vulnerable people divided from the exclusive freedoms enjoyed by the privileged. This system, however—a system of segregation—was so deeply baked into the American reality that the years following 1954 would see segregation reimagined and reinforced. With it, the uneven distribution of education would continue, and those of us charged with seeking equity would find ourselves split between the goals of integration, which implied a more united populace, and the necessity for survival, which focused less on unitary aspirations than on resources.

The mistake of this first wave of integration and the ensuing fragmentation of equity work(ers) was seeing unity as only a march of flesh, divorced from the directionalities that define and represent enactments of power, privilege, and possibility. These enactments and the compass points to which they tug are where the real struggle for equity exists. Thus, integration has never been about sending Black and Brown children to school with white students; it has always been about a struggle against white supremacy, which is a struggle over power—the power to move and remain still, to live on ones' own terms, to choose, to gain access to the opportunities afforded the most privileged Americans while also seeing oneself represented in the creed of the country and the school curricula. From this perspective, integration is much about freedom—about bringing people together, allowing values, experiences, hopes, dreams, and so forth to transact liberally. But as Sonya Horsford (in this issue) so eloquently reminds us, “integration never happened.”

This issue of *Voices in Urban Education (VUE)*—the first issue published by the Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools at New York University—explores the question of integration from a number of perspectives. Each perspective seeks to reframe the integration debate, interrupting, for example, the Black/white binary—a schism that integration so often gets trapped into, reinforcing the exclusion of other races, such as Asians, from conversation on racial equity in ways that fracture possible coalitions for social justice (see Tanikawa, in this issue). Other perspectives in this issue of *VUE* seek to reclaim the concept of integration but from a racial equity basis (see Gonzales, in this issue), reimagining integration

as both having and needing all the ingredients necessary to advance social justice in education and beyond it. This issue of *VUE* also offers other reframings that challenge the construct of integration entirely (see Horsford, in this issue), raising questions such as “whose integration”?

These disruptions, reframings, and questions are crucial to advancing the cause of equity in education. By answering the question “whose integration,” for example, readers are invited to reflect upon, attend to, and contend with the ways that systems of ideology—white supremacy and racism—fabric our understanding of social change and blanket our thoughts about social progress. Such understandings lead us to fresh analyses of topics such as choice and displacement (see Kirkland and Cordova-Cobo, in this issue). They bring us face to face with the individuals most harmed by the social violence of segregation (see conversations with Jamal and Hannah-Jones, in this issue). If anything, they give us an intimate peek into a social system designed to subjugate some people while protecting the privilege of others, reminding us of why the question of integration is so important in the first place.

VUE is an ideal venue for hosting this reflection, with a special focus on the integration/anti-segregation work currently happening in New York City (NYC). NYC, what some see as “the mecca of segregation,” is the largest and one of the most diverse cities in the U.S. It is also one of the most segregated cities in the U.S. Like the city, NYC schools are highly segregated, most likely as a matter of policy rather than circumstance. In response to its segregation problem, NYC Department of Education (NYCDOE) released a plan in 2017 to increase the “diversity” of its schools. One significant measure of the plan called for a school diversity advisory council, more formally known as The School Diversity Advisory Group (SDAG). SDAG was composed of a broad coalition of advocates, educators, parents, students, and other community representatives interested in advancing equity in NYC schools by supporting NYCDOE in its efforts to create a more effective plan to integrate NYC schools. In spring of 2019, SDAG offered NYC’s mayor 67 recommendations for advancing equity and increasing integration throughout NYC. The mayor accepted 62 of the committee’s 67 recommendations.

Thus, it is not a stretch to locate NYC as ground zero in the current struggle to integrate schools. Therefore, contributors to this issue of *VUE* have been selected purposefully, as each shares some connection to NYC and unique insights into the question of integration. This issue, however, is not about NYC. It is about understanding the movement for school integration more presently through a chorus of contemporary voices—from parents and student activists to community organizers and university scholars. This multi-perspectival view into the questions of integration is an attempt to reframe a concept that has been itself recast, redesigned, and stubbornly (re)inscribed against the tapestry of a country. In this issue of *VUE*, we bring together commentary and conversation, concluding with data and analysis around the complexities of transitory bodies—some fugitive and others invasive.

In all, this issue of *VUE* responds to a kind of new *new* Jim Crow, which is really a continuation of old patterns of racial hierarchy and social subordination in the U.S. The response we feature here has been curated in a way that deals with the current moment, responding to this iteration of segregation by calling for a broader collective of voices, a reimagining of terms, and a texturing of players. It also calls for a willingness to let go of the past, suspending what we think we know about integration while holding on to futurities that allow integration to exist as something greater than mythology. As you hear each voice, hear also the fierce urgency beneath the words—the urgent cries of the voiceless demanding change to the status quo ... *with all deliberate speed*.

Commentaries in Urban Education



Taking Up the Mantle of a Forgotten History: New York City Integration

MATT GONZALES

This article suggests that roads to integration and desegregation are two long, forked, rocky paths that can lead to greater educational opportunity for students. Moreover, current integration and desegregation efforts in New York City offer a map along these paths capable of guiding American education systems closer to justice.

I am often asked to travel across the country to speak about my advocacy on school integration and share my knowledge and experience on the successes of awareness- and coalition-building we have done in New York City (NYC). I always accept these invitations feeling honored and often inadequate because the suggestion that we have had “success” in NYC, especially as the work towards integration is ongoing, belies the fact that racial equity work is a never-ending struggle.

On a recent trip to visit fellow advocates in Washington DC, I walked through my presentation as I do, speaking a mile-a-minute, moving us to the Q&A and conversational part of my talk. In the back of my mind, I worried about time, as I was getting dangerously close to missing my train back to NYC. During this visit, I discovered something new, which helped disrupt my imposter syndrome. As I was saying goodbye to people and getting ready to make a dash for Union Station, I found that the people offering thanks did so less from a place of needing concrete answers to the complex problems integration brings up (although I shared some), but a need for hope that change is possible.

The idea that my work gives people hope humbles me. NYC is home to the largest public school system in the country. We have the opportunity to be a beacon of light in moments of darkness. The movement for integration in NYC is unmatched anywhere across the country in its rapid growth, constituency, complexity, and commitment to racial justice. We have an opportunity to lead the country to *Real Integration*.

“YOU CAN’T HAVE ONE WITHOUT THE OTHER”: DESEGREGATION AND INTEGRATION

Often, the terms integration and desegregation are used interchangeably. It is important, however, to make a clear distinction between these two concepts, which can help us more effectively consider where our policies and priorities reside. Integration and desegregation are two separate but interrelated mechanisms.

Desegregation is the movement of bodies to promote the equitable distribution of the racial and economic (and other forms of) diversity for a city, district, or community. This must be done by breaking down structural barriers to access (exclusionary enrollment policies) that exclude students of color and by replacing those policies with mechanisms that support mobility and diversity. Many initiatives that were birthed out of the Brown v. Board of Education decision focused on this process.

By contrast, integration is the movement of resources, pedagogy, curriculum, and school cultural practices towards inclusiveness, anti-racism, and universal design. Done together, advocates in NYC believe we can achieve what student leaders have termed *Real Integration*. Only when we invest in *Real Integration* can our students reap the full benefits of diverse spaces. This is what we are working towards in NYC.

THE MOVEMENT FOR REAL INTEGRATION IN NEW YORK CITY

In recent years, NYC has emerged as a hotbed for discussions of school integration and desegregation. In mid-February 2019, NYC's School Diversity Advisory Group (SDAG) (of which I am a member) released *Making the Grade*, a framework and path towards the *Real Integration* of NYC Schools.¹ The report, a 108 page collaboration of over 40 individuals and organizations, is an invitation to New Yorkers to consider what integration means for this City. It makes the case that diversity benefits all students. It offers a dynamic student-designed framework for this conversation and articulates clear and practical ideas for changing policy and practice. The SDAG convened in December 2018, and picked up the mantle left by Elle Baker, Kenneth Clark, and others who 64 years prior comprised NYC's 1954 Integration Commission.² My hope is

“Desegregation is the movement of bodies to promote the equitable distribution of the racial and economic (and other forms of) diversity for a city, district, or community.”

that our report and recommendations meet a different fate than those of our predecessors.

It seems outlandish to say that in 2019, an advisory group had to be convened to think about how to dismantle segregation. However, placed in the larger context, we are just 55 years since the passage of Civil Rights Act and a massive NYC boycott over school segregation (1964),³ just 65 years since the Supreme Court outlawed educational segregation (1954),⁴ and 154 years since the end of slavery (1865).⁵ This is just two generations from the darkest parts of this country's history, and unfortunately, many educational leaders have abandoned the mission and merits of integration. Sixty-three years after the 1954 Integration Commission released its recommendations, we are back in a very similar position. While this lack of movement represents intransigence and cowardice among political leaders, entrenched institutional powers, and an unwillingness to confront racism, the fact that the largest urban school district in the country is tackling segregation today is worthy of acknowledgement.

Many attribute the renewed integration action in NYC to a 2014 UCLA Civil Rights Project report titled *Brown at 60*. The report called out NYC for having the most segregated schools in the country and led to subsequent analysis highlighting NYC as the third most segregated school system in the

nation. The absurdity was not lost on New Yorkers who live in one of the most diverse cities on the planet.⁶ The report motivated activists and also elicited administrative action by then New York State Commissioner John King with the creation of the Socioeconomic Integration Pilot Program (SIPP), which allowed the use of Title 1 funds to promote economic integration.⁷

It is important to note that, while NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio and NYC Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza have been vocal on the need to pursue integration, NYC elected officials have typically avoided the work of integrating NYC Schools. Prior to the arrival of Chancellor Carranza, Mayor de Blasio and former NYC Schools Chancellor Carmen Farina were often roadblocks to meaningful movement towards integration. Beyond the many problematic statements made by both leaders, the real impact came through years of obstruction over NYCDOE District 1 planning process, abandonment of the NYCDOE District 13 planning process, and the unwillingness to even utter the words segregation. Despite this and because of a combination of persistent local advocacy, courageous educators, school and district leaders, and state resources, NYC is finally beginning the important work of integrating NYC Schools. Below, I describe the movement of research, policy, and advocacy between 2012 and 2019, which led to NYC's current integration work.

To be clear, there is a tremendous amount of work to be done to achieve *Real Integration* in NYC, but in my short time working on this issues I have seen significant growth in not only the public awareness of school segregation but also the numerical increase in schools and community school districts pursuing integration policy. When I began this work in 2016, there were about eight individual schools pursuing

integration through the NYCDOE's Diversity In Admissions pilot, and one community school district working towards a district wide plan.

Today, there are more than 70 individual K-12 schools pursuing integration through diversity in admissions plans, three districts (1, 3, 15) with approved integration plans, fourteen more working with NYSED to develop plans,⁸ and the city just announced a \$2 million grant program to fund ten more districts to develop integration plans. Additionally, in June of 2018, Mayor de Blasio announced a plan to reform admissions at the City's so called "Specialized High Schools." As noted above, the SDAG has also made comprehensive recommendations for integration. No other city has the type of movement for integration that exists in NYC, and it is important to celebrate this work, while also considering what we can learn from these efforts.

Over the past two years, and more recently with the arrival of Chancellor Carranza, the issue of integration has found its way almost daily into articles, panel discussions, and advocacy spaces as a top priority for the City to tackle. He has spoken powerfully about the issue, embracing the challenge of not just talking about integration but pursuing it. At a town hall in 2018, he said:

Sixty-four years ago, the question of...integrating schools was definitively settled by the United States Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education*. The court said, "separate is never equal," especially in education. But 64 years later, the city and the country have little to show for it.

It has been refreshing to hear Chancellor Carranza acknowledge the importance of seeking integration, and the advocacy community has welcomed his voice

on this issue. However, the debate surrounding integration has necessarily elicited strong feelings from those for and against integration. There is an ongoing city-wide debate, and supporters of the *status quo* have emerged in force.

WHY NOT JUST SEPARATE BUT EQUAL?

Segregation has existed in the United States since its inception. It represents one of the many threads of division, sewn into the fabric of this country. For many, the issue of segregation and the contemplation of integration died with Dr. King. For many more, the answer to segregation has been to ignore it, and, for those conscious of the damage of segregation, to try and work around it. These responses to segregation, in my opinion, have contributed to the maintenance of the racial and economic hierarchy that this country has always rested upon. This avoidance and complacency with segregation are mechanisms for what I describe as a *segregationist mindset*: one that has accepted segregation and seeks to assimilate to it rather than disrupt it. This segregationist mindset is a threat to democracy, which was so clearly on display in the 2016 presidential election of Donald Trump. In education, segregationist mindsets are threats to equity and have resulted in models of education premised on scarcity, hyper-competition, and opportunity hoarding. “Separate but equal” will never be sustainable, and this is why integration is imperative.

The manifestations of segregation go beyond separation and far beyond just the separation of bodies, which undermines democracy. But this separation of people has unfolded a range of impacts that may not always be intuitively connected to segregation. I will attempt to make the connections here. One product of segregation is the strategic divestment in schools serving Black and Latinx students. Battles for

“Integration is the movement of resources, pedagogy, curriculum, and school cultural practices towards inclusiveness, anti-racism, and universal design.”

funding equity have acknowledged segregation as the cause for funding disparities but have seemed to align with a segregationist mindset that separate can be equal. It cannot. Second, segregation and the *segregationist mindset* are premised in deficit narratives and the dehumanization of students of color. Segregation reinforces Eurocentric curriculum, pedagogical methods, and cultural practices that undermine and exclude students of color from accessing education. Third, segregation and a segregationist mindset are essential to the school-to-prison pipeline, targeting punitive and exclusionary discipline practice on students of color. Just as neighborhoods of color are more heavily policed, schools serving majorities of students of color tend to align with more harsh and punitive discipline practices. Lastly, a historic product of desegregation was the mass firing of Black teachers in the South. To this day, this country has never recouped those losses, and the result has ensured that students of color do not feel represented in education.

Each of these impact areas requires intervention to achieve *Real Integration* and align closely with the 1968 Green v. Kent County case more popularly known as “Green Factors.” Green Factors articulated the six areas that desegregation plans must impact: students, faculty and staff assignments, facilities, extracurriculars, and transportation. It is clear these issues

“Segregation reinforces Eurocentric curriculum, pedagogical methods, and cultural practices that undermine and exclude students of color from accessing education.”

still exist today in NYC Schools, but there is a new wave of advocacy being led by students.

THE NEW WAVE OF ADVOCACY

For supporters of integration, the apparent solutions often lead to thoughts of massive busing programs, controlled choice admissions, and magnet schools. These initiatives primarily represent a focus on enrollment or desegregation policies. Youth advocates who have analyzed the mechanics of NYC educational segregation have aligned themselves with a broad racial justice framework for integration.⁹ This framework, premised on the youth advocacy organization IntegrateNYC’s 5 R’s of *Real Integration*, which prioritizes enrollment policies, while equally considering a broader range of reforms around policy and practice. The 5 R’s presents a theory of action that insists the enrollment work begins by dismantling the structural barriers to access that facilitate concentrations of privilege and vulnerability. This means eliminating exclusionary admissions policies such as screens and rethinking the use of programs such as Gifted and Talented. It also means working towards district-wide and then borough-wide enrollment policies that facilitate mobility and equitable parent choice, disrupting gerrymandered community school districts.

We have already seen these priorities play out, whether it be at some of the

individual schools such as Castle Bridge Elementary, Star Academy, Harvest Collegiate, Park Slope Collegiate, and in the district-wide plans such as the Diversity in Admissions plan for Community School District (CSD) 1, and Community School District 15 Middle School Diversity Plan, which eliminates all screens from middle schools. Each of these plans builds equitable enrollment policies, while making deep investments in inclusive practices and culturally responsive education.

The SDAG’s report aligns with this student-designed framework and offers many practical steps to move in the right direction. The initial report falls short of calling for specific admissions policy changes, but a follow-up report commits to more specificity on these matters.

The movement for integration has grown significantly over the past few years and planning a role in this work has been the privilege of a lifetime. The work is by no means complete, but we are on the path forward.

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Matt Gonzales is the director of the School Diversity Project at New York Appleseed, where he advocates for integrated schools in New York City and New York State. He can be reached at: mgonzales@nyappleseed.org. Follow him on Twitter: @MATTtheG.

Reclaiming My Humanity: How I Became A School Integration Advocate

SHINO TANIKAWA

This article shares an inspiring story of how an open heart can become a bridge between cultures and a powerful space for reimagining structures of oppression. In this beautifully written narrative exposition, Tanikawa speaks to what it means to be woke, working for integration, and Asian in a world of privilege, power, and paradox.

I am a newcomer to the school integration scene. Although I have been a public school parent and advocate for well over a decade and have cared about school diversity from the very beginning of my involvement, it was not until I learned to accept and own my racial identity a few years ago that I could begin to see myself as a school integration advocate. My journey for school integration has been both internal and external, requiring me to critically examine and dig deeply into my own history, experiences, values and beliefs, and at the same time build externally a movement with like-minded parents, educators, and students.

My two daughters are both public school kids from Pre-Kindergarten to high school. We live in Community School District 2 in Manhattan—one of the most affluent and whitest CSDs in New York City (NYC). I began my public school advocacy “career” with class size, school capacity, test-based accountability, and adequate funding as the major issues. I was interested in school diversity but my advocacy in it was not rooted in an understanding of systems of oppression. Rather it came from a place of liberal progressivism that is full of privilege, entitlement, and the “savior complex” that actually perpetuates white supremacy. Although I am an Asian immigrant, my family is affluent, and I have a post-graduate degree and a professional career. My socioeconomic status shielded me from overt racism and discrimination, and I assimilated with whiteness quite effectively—so effectively I did not know I was a person of color until recently.

LOOKING BACK

I have realized that my desire for school integration work is rooted somewhere deep inside me. This is hardly unique as I have observed that this work is deeply personal to my fellow integration activists. I wanted to know the emotional reason why I do the school integration work—as a volunteer in my spare time—because the intellectual answer to the question (e.g., it’s a moral imperative) does not feel authentic. So, in search of a truer answer, I have been doing a little digging into my past and looking inward to finding what it is that drives me.

I grew up in the 1960's Tokyo where everyone looked the same, spoke the same language, ate the same food, understood the same culture, and by and large had similar living standards. But in this homogeneous environment my family was different. My father was not a "salaryman" working for a corporation like my friends' fathers. My mother was a woman who spoke her mind unlike other mothers who smiled warmly and never yelled at other people's kids. As a result, I often felt I did not belong. Looking back, I wonder if this childhood experience might have planted the seeds of my yearning for diversity: When there are diverse people, nobody feels like the odd one out.

In a conformist country like Japan, being different was not easy. But in the U.S. being "individualistic" is valued. There were many reasons why my parents and I decided for me to attend high school in the U.S. but the lure (and the myth) of "you can be whatever you want and do whatever you want" was certainly a factor. My father and I selected a progressive private high school, one that is most different from Japanese pedagogy. (Little did I know it was very different from the mainstream American pedagogy as well.) I was beginning to embrace being different and unique.

I did not consciously think about this at the time but looking back, many of my friends at this predominantly white private school were students of color (and there were not that many!). It seemed that while I embraced the American brand of individualism and non-conformity I still yearned to belong. And, in a private school, I somehow figured out that I was part of the students of color group.

After three years at the small, very white private high school in a suburb of Boston, I applied to a college in NYC because I wanted to live in the

"Melting Pot." The high school was certainly more diverse than anything I had experienced in Japan, but it was still a private school in suburban Boston—not exactly a bastion of diversity. But as an 18-year-old foreign student, I lacked the sophistication needed to find a truly integrated college. I quite superficially chose the college I attended because it was in NYC. It turned out to be not so diverse (but it had lots of Asian students) and not quite integrated (students congregated by race and ethnicity—Korean women's club, Latina women's club, etc., and professors were all white). I did not understand why people wanted to hang out with other people who were like them. To me, the whole point of living in the Melting Pot was to meet different people. For this and other reasons, I transferred to an art school as a sophomore and spent the rest of my college life with quirky artists. Although not racially diverse, many of us felt we did not belong in the mainstream, and we cherished being different.

All through high school and college, while I was pursuing being an individual without the constraints of fitting in and conforming, I was also absorbing white supremacy with its internalized white superiority and the inferiority of people of color. Looking back now, I understand why I began shunning my heritage, stopped speaking Japanese, and tried my best to fit into the white norm. The irony of it all was completely lost on me: a young Asian woman working hard to conform to the white norm in search of her individuality.

So, I spent most of my adult life pretending to be a "white Asian"—otherwise known as a "twinkie" or a "banana." I even married a white American to unknowingly reinforce the stereotype of an Asian woman. I would be decades before I unearthed my Asian identity.

**HOW I BECAME INVOLVED IN
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

In 1999 when my older daughter was ready for Pre-Kindergarten, I, like many white parents around me, began looking for elementary schools. I already knew we had a good elementary school in our zone (our downstairs neighbor had school age children), but it did not offer full-day PreK. Moreover, I found it not very diverse racially, so I looked around. For a variety of reasons, we decided our local school was the best choice, and I spent 14 years as a parent at that school (two children without overlapping years).

During those years, I noticed the number of students of color decline steadily as the school age population grew and the neighborhood became more expensive. While the school was lacking in racial diversity, it offered another type of diversity. The school had bridge classes in which students in two grades learned together as well as integrated co-teaching (ICT) classes in which students with disabilities learned with their general education peers. This diversity in learning abilities and styles in the classroom offered an important education for my children by broadening what it meant to be good students. They learned to find the strengths and talents in individual students and to respect the differences without attaching values or judgement. They had classmates who were good at math but struggled with reading. They had classmates who were not great with academics but were phenomenal artists. When my younger daughter was in her 4th grade ICT class, she came home one day to tell me about her classmate with disabilities and behavioral issues. (He often ran out of the classroom in an emotional distress.) On that day, she discovered that this student excelled in math. At the tender young age of 9, children already harbored biases against students with disabilities. But for my daughter, spending time with students

with disabilities on a daily basis began to chip away at the biases. She learned not to judge or define people by their disabilities or abilities.

As valuable as these lessons were for me and my children, the lack of racial and socioeconomic diversity was still troubling. The school lacked teachers of color as well. But because of my and the school's affluence, I harbored no sense of urgency for school integration: My children were receiving a "good" education after all. It was important but not enough to set aside other issues I cared about, such as class size and test score-based accountability. This was before I learned how an education in a racially isolated environment is, in fact, detrimental to my children's ability to realize their full humanity.

**FROM AN INVOLVED PARENT
TO AN ADVOCATE**

When my older daughter was in 3rd grade, I became involved with the elementary school PTA. As part of the PTA, I began attending District 2 PTA Presidents' Council—a gathering of PTA leaders from District 2 elementary and middle schools. There I learned that issues affecting my daughter's school, such as high stakes testing, large class sizes, etc. were systemic problems that affected all schools. That was my foray into public education advocacy, but I was still just a public school advocate—a long way from becoming a school integration activist.

From the District 2 Presidents' Council, I moved up to the Community Education Council District 2 (CECD2) in 2009. I have served on the CECD2 since and at various times held the position of President or Vice President. I currently chair the Diversity Committee.

Early on in my CECD2 tenure, I met a veteran member from our neighboring district, CSD1. She has been advocating for an equity-based admissions process

for elementary schools in CSD1, whose schools do not have attendance zones and offer seats through a lottery. From her, I learned about a process called controlled choice and how a free market choice admissions process, without mechanisms for equitable enrollment, creates segregated schools.

Removing attendance zones from elementary schools in District 2 is likely a non-starter partially because of the geography of the district. However, District 2 already offers middle school choice which presents a real opportunity. I started contemplating the possibilities, but on the CECD2, conversations were limited. Shortly after I came on, we had several new elementary schools come online which required the CECD2 to create attendance zones. Like any other school zoning, the meetings were contentious and often got ugly. We had multiple years of school rezonings, which took much of our energy leaving very little space for taking up other issues.

Partly due to inadequate school capacity planning, we began seeing middle school overcrowding (you build new elementary schools, the kids inevitably grow up to go to middle school). The increase in students appears to have come mostly from affluent white families (based on the neighborhoods that opened new elementary schools and the residential development that prompted new school capacities). With the increased demand and scarcity of middle school seats perceived to be desirable, we began hearing complaints from families on the stressful process of middle school choice.

In 2013, a dozen or so parents came to a CECD2 meeting to complain that their children did not receive offers to any of the schools they listed on their applications. We established the CECD2 Middle School Committee to begin examining the issues more deeply. The Middle School Committee met on a

regular basis and analyzed the issues: that the process (1) lacked transparency, (2) was highly stressful for families and children, and (3) was inequitable. The last issue was framed as equity of access: Some students did not stand a chance of getting into some of the highly coveted D2 middle schools because of screening.

My own thinking has evolved through this process. When we began the Middle School Committee, I was not opposed to screening. There were a few reasons for my position on screening. My older daughter went to a very diverse (racially and socioeconomically and by test scores) middle school that used screens to admit students. My younger daughter went to another very diverse middle school that used screens. These schools were not the “most popular” schools and were intentional about maintaining their diversity. I understood that the interplay between screening and the demand (e.g., the number of applicants per seat) mattered in whether a school becomes segregated. I also understood that screening could be used to create diverse schools. I also knew, from following the trends in CSD1 that a lottery system of admission (what the NYC DOE calls “unscreened”) does not automatically create diverse schools. Lottery only makes enrollment reflect the applicant pool: If the applicant pool is predominantly white, then the admitted students will be predominantly white.

The more personal reason for not opposing screening was that I wanted something that could potentially teach my very privileged mixed-race children a little humility. My older daughter was rejected by her first-choice school. As hard as it was for her (and me, to see her upset), I thought a small rejection would be healthy. Looking back, I am embarrassed by this line of logic that only a privileged person can embrace.

As I began analyzing data for the Middle School Committee—demographics,

socioeconomic status, test scores, students with disabilities and English Language Learners (or Multilingual Learners), admissions methods, applicants to seats, and so forth—I began to realize how segregated our middle schools are in District 2 even though we have diverse students (one of a handful of districts in which we have relatively balanced representation of races). After many months of discussions and data analyses, the focus of the whole committee shifted to diversity in our middle schools. In July 2016, the CECD2 officially changed from the Middle School Committee to the Diversity Committee.

**DISCOVERING MY RACIAL IDENTITY
TO BECOME A SCHOOL
INTEGRATION ADVOCATE**

I was still not a school integration advocate at this point. I thought diversity was what we needed; however, I was still full of internalized white (and Model Minority) superiority and internalized inferiority of people of color (including Asians). My understanding of racism was limited to the interpersonal and the “southern” kind, even though I have had my fair share of racial microaggressions.

I acted like a typical white Manhattan liberal (except I wasn’t white) with all of the pitfalls—the deficit narrative, the denial, the fragility, the savior complex. I understood intellectually that there was systemic oppression of Black and Latinx people, but I did not understand how the system was upheld by well-meaning white (and many affluent Asian) people, or how the system did not require overtly racist people to function. At the same time, I was always very aware of my ethnic heritage as a Japanese citizen. I was an “accidental” immigrant: I did not come to the U.S. to escape an oppressive regime or in search of better opportunities. I came because my father had the means to send me

to a private school in the U.S., and I ended up staying because I fell in love and married an American citizen. But I was able to maintain a close connection to the country of my birth and carried a healthy dose of national pride, even while shunning my background because being Asian was nerdy and uncool. It is remarkable how one can harbor both pride and shame in her heritage at the same time. I identified as Japanese—an ethnicity, but not as an Asian—a race. My personal history, affluence, and East Asian origin shielded me from much of the worst kind of oppression and kept me in the fog of whiteness, even though once in a while the fog would clear, and I could see and feel racist acts against me.

There was no pivotal moment that led me to my current path. Rather there were many “clues” that were pointing to it. In 2015, I served as the treasurer of my younger daughter’s middle school. The principal requested PTA funds for an anti-racism workshop for the entire faculty. In a conversation after the workshop, the principal said people of color cannot be racist because racism is about racial prejudice with power. That little comment made me realize how little I knew about racism. Months later, I took a social justice workshop through work. Although it was not explicitly about racism, the two-and-a-half-day workshop was firmly rooted in anti-racism and the work of Paulo Freire. I was hooked.

In early 2017, I organized an all-day anti-racism workshop for District 2 parents as part of the Diversity Committee’s work. From that point on, I attended many anti-racism workshops and devoured articles, books, and blogs, and I continue to obsessively read books on race and racism. As I began developing a deeper understanding of racism in the U.S., I was able to see the problems with the public school system more clearly. I realized putting diverse students in the same classroom was

not enough. Teachers needed to alter their curriculum and pedagogy. We also needed more teachers who look like the students they teach. How we discipline students also needed to be reformed. Resources do not just mean money; human resources, social capital and opportunities for students all make a difference in a child's education. The whole system needed to change, not just a school here and a school there. I began using the term school integration instead of diversity and, in my own way, defined it as diverse students, diverse teachers, and culturally relevant pedagogy.

At the same time, I was making the journey of awakening. I began building a network of education advocates and anti-racism activists citywide. Stepping outside of the District 2 bubble was one of the best educational experiences for me. I have met fellow public school advocates from the South Bronx, Brownsville, Bed-Stuy, Sunset Park, and other low income communities of color in NYC. I have also met parent advocates for children with disabilities. Needless to say, their stories and experiences are quite different from mine, and their perspectives have been invaluable in my work. For instance, I learned that "school integration" can mean busing Black students into white schools—a traumatic history from the 1960s. I have met parents who do not support school integration because they believe school integration is based on the notion that Black and Latinx children need white children to succeed. There are parents of color who support standardized testing because it offers them a mechanism to hold schools accountable. I learned the conventional public meeting format is not always the right way to engage disenfranchised parents. By working with these parents, I was experiencing firsthand the enormous benefit of a diverse learning environment. They have broadened my horizon, deepened my understanding, and made me a more effective advocate.

I also became a part of a larger community of parents who deeply cared about the public school system for all children. Even with our disagreements and differing perspectives, we are each other's support system, and having them in my world has sustained me.

As I deepened my understanding of structural racism in the U.S., it took a while longer for me to begin to grasp how Asians fit into the racial hierarchy. As eye opening as the workshops, books, and articles have been, analyses of Asians, particularly in public education, were not as readily available. Even in the racial justice arena we seem to be frequently forgotten. I know why this is: We don't fit into the binary narrative of racism, and our stories make institutional and structural racism more complicated. I understand white privilege and fragility because of my proximity to whiteness. I have also experienced microaggression and harbor a low level of fear that the system will label me undesirable. I am aware my privilege is given to me by the white power structure. But I have not been subject to the more traumatic and damaging racism of the type my fellow people of color must endure on a daily basis.

So my anti-racism and school integration work has led me to dig deeper into understanding Asian Americans. I learned that we are an oppressed people who have lived through lynchings, government sanctioned school segregation, red-lining, and exclusion (both from attaining citizenship and exercising rights as citizens). My people were also civil rights activists fighting alongside our Black and Latinx sisters and brothers from the very beginning. I learned how the Model Minority myth was created for political expediency by the U.S. government. At the same time, the Model Minority myth has served many of us in attaining the positions we have. We are both victims and perpetrators in this system, but I

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I realized putting diverse students in the same classroom was not enough. Teachers needed to alter their curriculum and pedagogy. We also needed more teachers who look like the students they teach.

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now understand how the system uses Asians as a wedge between the white power structure and Black and Latinx people fighting for their humanity. And when the wedge is not needed, we are ignored or treated as “the other” who does not belong.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

School integration work requires an understanding of racism in this country, especially if you are white or East Asian. This is often painful work that requires one to dig deeply into oneself and come face-to-face with all the implicit biases and internalized racism baked into one body. It certainly challenged me because acknowledging my own internalized racism threatened my identity as a good, conscientious person. I began to see this as clearing my vision to see the world for what it really is so that I could be authentic in the work I do. It is also work that is constant (every day when you are interacting with people) and permanent (because the world will not change in my lifetime), and frankly exhausting at times.

As much as this work is internal, it also requires one to go external, to form friendships and partnerships with people outside of our comfortable bubbles. To understand the system, one needs to see it through perspectives different from our own. If we do not understand the

complexities and nuances of this system, we cannot begin to think of solutions. People who work with us are also important for our self-care. My fellow activists in this work are the ones who keep me going and nourish my heart and mind.

Needless to say, it has not been an easy journey. Recently, I had fellow Asian parents call me racist because I support reforming NYC Specialized High Schools admission policies. I have had white parents accuse me of not representing District 2 families because I want to make the system more equitable for Black and Latinx families. It is tempting to write them off as entitled, privileged, unwoke, racist, or clueless, but I am trying to see it through the lens of how white supremacy robs white people of their humanity, too.

I truly believe school integration is a way to begin dismantling the white supremacist system at work in education in order to move toward an anti-racist education system. Closing the opportunity gap, ensuring equitable distribution of resources, and giving a high quality education to all students are important goals, but if we can raise the next generation of students with fewer implicit biases aimed at them and less internalized racism and with a better understanding of race and racism in our society, then maybe we can dream of an entirely different system that is not rooted in white supremacy. To me this work is a matter of survival for the entire human species.

Shino Tanikawa is the vice president of District 2’s Community Education Council and a school integration advocate. She can be reached at: estuaryqueen@gmail.com. Follow her on Twitter: @Estuaryqueen.

Whose School Integration?

SONYA DOUGLASS HORSFORD

This article reimagines the place of integration in the struggle to advance equity in education. Dr. Sonya Douglass Horsford provides a passionate counter-commentary, inviting readers to rethink integration as both a paradigm and strategy useful for representing the needs and interests of students of color, whom she argues should experience schooling with dignity in environments that value and want them.

I often get the sense that my critique of school integration is interpreted as a lack of support for the cause of racial diversity and unity. When I first began delivering talks to discuss my book, *Learning in a Burning House: Educational Inequality, Ideology, and (Dis)Integration* (2011), there was usually someone in the audience who asked (and others who silently wondered), if I thought that the all-Black segregated schools described in the book were better for Black children than the ones we have today. I never quite knew how to answer the question, and I suppose it is because it was never mine to answer.

I didn't live through Jim Crow or attend an all-Black segregated school. I went to public schools in Las Vegas, Nevada, in the mid-1980s and early 1990s. My classmates represented a wide range of racial, cultural, and religious backgrounds. My close friends were African American, white, Mexican, Filipina, Cuban, and Vietnamese—some of whom, like me, represented mixed ethnic ancestry, were children of immigrants, and whose parents worked in the gaming or hospitality industry, served in the military, or were able to land a government job with good benefits. Many of us served as cultural brokers between our homes, schools, and the broader institutions that we navigated alongside or on behalf of a parent who spoke Spanish or Korean or Tagalog at home. We may have looked different from one another but had so much more in common—the pressures of growing up, trying to fit in, and hoping to make our parents proud by doing well in school. We were their American Dream.

And many years later, as a Black mother of three children (middle school, high school, and college) who wants what is best for her children, I continue to wrestle with what constitutes the best type of learning environment for young people in a society that does not value their intellect, culture, or humanity. I also question how we as a nation make assumptions about the racial composition of our schools, which have implications for how integration is defined and what problem it aims to solve. What do we mean by *school integration* when, for the first time in the nation's history, the majority of school-aged children are students of color? What does an integrated school look in the current political context? And *whose* school integration is it?

WHOSE INTEGRATION IS IT?

As part of a fifty-year retrospective of the Brown decision in *The Journal of American History* in 2004, historian and African American studies professor Kevin Gaines explored the competing conceptions of *integration* that emerged in response to *Brown v. Board of Education*. In the opening essay titled, “Whose Integration Was It?” Gaines described the concerns expressed by African American political scientist Preston King in 1965 regarding the term *integration* and the misperception that had swirled around its usage by an ally of the cause, white historian August Meier. King argued that Meier had “failed to comprehend the difference between *integration* as the demise of separate Black institutions, and *desegregation*, namely, the overthrow of the regime of racial subjugation defined by the exclusion of Black people “from access to power, wealth, education, status, and dignity” (pp. 19-20). According to Gaines (2004), by 1965,

...integration had generally described a top-down vision of racial change endorsed by U.S. officialdom, northern liberals, and the civil rights establishment, a process orchestrated and managed primarily by policymakers. Who, except bigots and extremists, could possibly object to that exemplary vision of equality and color-blind liberalism? (p. 20)

These conflicting definitions of integration are also evident in the post-Civil Rights Era. Borrowing language from the Black freedom struggle for racial justice, a 21st century network of education reformers, policy elites, philanthropists, and social justice advocates represent a new power structure that is largely white, and yet wields disproportionate control over the education of children of color and the

options made available to their parents and in their communities. These modern-day “white architects” (Watkins, 2001) of urban education, like their predecessors, continue to advance a vision of equity and diversity grounded in the belief that if the *Brown* decision declared separate schools inherently unequal, the way to address the problem of educational inequality is through racial integration.

This conception of integration, however, remains a dilemma for the cause of racial justice because it fails to acknowledge that *Brown* “fell considerably short of the structural vision of equality and redistributive justice sought by African American litigants and many black parents” (Watkins, 2001, p. 21). It also overlooks the Black experience and perspective on the question of desegregation, which has in many cases, as explained by Preston King, misses the original goal of Black parents and plaintiffs—equality and freedom. Freedom from racial violence, subjugation, and discrimination and equal rights and protections of citizenship granted under the law. Yet, any critique of integration can easily become interpreted as either support for voluntary separatism, an unhelpful embrace of pessimism, or a misguided nostalgia for community control that fails to find hope in the possibilities of a diverse, inclusive, and just society.

Perhaps this is why Zora Neale Hurston waited one year after *Brown I* (1954) to “break her silence” on the court’s decision in a letter to the editor of the *Orlando Sentinel* titled, “Court Order Can’t Mix the Races Mix.” She wrote, “The whole matter revolves around the self-respect of my people. How much satisfaction can I get from a court order for somebody to associate with me who does not wish me near them?”

Herein lies the heart of the issue—the self-respect of Black people in a society where Black lives remain devalued and unprotected. Some research studies

suggest racially diverse schools benefit all students, but how do we account for the price that is paid by Black children who exist in schools and classrooms where they are not wanted? Where members of the school community believe the increased presence or participation of Black families diminishes the overall quality of the school? Or where the gifts, talents, and achievement of Black children go unrecognized or unrewarded?

It reminds me of James Baldwin's 1963 novel, *The Fire Next Time*, where Baldwin asked, "Do I really want to be integrated into a burning house?" His question emphasizing the point that the concept of integration being advanced was neither his idea, at his request, or worth the cost.

A VISION PROBLEM

One source of confusion around what school integration is stems from differing visions of educational equality and opportunity that come from competing definitions of segregation. As legal scholar and critical race theorist Lani Guinier explained, *Brown's* declaration that "separate schools are inherently unequal" became the gold standard for formal equality leading colorblind integration advocates "to equate race-conscious government decisions that seek to develop an integrated society with the evils of *de jure* segregation." This certainly coincided with my formative views on racial segregation, where I had concluded that since the forced separation of people by race was wrong, integration must be right.

My thinking would shift in the midst of my doctoral studies in 2006 after meeting Professor Asa Hilliard at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association in San Francisco. After sharing the purpose and rationale of my proposed study and plans to interview retired African American school superintendents who

attended all-Black segregated schools about their views on integration, he gently broke the news to me that "integration never happened." He then asked me about the research that had formed my conception of integration, which was of course, as he anticipated, the widely-cited books and articles by white scholars who amplified the benefits of school integration and warned of the dangerous reversal of *Brown* and looming trend toward resegregation. It was hard news to take in the moment, but necessarily paradigm-shifting in forcing me to engage critically with the research literature and taken-for-granted assumptions about school integration and the education of Black children through the white gaze. Who were the researchers conducting these studies? How were they framing the problem of school segregation? What perspectives and experiences did they bring to their work? In what ways, if any, did their work produce meaningful change in the area of school integration? How had it helped to achieve educational equality for Black children?

It also prepared me for what my study participants would eventually share and become a critical counternarrative pushing back on much of what I had read in the school desegregation literature. What I learned from these eight Black educational leaders, men and women, who had actually attended all-Black segregated schools and ascended to the superintendency in desegregated school systems was: (1) "There is nothing wrong with something being all Black," (2) Sometimes I feel like the problems started with desegregation," and (3) "We've never truly integrated." They emphasized the value and significance of Black organizations and institutions in supporting their own educational development (all but one graduated from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)) felt strongly that their all-Black schools and institutions prepared them well and gave them the confidence to compete and succeed

academically and professionally in the desegregated world.

As superintendents, they would face a new set of educational injustices and inequalities with Black children in their schools and systems being identified disproportionately as low-achieving, having special needs, discipline problems, or less capable than their peers. Sadly, these trends persist sixty-five years since Brown dismantled the century-long doctrine of separate-but-equal. In *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (1955), C. Vann Woodward explains why:

Segregation, as the word is used here, means physical distance, not social distance – physical separation of people for reasons of race. Its opposite is not necessarily ‘integration’ as the word is currently used, or ‘equality.’ Nor does the absence of segregation necessarily imply the absence of other types of injustice or the lack of a caste structure of society ... Since segregation is subject to the whim of individuals and the custom of localities it could and did crop up in all periods and in numerous manifestations. (pp. xi-xii)

How might equality and justice for Black people ever be achieved if segregation is in fact “subject to the whims” of the members of society? What have we learned from our complicated history of racial segregation in schools? What is the state of Black education in the post-Civil Rights Era, and how will today’s integration efforts impact the social, emotional, academic, cultural, and intellectual lives of Black children for the better? Put differently, does the Black child *need* integrated schools?

BEFORE AND BEYOND INTEGRATION

In reflecting on my own schooling experiences in Las Vegas, it is hard to

say whether or not my schools were integrated based on today’s standards. I also wonder if the schools my children have attended over the years would be considered integrated and how that conception might look different in Salt Lake City, Utah; Atlanta, Georgia; El Paso, Texas, or New York City. Are traditional public or charter schools designed for boys of color inherently unequal? Historically Black Colleges and Universities? What about private independent schools with nearly all white enrollment, faculty, and administration? If research shows that Black students with Black elementary school teachers graduate from high school at greater rates, how does one leverage these benefits while supporting diversity and integration?

In his 1935 essay, “Does the Negro Need Separate Schools,” W.E.B. Du Bois takes on the question of whether separate schools and institutions are needed for “the proper education of Negro race.” He reported that of the four million Black children of school age, two million were in school and that 4 out of 5 of those children were being taught by Black teachers in separate schools. Less than 500,000 were being taught by white teachers in the North. His answer to the question was yes; for as he explained:

We shall get a finer, better balance of spirit; an infinitely more capable and rounded personality by putting children in schools where they are wanted, and where they are happy and inspired, than in thrusting them into hells where they are ridiculed and hated. (p. 330)

He also delineated the requirements for the “proper education of any people” that, nearly eighty years later, reflects what advocates for culturally relevant and responsive education have been working to reclaim and restore:

- sympathetic touch between teacher and pupil;
- knowledge on the part of the teacher, not simply of the individual taught, but of his surroundings and background, and the history of his class and group;
- such contact between pupils, and between teacher and pupil, on the basis of perfect social equality, as will increase this sympathy and knowledge; and
- facilities for education in equipment and housing, and the promotion of such extra-curricular activities as will tend to induct the child into life.

Rather than continue to debate the contested claim that integrated schools benefit all students, which remains contested along the color line, we must shift our focus and energy toward a vision that moves beyond a conception of school integration that has been decontextualized from its Jim Crow past. As a nation, we have been given the gift of current and future generations representing a rich tapestry of ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious, and intellectual diversity—for whom top-down visions of integration based largely on racial classifications—byproducts of white supremacy and racism, will always fall short. We are a long overdue for a more radical imagination of what education can and must be for America’s new majority.

It is invigorating to see students, parents, educators, community members and activists representing historically disenfranchised and unprotected communities rightly demanding the resources necessary to achieve a proper education. Instead of trying to convince, through policy, “somebody to associate with me who does not wish me near them,” adequate and equitable resources must be granted *before* true integration can be realized and sustained. This redistribution of resources, with less concern on the “separate” and a greater focus on the “equal” must be used to

provide children with access to caring, demanding, and well-prepared teachers with high expectations, a curriculum that teaches the history of their group, and a supportive and affirming environment that fosters self-knowledge, self-confidence, and self-respect. In the words of Zora Neale Hurston, “Thems my sentiments and I am sticking by them.”

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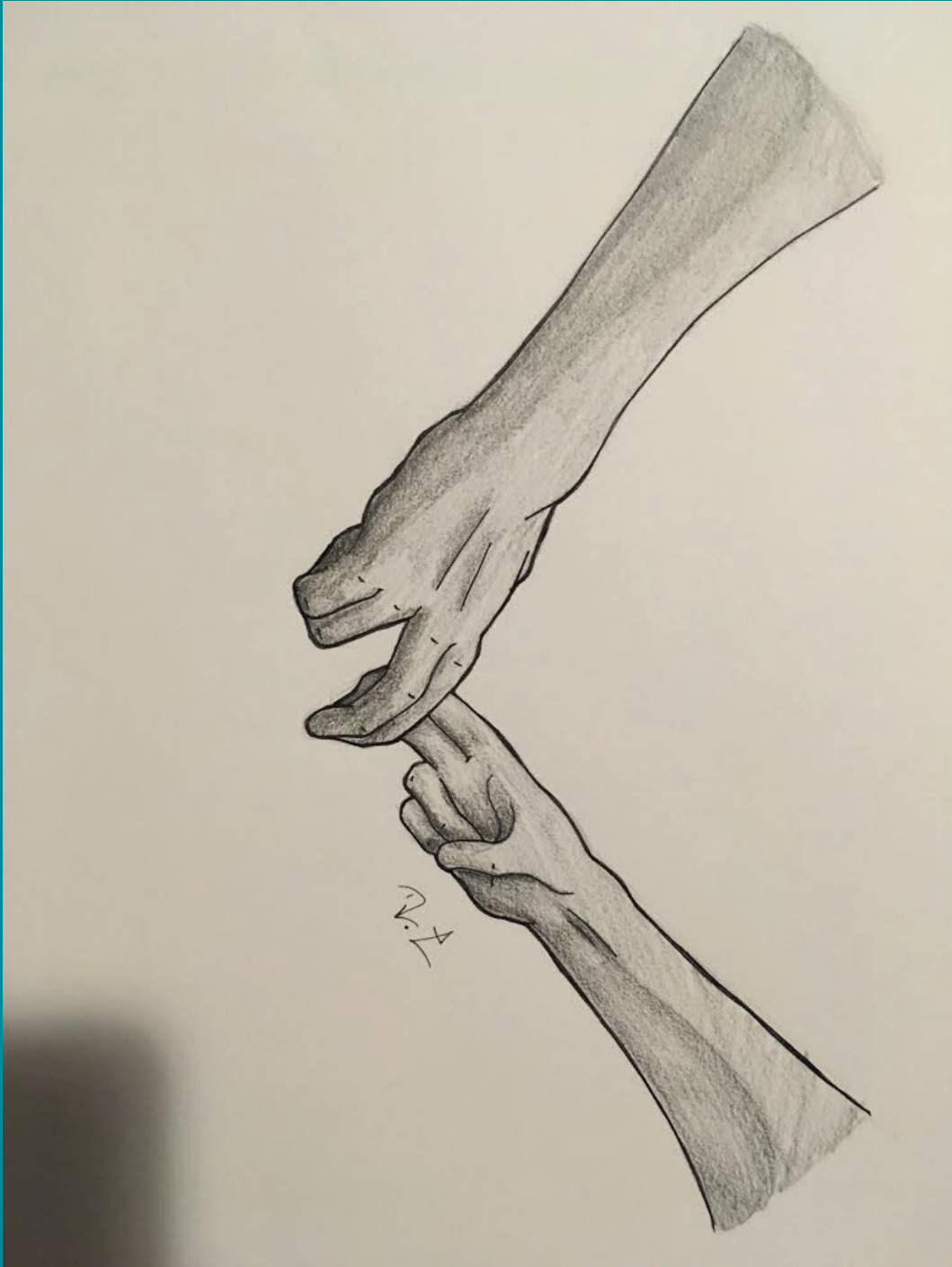
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Dr. Sonya Horsford is Associate Professor of Education Leadership at Teachers College, Columbia University. She can be reached by email at: horsford@tc.columbia.edu.

Conversations in Urban Education



A Conversation with Hebh Jamal

This conversation explores what it means to be a youth activist in the struggle for education equity. Hebh Jamal gives an honest assessment of her experience being a student in a predominantly white, high-achieving school where Black young men were virtually absent. She shares how she came to rally other youth to advocate for integration and how that moment became a movement in New York City.

Paloma Garcia: To start, can you state your name, age, and current occupation?

Hebh Jamal: My name is Hebh Jamal. I'm 19. I'm a sophomore in college and am currently a youth director of an organization called Muslim American Society. I've been at the Muslim American Society for about five months. Before that, I was a Youth Policy Fellow with New York Appleseed.

At the Muslim American Society, we try to inspire youth, get them active, and make them feel comfortable and [aware] that there is such a thing as a Muslim community around them. Part of the focus could be, you know. The interests of the students. Maybe it could be political activism. A lot of it is rooted in spiritual awareness as well, but mostly the idea is to provide a community [for] Muslim youth.

PG: As you know, this issue is about integration and you're doing many things. You're a sophomore in college currently. You've worked with New York Appleseed who focuses on integration work in New York City, and you're also actively involved with the Muslim American Society. Can you start by focusing on your connection with school integration?

HJ: So, I've probably told this story so many times, but my relationship with integration actually started out as mere curiosity. Before I was in this integration work, I was actually on the front cover of The New York Times for my commentary on Trump's presidency and rising Islamophobia in the U.S. I was then invited to speak at a few high schools on the topic.

I went to a predominantly white high school in Times Square. So, when I visited this other high school to speak, I saw an environment that was like really inclusive and diverse, and that was super abnormal to me at the time. And I didn't really understand why up until then. I continuously researched, and realized it's because New York City [has] one of the most segregated school systems in the country. And after that, I just kept talking about it. One space where I would talk about it was in my high school, and afterwards I got involved with integrateNYC, which was a really, you know, small organization at the time. I came up with the concept of having a monthly Youth Council where students could actually come and build ideas of what integration was about. And yeah, that's how we actually developed the five R's, which I'm sure you know about. [It] was just adopted by the NYCDOE. So, yeah, this all started from a very genuine kind of thing. It just happened.

PG: It's great to hear that you were able to pursue this curiosity and deeply understand why having an inclusive and diverse space was not the norm in New York City. What was it about that inclusive and diverse space that was important to you? How does that build on the general idea of integration?

HJ: For me, I really believe that in order to be in an educational environment, you have to have diverse opinions, and you have to have, you know, a variety of people from different backgrounds who can speak to different things. For example, at the school I visited, there was no such thing as a clique. Right. There wasn't this inherent self-segregation that you see in other schools. That in itself was abnormal considering that we often are in self-segregated environments. [We] don't go out of our comfort zone. Don't really want to learn new things and be around different people. And honestly, a lot of prestigious schools may have opportunities—you know, I went to Beacon [a magnet high school in NYC], so there was a "great education." But there wasn't diversity in thought, and it didn't really push students to think outside of their comfort zone. They believed that their point-of-view was the truth. And if we're going to be honest in educational environments, that's not a way for progress.

Another thing I noticed in segregated spaces like Beacon is that Black boys are the ones who are not in these environments. Right. One of the main shocks in an inclusive and diverse environment is that there were Black boys, and they participated in the conversation. That wasn't something I was really exposed to in my high school. It's just like there was a very singular thought process and a very specific type of person who went to my high school.

PG: You mentioned there was a singular kind of thought and specific types of people were very obviously excluded from conversations. When you were able to see a more integrated space, these specific people who you never saw as part of the conversation before became part of the conversation. You mentioned Black boys specifically. Do you think there are other groups who you've seen in an integrated space who've had a voice in a way that you hadn't seen in segregated or homogeneous spaces?

HJ: Right, so I'll give you the example of my cousin. She went to a high school that was extremely segregated and had metal detectors. She didn't have a science teacher for like a year and a half. And I went to an extremely different environment, and we live five minutes away, right! Just looking at her experience and hearing stories about how teachers would treat students and, you know, the environment, and she would kind of mention that no one really cares. I remember I brought her to an integrateNYC meeting once, and she actually was comfortable to speak her mind, have ideas, and feel supported in what she was saying. You could tell the difference between a supportive, diverse, inclusive environment versus a segregated one filled with students just like her who don't get the attention they deserve.

I sat down with her once and recorded all of her school experiences. She remembered very traumatic stuff from as early as third grade. I don't think that these environments show genuine care for students. Also, teachers have it bad in these environments. I remember she mentioned that there were a few teachers whom she appreciated, but they were gone before you knew it because that's what ends up happening in segregated high schools. The teachers just want to leave to be in environments that are more prestigious or exclusive.

So yeah, it really depends. Because if you're in an environment that specifically doesn't care about you, that shows you that they don't care by lack of access to opportunities and just the way you're treated in the morning going through a metal detector, then you're going to be affected. It definitely has an impact on your quality of work and your opinions. I feel like that's true across all racial boundaries. If that's how you're treated, it's more common than not that your future won't be as bright as someone who did have those opportunities, who had genuine support from diverse and inclusive environments. But mostly, if we're talking about specific groups of people, it's usually low-income students of color who experience this far more than affluent students for example.

PG: You mentioned earlier that you were just intrigued by this idea of integration and desegregation, and you were able to dig into it and find a lot of information that you were then able to share to advocate for yourself and others. I'm wondering beyond yourself, who are people who should be concerned about school segregation?

HJ: Well, honestly, I think everyone should be. I think education is one of the most important things people should really invest in. And I mean, are you talking about like who should or why should?

PG: Let's start with who should, and then we can look to the why—both questions are important to the conversation.

HJ: Well, the obvious one is politicians and people who fund our educational systems. But the reality is that that won't happen unless the common person understands the importance of education. Students understand that the issues affecting their communities are due to the lack of support within their educational institutions. What

some students understand is that a lot of the issues that happen with their communities is because of the lack of support within the educational institutions.

I remember reading Malcolm X's biography, and there was a specific moment [in the book] where [Malcolm X's] teacher asked the students, what would they want to be in life? And this is a teacher that Malcolm X looked up to. The teacher went to Malcolm X, and Malcolm X said he wanted to be a lawyer. The teacher said, "Well, that that's not something for you people." Right. It was a very ... transformative moment in his life when he was a child.

He was told this. This kind of mentality, these words, can really impact a student's image of themselves and their aspirations. Critically challenging the biases illustrated by this example is really important if we want to foster the positive development of children in schools.

Another example is that my parents are immigrant parents. They didn't really understand the high school application process. If I didn't figure that out for myself, I would probably have gone to a high school that really wasn't as good. Honestly, there is a good/bad dichotomy in New York City, so what I'm trying to say is that if I didn't figure out the process, I probably wouldn't have gotten the educational support that I needed. I probably would have never figured out what school segregation was because I would have been in that environment. So, yes, I really think that the isolation that I saw in my high school was a wake-up call. Those years were transformative because I don't think I would have been cognizant of that isolation, and I don't think I would have understood that this is an extremely problematic issue within America.

PG: You also mentioned low-income students of color being the most negatively impacted by segregated schools, and it sounds like in your framing those are the people who should have the most information and be able to advocate for integration. But I'm also wondering what do you think is the role of the affluent families and students who you mentioned who may be in homogeneous spaces, who may reap benefits of a well-resourced school, and who may perceive their schools as better with more opportunities in general? What is their role in understanding school segregation?

HJ: Well, so here's the issue, the whole conversation on education has been super commodified, whether we're talking about high school or college, and especially high school specific to New York City. But just generally the education is super commodified, and it's very competitive. You know people are going to do what they can to get the best quality education.

Now, I wish that people acted from the kindness of their hearts to be cognizant about where their child goes and how it affects other students. But I don't know if that's a feasible solution. What I really think should happen is that the whole conversation around education should be different. There should be no such thing as a good and bad school in New York City; there should just be high school. Whether you go here or there, it's a good one, a quality one, the same amount of resources and opportunities.

I was mind boggled when I realized there were so many different types of high schools and so many different types of qualities of school. And it was such a competitive process.

Although I really believe that there should be very conscious decision making when it comes to high school, I think there should be advocacy about

doing it through a systemic approach rather than just saying people should do this out of the kindness of their heart. Their needs to be a conversation around the commodifying of education and why that's so harmful. You know the whole neo-liberal aspect to education needs to stop because if we're talking about education through a free market perspective, there are winners and losers. And oftentimes the losers are Black boys.

I think the issue is much deeper than just what white parents should do. They're just playing the system right. We just have to change the system. We can't expect people to freely do what is right in a system that structurally isn't right. There needs to be a systemic change that gets to the deep-rooted issues that cause segregation.

PG: I'm going to shift the conversation slightly with this next question. Who do you look to (this could be organizations or individuals) as role models or allies in the movement for integration?

HJ: I'd have to say Matt Gonzales from New York Appleseed, IntegrateNYC students, Sarah Camiscoli and Sarah Zapiler who are the adult allies at IntegrateNYC, Brandon Hernandez who is the principal of Bronx Academy of Letters, and David Kirkland who is an NYU Professor and Executive Director at NYU Metro Center. These are all people that I've personally worked with who proved to be extremely amazing advocates for the work and who would do anything to uplift the voices of students in the process. But there are also so many other people behind the scenes who do so much work that I'm probably forgetting. But if I were to pick, it would be those people.

PG: You mentioned one of the things that makes them a role model and ally is their ability to uplift student voice in this movement to integrate schools.

Is there anything else that makes them ideal for being a role model/ally in this work?

HJ: A common vision. Every time I've been in these circles, these spheres of influence, there was never an argument over different visions of what a school should be. There was constant commitment to justice and having the most equitable education system. That's the vision, and that's another quality that makes them strong advocates for the work.

PG: You have been involved in various social justice movements including the pro-immigration rally you coordinated in response to President Donald Trump's January 2017 executive order barring people from seven predominantly Muslim countries. How would you say that these issues relate to the integration work in which you are also involved?

HJ: I received a lot of media attention for the rally I coordinated in response to the Muslim ban. I do do a lot of immigration work. I also currently do a lot of Palestinian advocacy work as well. And I'm Palestinian, so that's probably been my primary field of activism and advocacy for as long as I could remember. I guess this advocacy is what kind of ties everything together. I'm also focused on political imprisonment because I've had a lot of friends who were political prisoners.

When people ask me what I'm into I say education and Palestine, and they respond, "Why? How are those two ever connected? Why those two?"

I really think that what all of these are is the concept of separating people, the concept of segregation and othering of people whether it's in Palestine, or where there's apartheid. In each of these environments, you can find that there are separations of groups and people [in place] to advance the interests of the state.... So, I feel like all of these things

for me are really crucial if we consider the concept of separating people and othering people and that this process almost always results in an injustice. So yeah, I consider myself an anti-apartheid/anti-segregation person.

PG: What is your role in the future of the integration movement in New York City?

HJ: I'm currently on the board of IntegrateNYC, and I feel like it's definitely been a challenge to be on a different side of the work. It's not something I'm used to. I'm usually like super excited and into the work. It's an adrenaline rush constantly trying to get things done. But I feel like now at least that I would be a benefit to this movement if I were to study it in a more academic perspective, and my future career goal is to be an academic who's also an advocate. So, I really would like to be a professional on various topics, including education, and how to effectively translate that into advocacy work. It's a different side of it, but I do think in the future that's what my role would be. Still though, I probably would do advocacy work now and be a part of every kind of thing that's happening around the City, but I'm actually moving to Germany pretty soon. I still want to be involved in the work, but it's obviously going to look very differently.

PG: Are you moving to Germany as a study abroad, or is this a longer timeline?

HJ: I'm finishing college in two years. I'm getting married in June. My fiancé lives in Germany, so I'll be doing a master's and hopefully PhD program there. I'll be studying there, but I'm probably going to be settling down there as well.

PG: Congratulations! Do you have an idea of what integration work looks like over there?

HJ: I have explored it, but you know Germany is a pretty homogenous society. Things are much different when we're talking about education. For example, there's no such thing as a good and bad college. Every college is pretty great. So, when you get into college, you'll probably have a pretty good education and, then, probably have a pretty good job.

I plan on going in the summer to see qualities of life.

I know there's actually a lot of Islamophobia there. There is also a lot of Islamophobia in the U.S., but it just manifests differently. I think something that a lot of advocates tend to do is try to stretch very similar concepts of justice in different places. I think that's why it fails. The reason why education advocacy for me really works and I was able to get a lot of things done was because I was really genuine. It just started out of curiosity; it started out of a question.

Whenever people ask me how to get into this work, I always say that you have to

ask what's wrong first and never have any assumptions going into something because that's just not genuine. It's just not genuine advocacy if you don't start by asking that question, if you just want to do work to do work—not necessarily because there's a problem to solve. And that's really hard for me because I really just want to get into it. But the reality is you have to stop and analyze and be in the society and experience things. Questions will genuinely arise, and you will want to answer them and solve them. So yeah, I feel like if advocacy was done in this way, a lot of this work would be just a lot more genuine, intentional, and more effective which is why I really think what the students are doing is so effective because it really started out of curiosity.

Hebb Jamal is a student activist who organizes around issues of school integration and the rights of Palestinians. Please follow her on Twitter: @hebb_jamal. Paloma Garcia is the communications director at NYU Metro Center. She can be reached by email at: pg1468@nyu.edu. Please also follow her on Twitter: @4po_garcia.

A Conversation with Faraji Hannah-Jones

This conversation provides a glimpse into the life of a parent advocate who promotes integration, starting with the choice he and his wife made of where to send their daughter to school. From Faraji Hannah-Jones's perspective, school integration is about family, history, and the ongoing struggle to achieve racial equity.

Paloma Garcia: Let's start on the personal level. Who is Faraji Hannah-Jones?

Faraji Hannah-Jones: Well, I'm a son of a veteran of several veterans. My dad was in the military for 23 years. My grandfather was in the military for over 30, and a lot of my aunts were also in the military. So, I come from a very concentrated military family, and of course they all attended college. My dad, he was only able to attend college. My grandfather attended Tuskegee University. My grandmother also attended Tuskegee University, then dropped out to raise her children, and then went back to Fayetteville State University in Fayetteville, NC. And that's where I attended. I attended Fayetteville State University, which is a historically Black university. The majority of my life was spent overseas. I lived the majority of my dad's career ... in Europe. I lived in Germany from kindergarten pretty much to my sophomore year of my high school. Then we came go back to the states, which you know gave me a pretty well-rounded view.

So, I kind of grew up everywhere pretty much. My friends consist of friends from all over. I was also born on a military base. I was born in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. As far as school goes, the majority of my life was spent in the Department of Defense Schools. I really did not attend segregated schools. The schools that I attended had children as well as people from all backgrounds from all over the country—pretty much everywhere from Compton, Los Angeles to Brooklyn, New York. And those cultures, all of our cultures, came together as one. We pretty much had a style culture of our own. And that's how we kind of lived our lives on the base. Amenities were valuable to us. We had youth centers. We had gyms. We had youth programs, recreational programs; you name it, we had it. So, pretty much nothing limited me from any type of exposure—culture, art, science, whatever it is. I was pretty much a part of it. I feel very blessed to have that.

PG: Professional?

FHJ: My professional career ... I've been in IT for 20 years. I was introduced to it by my father. He was a communications engineer in the military. And I was introduced to the early technology of the Internet and how it works.

I deal with systems, integrated systems, networking. Computers have to talk to each other, [so does] file management systems and support people who use their

workstations. Every platform from wireless to area networks, I've done physical work. I've installed cables. I've installed telephone lines. I've installed networks....

Second part of that is the development. I taught myself HTML, CSS, and some coding languages like PHP and Javascript. All of those things I was able to acquire out of curiosity and find books, learning through YouTube.... I've been able to build and also connect with individuals who are also in the field of study, field of work. So, now I've become more of a jack of all trades.

PG: As an advocate and parent-leader?

FHJ: When my wife and I had our first child, I always knew that I wanted to be involved in her schooling because my dad was also involved in the school in the military. He wasn't much of an advocate; he was just involved. He was quite involved and also pretty busy because he was also a minister. Not only was he in the military, he was also involved in the Church. I think the involvement with that also connected him to community in the military base and outside, of course, and so watching that encouraged me. It kind of influenced me to also want to be involved because you see the impact of how people respond to you. You're involved, and close relationships build alongside that. So that was something that I desired.

When my child was ready for her first years of school, I knew that was something I wanted to be a part of. Alongside that came the inequities that I've always known—the fact that many of our children of color primarily our Black and Latinx kids have never been given a fair shake. We've been told that we had to “race to the top” for our communities—and not an even [race] where everyone is able to start on the starting line pretty much. That drove me to the parent leadership role and advocacy. I think I became more of a

parent leader because most parents, or some parents, tend to confront this situation from the standpoint that it's happening right now. We don't have a whole lot of other parent groups that approach the inequities through a historical perspective and then work their way around that. This is why I think a lot of my parent voice is strong. That's how I became more of a parent advocate and leader. I kind of got thrown into it because of the rezoning situation that happened at PS 307, where I was very vocal [and able to] spring into action to create allies around the advocacy work. We were able to get into the community and inform them through literature and action plan items and things of that nature.

A memory that stands out is interrupting a craps game I was in the middle of. I interrupted it just to let [people] know what's going on. I don't recommend people do that because there's a pile of money in the middle. But the men who were involved stopped and listened to what I had to say. A few of them had nephews, nieces, sons, or daughters who attended the school who also heard what was going on and wanted to find out how they could help. I was able to ask them to kindly provide their names. So, I think I gathered maybe seven signatures that night.

Another memory that stands out is of one Sunday. Reverend Taylor, pastor of Church of the Open Door, was gracious and gave me the honor to take 15 minutes of his sermon before he spoke. He gave me the platform to speak to his congregation about what was going on. And he also allowed me to collect 100 signatures from the congregation. So that in itself allowed me to be officially ordained as a part of this work, and one day he told me to let our children see us fight. This kind of made me embrace becoming an advocate. I've been on the radio speaking about this work, and some of the local publications quoted some of my advocacy about this work.

PG: What do you love? What makes you happy? What makes you go to sleep at night? Why?

FHJ: Connecting and creating alliances with people who value our children in the Black and Brown community makes me happy. Also, I'm ecstatic about our middle and high school students who have organized around this work. What makes me go to sleep at night is knowing that we are not alone.

PG: What was your educational experience like?

FHJ: No segregated schools. Military schools. [I] met people from all over the country and of all different races/ethnicities. [I] had a unifying culture on base, [and] also had resources outside of school.

PG: Can you speak about your entrance into the school integration movement?

FHJ: I volunteered as PTA co-president at my daughter's school, and we were working on gauging the interest of our school community. We were hearing rumors that we may be involved in rezoning our district. My daughter saw the inequities experienced by students of color and low-income students. Most parents are confronting inequities as they appear rather than from a historical/systemic perspective.

PG: How do your racial identity and life experience influence the way you advocate for school integration?

FHJ: My racial identity is African-American. One part of it is American that's based on where I was born. The other part is African based on my ancestry. In this country I don't think that I have the option or the privilege to talk about any part of my background simply because of the color of my skin. I don't think anyone who is my skin tone or lighter—no matter how light, no matter how dark—has been given that option. I think the society in this country has set it up that way because

either being Black or white lets you know how much access you have.... I identify proudly as being a Black man, but in society [I am prevented] from being able to explore or even pursue any other option of ... being, [of] acknowledging any other part of my genealogical existence. So, I identify as Black. And that's why I identify as Black because in this country Black means you have no power. Well, you don't have access. I won't say I don't have any power because I do have that. But I don't have that access, [which I] would if [I] were white. And I think that people that deem themselves and are able to express their bi-racial background—in a sense, in some cases not all—use that as a mechanism to describe or maybe even acknowledge the fact that there are some parts of them that are in a privileged position to acknowledge the fact that they are half white or even half of something else [that's not Black]. I don't have any qualms about that. I just think that that's the nature of our environment, and that's the reason why I feel like I need to be an advocate.

The other part is that my wife and I were proudly able to go to Ghana. And, of course, I was able to see how our people, our African brothers and sisters, are able to live and able to display the available freedoms that they have over in that country. I saw for the first time that they did not identify me as anything else [other than a] part of that community. I was looked at as being Ghanaian although I was American. It wasn't until I opened my mouth and they heard the English dialect come out that I was American.

I just feel like when you're saying what do you identify as—Black or white—that it depends on the type of privilege you have. And I'm talking about the access to privilege, racial privilege. I identify proudly as being Black because that's what my parents were born as; that's what my parents had to experience. So, Yes, I identify as being a Black man.

“
one day he told me to let our children
see us fight.”

PG: You have this deep understanding of the way that America has historically and systemically stereotyped and homogenized the Black experience. I know that in this integration advocacy space there are several variations of advocates who come from various ethnicities and various racial backgrounds. Do you think being Black, an African-American advocate for integration has a different kind of tone to it? Is there something that is being said within that space that is unique?

FHJ: Yeah, it does. It does take a different meaning because in every circumstance, especially in the City of New York, it requires us to take on that role of trying to define and trying to clarify and explain what it's supposed to be and what it means. That's something that I don't think has ever been fair because it should not have been. It should not be on us to take on that role or take on that initiative, although we don't have a problem doing it. I just think that that role and that initiative has always been on us. The other part of it is when you have individuals who come from privileged backgrounds, and I'll just be honest and say when you have white people who are explaining what integration means in the Black community, that also is looked upon differently simply because you're lecturing to people who actually understand what it means to be oppressed and to be disenfranchised, to be discriminated against, to be in

separate spaces and historically forced to study behind partitions. They had to live their lives behind walls, and behind barriers all the time. So, I think that you make sure that you acknowledge first who those people are and that you acknowledge that you see them first prior to trying to identify and diagnose the issues that they have. That's the different meaning that integration has in our community.

The other part to that is integration for whites is facing the possibility or even the proposal of giving something up.... There should be no question that you should give something up. Black folks have given stuff up all the time. A lot of times they'll give up the opportunity, that single opportunity as a community, so that one child might have a potential to going to college. You'll see a whole community surround themselves around that individual just so that they can make it. You'll see just to get to high school and graduate from high school is a goal for many of our families simply because of having to duck bullets and having to live in impoverished neighborhoods and things of that nature. You see a whole community take risks on behalf of that one or maybe a few. To ask individuals who have been privileged and have high expectations going in without even earning anything at the start should be more than willing to give those things up because they're not the only ones. They're not the only ones who work hard.

PG: Is there or have you created a connection between the tech world and integration?

FHJ: Well, in the tech world, integration exists. Integration is necessary for systems to work together. It's intentional in a lot of ways because you cannot run a proprietary system without integration.

In my line of work, when it comes to integrating systems, you have three types of users. You have Mac users, and you have Windows users. You have three types of people. We have people who

have perception. We have people who have preference. And we have people who have perspective. Preferences are people saying say, “By all means, I’m only going to be a Mac user, nothing else.” People who have perception are users who say, “Well, I’m currently working on the Mac because Windows crash all the time, and vice versa.”

PG: Can you speak to the intentionality you and your wife, Nikole Hannah-Jones, have engaged in when it comes to the education of your daughter?

FHJ: We chose the school totally unaware of what was going to happen (that the NYCDOE was going to plan on rezoning the district). We saw a flyer for PS 307. It was a STEM school. There were several schools that we looked at in our district, but they had limited seats at the times. This was prior to the “Pre-K for All” initiatives that [NYC Mayor Bill] De Blasio put in place. We were a year late for that. So, in 2010, we kind of ignored a lot of the advice that some of our neighbors and friends. [They] were trying to encourage us to check out this Montessori school, check out this charter school, check out this private school ... to make sure that [we] get to the open houses early: “Oh, she’s two years old you want to try to get to these open houses as soon as possible.” You know every precaution to make sure that we made provisions ahead of the crowd that was coming to ensure that she had some type of quality education. We kind of ignored all of that, and of course ... I think we’ll get into that a little later. But that’s why we chose 307. Now 307 was a Title I school. The test scores were low, but you know we had to. We went and then spoke to the principal, spoke to the teachers. The organic approach of walking through the doors to see what it [the school] was about. And of course, we found out that they had 100 seats. So of course, they became our first choice, and all the other schools in our district became our 2nd, 3rd,

and 4th choice. And so, we didn’t get our 2nd or 3rd or 4th choice; we ended up getting PS 307 because they had 100 seats versus the ones that had only 10, 12, 13, 14 seats.

PG: You mentioned using this organic approach to learning more about the school you eventually decided on sending your daughter to. When you were able to go in and talk to the principal and teachers and observe the school, did you notice anything about the environment that you were surprised by or didn’t expect?

FHJ: Well, it didn’t even start at 307 it was actually in a couple of the other title I schools that we had visited. I think what I was most shocked at was the fact that all of the preconceived notions about our children not being able to learn and then seeing young Black and Brown kids in these classrooms blossoming before your eyes.

I think I was more surprised at the nature of the audacity, so to speak, of those who happen to be in privileged spaces making these preconceived notions about these people, and then the other part to me was that they were reflections of myself. Now I’m seeing myself as a young boy sitting among these kids. There was an emotional part to that. The things that they were telling me were the things they were saying to the kids. And these kids haven’t even come out of kindergarten yet. There are unfair advantages or disadvantages that our adults are putting on our children. Those adults looking at these kids as though they’re supposed to bear the burden of someone who might be 30 or 40 years old instead of giving them the opportunity to have teachers—qualified teachers—plant seeds into them to become upstanding and successful 30 and 40-year-old adults.

The expectation is put on the young kids and not on the adults who have set it up that way, not the institutions that have set it up that way. Not historically, which

allowed it to be this way. The outrage should not be on the kids; the outrage should be on the institution that has allowed this to go on and our officials who have allowed this to go on. The burden should never be on children, and I think that's the emotional part. The things they were saying about our young Black and Brown men is what they're saying about our children. That was what made me kind of rethink where we sent our daughter because I saw myself, and it was emotional.

PG: How does the idea of community and belonging relate to the idea of school integration?

FHJ: Reinvest into the community, demand access.... Don't abandon your community! Advocate for your community. See us first for who we are. Build the funding, resources, access, etc.

PG: As a leader in integration efforts in New York City, what do you see as strengths in this movement (from citizens and from government officials)?

FHJ: Alliances, especially young [people] but also parents. IntegrateNYC especially. Let them

work! Parents and adults need to put their powers together, avoid compromise, clean it up.... Seeing how young people see Nikole [Hannah-Jones] and are able to digest where she's coming from. [She's] relatable because she sees them first, acknowledges their humanity.

PG: Where do we go from here?

FHJ: Lean on each other, it's hard work. Because of the maturation of [a] racist system, we are young in the game [of] confronting the issue. Don't burn ourselves out. Stay real. Support each other. Take time to have a break. Who is on your ... reading lists that you would recommend to our readers? We all can learn a tremendous amount about integration and racial justice from [people like] Nikole [my wife].

Faraji Hannah-Jones is a parent activist who organizes around issues of school integration. Paloma Garcia is the communications director at NYU Metro Center. She can be reached by email at: pg1468@nyu.edu. Please also follow her on Twitter: @4po_garcia.

Research Perspectives in Urban Education



“Diversity Without Displacement”: Lessons from Gentrification for Integration in a Changing Racial/Ethnic Context

DIANA CORDOVA-COBO

The article examines the experiences of Black and Latinx families across New York City to explore routes to prevention of cultural displacement as City schools undergo seismic demographic shifts as a result of gentrification. Diana Cordova-Cobo concludes that we need racially just policies and research designed to truly integrate and stabilize racially and ethnically diverse schools.

In the fall of 2015, I sat across from Rosa Chavez at a coffee shop near her daughter’s public elementary school. For two hours, she recounted her experience growing up in the surrounding neighborhood and attending the same school her daughter now attends. The stories she focused upon most intently were those of the residents in the school facing displacement, and the ways in which her school community and her neighborhood were changing as a result. She outlined the work done during the past school year to re-establish a Latinx parent voice in the school after a shift to a white, mostly-affluent Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) left several parents feeling as though they could no longer contribute in ways they once did. Battles raged over seemingly small decisions such as moving away from the local Puerto Rican DJ for the school dance or discouraging abuelita’s cooking because it did not meet healthy eating standards. All these seemingly minor events added up to a drop in attendance at PTA meetings on the part of previously active Latinx families. Rosa’s anecdotes, heartbreaking as they were, ultimately followed the same narrative as other parents with whom the Public Good research team spoke with between 2015 and 2017.¹ Every interview was a web of stories about PTAs, school events, and mixed feelings about all the shifts parents were seeing in their neighborhoods and schools.

Though compelling, the experiences of these parents did not match up to the larger public narrative about the relationship between residential gentrification and school demographics at the time. According to a majority of journalists and researchers, gentrifiers were not enrolling their children in public schools. Capturing this sentiment, Hannah-Jones (2015) stated, “Gentrification, it turns out, usually stops at the schoolhouse door.” This mismatch between what I heard from parents about the changing racial/ethnic dynamics of their school communities and what I saw reflected in academic research and popular press media ultimately motivated much of the research I have done since that time. I find myself returning to this question: How can we learn from the experiences of

Black and Latinx families across New York City to ensure we are proactively preventing cultural displacement as schools continue to experience changes through a variety of demographic phenomena? In the following discussion, I outline how we can draw from these experiences to better design research and policies aimed at creating integrated school communities through intentional school-level practices.

CULTURAL DISPLACEMENT: WHEN DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE MEANS LOSING REPRESENTATION

Along with residential and school gentrification has come an increased concern over displacement—the process whereby existing residents are increasingly pushed out and priced out of the neighborhood. Despite early observations about displacement (Glass, 1964), the research on residential gentrification has yet to come to consensus on what should be defined as displacement. Some researchers argue that various forms of displacement result from gentrification with a focus on longtime community members (Atkinson, 2000; Davidson & Lees, 2010; Newman & Wyly, 2006) and others suggest that more affluent newcomers bring resources to poor communities, creating positive neighborhood effects with little or no displacement (Ellen & O'Regan, 2011; Freeman, 2005, 2008; Freeman & Braconi, 2004; Vigdor, et al., 2002). On the other hand, in research on school gentrification, the direct impact of a growing white, affluent school population on existing families of color and low-income families has been central. This qualitative research overwhelmingly points to a change in power dynamics that may negatively impact families of color and low-income families (Cucchiara and Horvat, 2014; Cucchiara, 2013; Muro, 2016; Stillman, 2011; Posey-Maddox, 2012; Posey-Maddox, 2014; Roda and Wells, 2013).

Though research details the impact of gentrification on the existing school community, few studies focus on the experiences of low-income families and families of color. Overwhelmingly, the discussion is centered on the actions of white, affluent gentrifiers—the body of research focuses on who comes into the school instead of who leaves. Focusing on displacement at the school level reframes the conversation around the experiences of families of color and low-income families who are leaving the schools completely or simply exiting community spaces and spaces of power within their schools.

The anecdotes about the day-to-day interactions between families from different racial/ethnic backgrounds and the underrepresentation of Latinx and Black parents in the decision-making processes that Rosa and other parents described constitutes a form of displacement. Marcuse (1985) began advocating over thirty years ago for a framework that captured the indirect forms of displacement that longtime residents could experience during gentrification. One of the ways residents experience indirect displacement is through “the pressure of displacement,” which he describes as:

When a family sees the neighborhood around it changing dramatically, when their friends are leaving the neighborhood, when the stores they patronize are liquidating and new stores for other clientele are taking their places, and when changes in public facilities, in transportation patterns, and in support services all clearly are making the area less and less livable, then the pressure of displacement already is severe. Its actuality is only a matter of time. Families living under these circumstances may move as soon as they can, rather

than wait for the inevitable;
nonetheless they are displaced.
(p.207)

Cultural displacement, as an indirect form of displacement, involves the loss of place and belonging at the school level that ensues when residents start seeing their school community transform in front of them. Even if parents are able to keep their children enrolled in a school, “gentrification is experienced as a loss of self, community and culture” (Cahill, 2007). Most of the parents we interviewed were not physically displaced, yet they still expressed a sense of loss as they described their neighborhoods and schools changing around them. Mirroring Muro’s (2016) findings on symbolic integration, more often than not interactions between gentrifying parents and the existing parent community were pleasant but resulted in a white parent “takeover” of the PTA. This in turn left Black and Latinx families feeling undervalued and disenfranchised in the school community.

**MAPPING TO UNDERSTAND
THE EXTENT OF DEMOGRAPHIC
CHANGE ACROSS NEW YORK CITY’S
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

While doing qualitative research on gentrifying schools, it became apparent that part of why the phenomenon parents described was under-accounted for in research on New York City’s schools was that researchers were overwhelmingly focused on identifying schools by a shift in their overall racial/ethnic composition over time when compared to other schools. However, what most Black and Latinx parents described during interviews was the process of gentrifying—meaning there was a recent influx of more affluent, mostly white parents that was already having an impact on the entire school community. The gentrifying families were not yet distributed across all grades evenly and were heavily concentrated in

the youngest grades. Rosa recounted one PTA meeting after another at which she grew frustrated with the board because so much of the extra programming for students funded by the PTA was being reserved for the youngest grades. The reality of this has been documented at length across the country. In sum, it takes a relatively small number of white and/or affluent parents with social and economic capital to shift the power dynamics in a public school in a way that marginalizes lower-income families and families of color (Cucchiara and Horvat, 2014; Cucchiara, 2013; Posey-Maddox, 2012; Posey-Maddox, 2014).

As important as the experiences of families in New York City’s schools are on their own, it is also important to understand the extent to which the experiences described by parents represented a pattern across the city during and whether this phenomenon was concentrated in certain areas of the city. Understanding if and where these changes in student demographics are taking place has important implications for proactively designing policies and practices in schools that serve to prevent the marginalization and disenfranchisement Rosa and other parents felt as their school communities changed.

With this in mind, I set out to understand if there were more areas of the City where multiple schools were gentrifying along racial/ethnic lines in particular, because this is how parents characterized school gentrification in interviews. Using data from the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) for the 2014-15 school year, I employed a spatial cluster analysis technique to understand the distribution of within-school demographic change for Black, Latinx, Asian, and white students in New York City’s public elementary schools. I focused on within-school change. Limiting my sample to public, non-charter schools that had both a kindergarten and fifth

grade during the 2014-15 school year (n=716), I calculated the percentage point difference between the fifth grade and kindergarten for each racial/ethnic group's share of the student population. Essentially, if researchers had only looked at the overall school racial/ethnic composition instead of differences between grades within the same school, there was a chance the phenomenon was being dulled by the fact that a shift in a racial/ethnic composition had not occurred in all grade levels yet.

Furthermore, focusing on schools where the racial/ethnic composition was substantially different between the youngest and oldest grades provided two important insights. First, it identified areas of the city that were on the frontline with respect to navigating complicated racial/ethnic dynamics at the school level as demographics shifted. Second, this focus allowed a better understanding of how changes varied by racial/ethnic group. I was especially interested in detangling the white/nonwhite binary as a way of understanding gentrification—and demographic change writ-large—in New York City's public schools.

Once the data were mapped out, early observations hinted at a spatial pattern of unequal distributions of demographic change. Though the citywide averages for racial/ethnic percentage point differences between fifth grade and kindergarten ranged from a loss of 2.3 percentage points for the Black student population to a gain of 1.1 percentage points for the White student population, some schools experienced more dramatic differences. Seeing some indication of spatial patterns, I conducted a significant cluster analysis, which measures if there are geographic areas within the city where there is enough of the same phenomenon happening to show statistical spatial significance for groups of schools. Figures 1-4 show clusters of schools that are experiencing spatially significant demographic change—

defined as a percentage point difference in the share of students from a racial/ethnic group between kindergarten and fifth grade— for each racial/ethnic group. For contextual understanding, neighborhood boundaries and the NYU Furman Center's neighborhood gentrification classifications are layered behind the clusters.²

These analyses indicate that some significant changes are happening within each racial/ethnic student category. For the Black student population, there is not as clear of a spatial pattern in terms of inner and outer city boundaries (Figure 1). But certain neighborhoods that are frequently discussed in the debate over gentrification and were identified as gentrifying in 2015 by the NYU Furman Center—such as Bedford-Stuyvesant and East Harlem—show significant clusters of schools with smaller shares of students who were Black in kindergarten than in fifth grade. For the Latinx student population, there were clear patterns in the school data that reflect both the narratives of parents in New York City and the qualitative research on residential gentrification (Figure 2). Clusters of schools with a smaller share of Latinx students in kindergarten than in fifth grade are mostly concentrated in the center of the city while clusters of schools with greater shares in kindergarten are concentrated in the outer rims. Additionally, schools with smaller shares of Latinx students in kindergarten than in fifth grade were located in neighborhoods such as the Lower East Side, Sunset Park, and Williamsburg that were identified as gentrifying by the NYU Furman Center.

The clusters of schools with a smaller share of students who were Asian in kindergarten than in fifth grade are mostly on the outer, eastern rims of the city in Queens and the clusters of schools with greater shares in kindergarten are almost entirely in the western section of

Brooklyn or Manhattan (Figure 3). A similar pattern holds for the white student population, though more clearly spatially concentrated (Figure 4). Clusters of schools with greater shares of students who were white in kindergarten are exclusively concentrated in Manhattan and the parts of Brooklyn and Queens closest to Manhattan – including

neighborhoods identified as gentrifying in 2015 and neighborhoods frequently described as gentrified or “hyper-gentrified” in the larger public debate over gentrification. Additionally, several of the schools with greater shares of students who were white in kindergarten also overlap with schools that had smaller shares of students who were Latinx or Black in kindergarten.

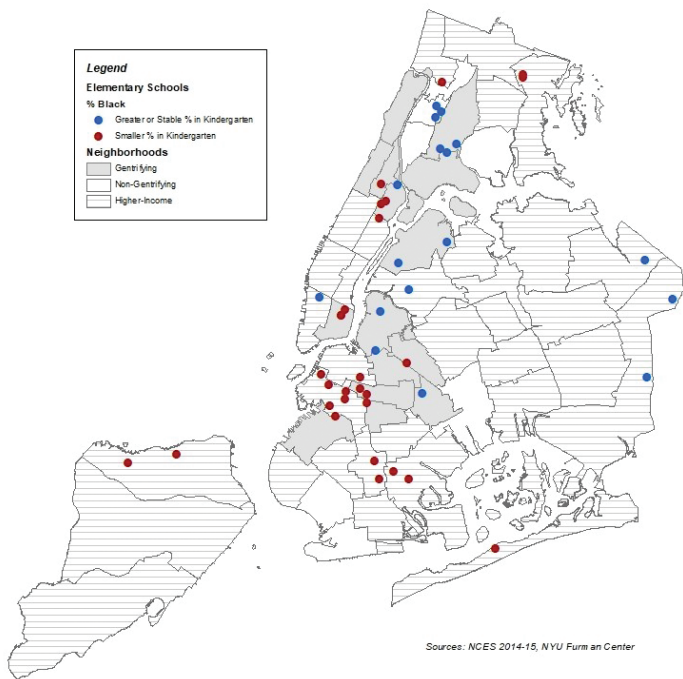


FIGURE 1. CLUSTERS OF PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS WITH A DIFFERENCE IN THE SHARE OF BLACK STUDENTS BETWEEN KINDERGARTEN AND FIFTH GRADE, 2014-15

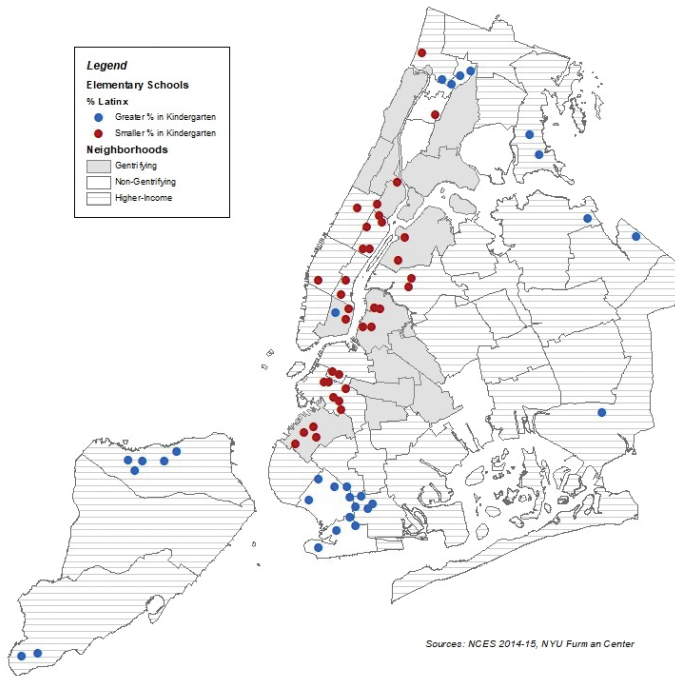


FIGURE 2. CLUSTERS OF PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS WITH A DIFFERENCE IN THE SHARE OF LATINX STUDENTS BETWEEN KINDERGARTEN AND FIFTH GRADE, 2014-15

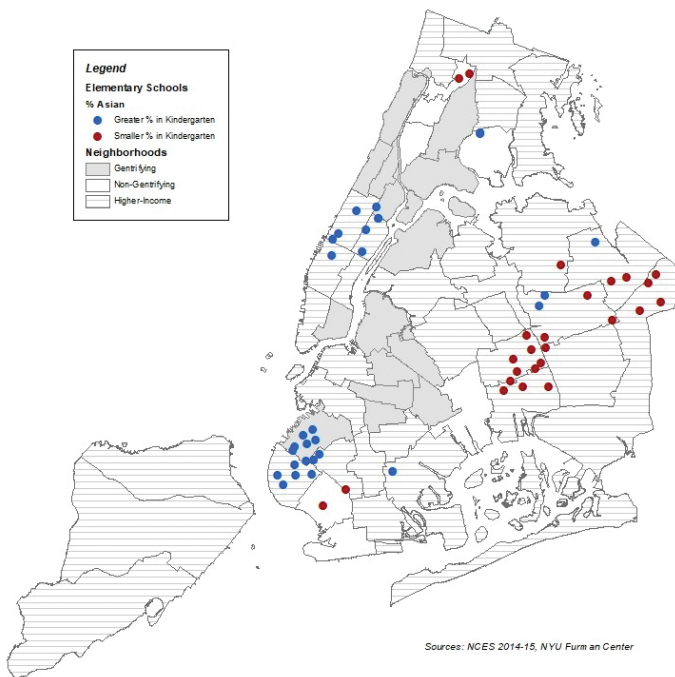


FIGURE 3. CLUSTERS OF PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS WITH A DIFFERENCE IN THE SHARE OF ASIAN STUDENTS BETWEEN KINDERGARTEN AND FIFTH GRADE, 2014-15

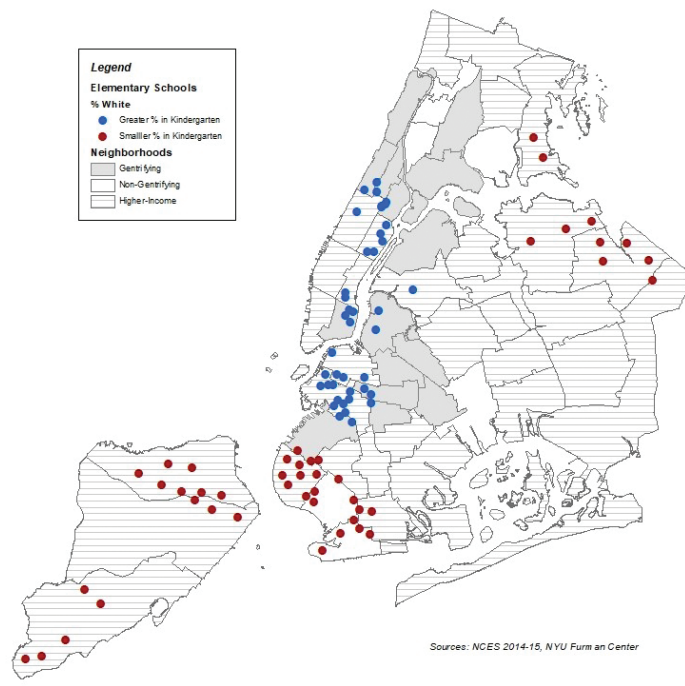


FIGURE 4. CLUSTERS OF PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS WITH A DIFFERENCE IN THE SHARE OF WHITE STUDENTS BETWEEN KINDERGARTEN AND FIFTH GRADE, 2014-15

This initial analysis revealed that the patterns of Latinx, Asian, and white demographic change for percentage point differences between kindergarten and fifth grade shares follow the patterns in residential and qualitative research findings. Though the cluster groups for the Black student population showed no immediate spatial pattern, a general pattern of loss is in line with the larger citywide demographic trends where the share of students who were Black in public, non-charter schools has steadily declined in recent years. Therefore, this small adjustment in how we define demographic change in the school data – informed by the experiences of families across the city—revealed that the experiences of Black and Latinx parents in a handful of schools spoke to a much larger phenomenon. I argue that this phenomenon suggests that their experiences should be centered in the larger discussion on school

gentrification (and integration). Though there is further investigation to be done regarding the relationship between these school patterns and residential shifts in the city along racial/ethnic and socioeconomic class lines, these findings suggest there are broader implications of this work. Specifically, given the extent of these patterns, we must consider how practices and policies can be proactively implemented across the city to subvert some of the negative impact of demographic shifts that were highlighted by parents like Rosa in schools seeing an influx of more affluent and/or white students.

**COMBATting CULTURAL
DISPLACEMENT WITH AFFIRMING
LEADERSHIP AND INTENTIONAL
STRUCTURES**

Despite fear or cynicism for what an influx of white, more affluent

families would mean for their own power and voice within their schools, Black and Latinx parents do see benefits of additional racial/ethnic and socioeconomic diversity for their children. The desire to maintain “diversity without displacement” was overwhelmingly evident. This sentiment among parents and community members has implications in any changing racial/ethnic context. While the sociopolitical dynamics that underlie the beginning stages of gentrification and integration differ, they both fundamentally represent a change in the racial/ethnic dynamics of a school community. How school leaders and families navigate the changing dynamics has implications for whether the change in racial/ethnic demographics results in the gentrification or the integration of the school community.

In many ways, policies and practices aimed at preventing the cultural displacement experienced by Rosa and other parents also serve the goals of true integration. Carter (2015) defines true integration as “deep intercultural exchanges in learning where no group is on the margins.... Integration weakens thick social boundaries and fosters empathy among people of varied social backgrounds as they teach, learn, communicate, and interact within a school community in ways that till the soils of a burgeoning democracy.” Though Carter articulates this as part of her focus on student learning, the same principles can live in the interactions between parents and families within a school community. To this end, two key factors arose while speaking with Black and Latinx parents that are needed to foster integration over gentrification: Affirming School Leadership and Intentional Parent Engagement Structures.

Parents overwhelmingly pointed to the importance of school leadership in counteracting the cultural displacement they witnessed in other schools throughout the district and the city.

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School-level leadership—more so than district and citywide administrations—can directly influence the day-to-day interactions between different racial/ethnic groups. Black and Latinx parents described the ways in which the school administration systematically ensured that the voices of the incoming white, more affluent parents did not overshadow the existing Black and Latinx parents at the school. Several parents and staff members noted the racially-balanced approach to parent leadership and the explicit discussions the school had if it appeared that representation was not balanced along racial/ethnic lines. The same was true for other positions on the PTA board and for other school activities that required parent leadership such as the School Leadership Team and open houses. Parent coordinators even did intentional recruiting along with members of the PTA board if they felt like certain groups of families were not being represented. Though these efforts were not always successful in immediately achieving balanced representation on parent leadership teams, many Black and Latinx parents expressed a renewed hope that their voice was being valued and reinstated in the school community—particularly in schools that experienced periods of turmoil and tension between different racial/ethnic groups.

Additionally, there was overwhelming evidence that the administration’s messaging, which placed emphasis

on the value of the existing school community before gentrification, served to simultaneously affirm the value of parents of color in the school as well as mitigate white, affluent parents who tried to enroll in the school under the assumption that they could “buy” the privileges they wished their children to have within the school or “help” the school “get better.” Some school leaders also opted to address gentrifying parents individually to address the implicit biases prospective parents had coming into the school.

While these school communities fight an uphill battle against the larger structural forces that are contributing to the physical displacement of their student population via housing instability and school choice, we observed success in mitigating the impact of cultural displacement for Black and Latinx parents in schools where leadership and staff took an asset-based approach to incorporating their voices in parent leadership structures. Instead of feeling as though their schools perpetuate the same disenfranchisement they witness with residential gentrification in their neighborhoods, explicit and intentional efforts to combat cultural displacement allowed parents to view their schools as a “safe place” where they could ensure that the needs of their children and families would not be overlooked in service of gentrifying parents with more political and economic clout.

Finding ways to mediate parent and student relationships across racial/ethnic and class lines in ways that mirror and expand the aforementioned efforts should be at the forefront of the concerns that policymakers and researchers are addressing if the aim is to truly integrate and stabilize racially/ethnically diverse schools.

NOTES

1. The Public Good project is a public school support organization that uses research to engage racially and culturally diverse school communities in facing power dynamics and difficult issues, while amplifying voices as needed to create a truly integrated and inclusive public school. <https://www.tc.columbia.edu/thepublicgood/>.
2. NYU Furman Center. “Focus on Gentrification” in *State of the City’s Housing and Neighborhoods 2015*. (2016). The NYU Furman Center established these classifications using the 1990 Census and the American Community Survey (ACS) 2010-2014 five-year estimates. Neighborhoods are defined by sub-borough areas. “Gentrifying neighborhoods” are neighborhoods that were low-income in 1990 and experienced rent growth above the median neighborhood rent growth between 1990 and 2014. “Non-gentrifying neighborhoods” are those that also started off as low-income in 1990 but experienced more modest rent growth. Higher-income neighborhoods” are neighborhoods that were in the top 60 percent of the 1990 neighborhood income distribution. <http://furmancenter.org/research/sonychan/2015-report>.

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- Diana Cordova-Cobo is a doctoral candidate at Teachers College Columbia University and research associate for the Center for Understanding Race and Education.*

Choices We Can't Believe In: Race, Schooling, and the American Dream

DAVID E. KIRKLAND

In this reprinting of his 2010 study on “the hidden costs of school choice,” Dr. David E. Kirkland suggests that integration is a matter of conditions that give true choices. He contrasts integration to “false choice,” acts of desperation that toss fugitive bodies in transit to places where children find themselves unwanted. Kirkland suggests that integration is the expansion of freedom—both the freedom to move and the freedom to remain still. It is about conditions that bring people closer together as opposed to pushing them farther apart.

At the time that I interviewed the parents of the subaltern¹, the hidden costs of school choice were, indeed, grave. Yet these costs, which can be traced to the era of segregation, lay hidden in the presumption that schools and communities are not created equally. While there may, in fact, be some truth to this claim (Barret, 2006; De Vos & Suárez-Orozco, 1990; Kozol, 1991; Sleeter & Grant, 1987), its proclamation suggests an overly essentialized view of American schools, where parents seem to submit to the way things are, insisting upon a dull conclusion that does not consider, allow for, or demand change.

For Kara, Gwen, Rachel, and Manuela, school choice had been shaped in the presumption that some things—schools and communities—were essentially better than others. According to Rachel, “That’s just the way it is.” This presumption alone, I argue, challenges any notion of free choice because who would choose the “inferior” option? In making the pivotal choice over what schools to send their children, suburban parents have rarely been required to cross geographic borders (Frankenberg, Lee, & Orfield, 2003). By contrast, city parents—such as Kara, Gwen, Rachel, and Manuela—are frequently compelled to cross borders, both geographic and cultural (Noguera, 2003a). Usually their crossings mean leaving behind a physical and ideational space and conducting a literal and figurative march of treason, where the children of the subaltern are expected to abandon communities and friends, languages and lifestyles (Ogbu, 2003; Smitherman, 2006).

For much of the twentieth century, this march was seen as an upward climb away from the segregated schools that lay nested in the permanent borders of the United States. The goal of this movement, which gained legal backing with *Brown*, was to provide parents, who are usually poorer and more vulnerable, with greater access to the choices needed to ensure their children the best education possible. However, it is not clear whether or not *Brown* accomplished this goal. To what degree can these parents make free choices? Such an aporia wraps itself around a larger question—a question that guides this work: Can the parents featured in this study freely choose their child(ren)’s school?

To address this question, I critically analyze the discourses² of school choice persistent in my conversations with Kara, Gwen, Rachel, and Manuela. The purpose of my analysis, here, is to reveal the “taken-for-grantedness” of the ideological messages that characterize these parents’ choices over where to send their children to school. In doing so, I treat the parents’ choices as a type of social practice representative of discursive and ideological systems, and ask: In what ways might the parents have reinforced the ideologies of segregation in their school choices instead of disrupting them? That is, in choosing to leave and sometimes in having to stay in city schools, the parents of the subaltern may have been speaking for another group whose interests they had interpellated for their own. In this process of being passively and unconsciously drawn into dominant assumptions, or dominant discourses (e.g. City schools are bad and suburban schools are good.), the parents of the subaltern may have thought—as the dominant discourses of school choice certainly encourage them to do so—that they had a genuine choice and that somehow this choice expressed their individuality. In propping up dominant discourses, such choices, if analyzed critically, may reveal the relatively small degree of power these parents actually exercised.

FROM SEGREGATION TO RESEGREGATION

Before analyzing the parents’ school choices, it is helpful to review the historical legacy in which these parents’ school choices are embedded. This history reveals sets of movements that at certain points—perhaps long ago—turned on themselves. The national journey away from school segregation, by 1954, seemed to happen “with all deliberate speed” (Siddle Walker, 2001). *Brown*, the engine for this movement, represented a leap in civil, racial, and

human jurisprudence and the power of a nation to take bold and principled steps toward promoting justice even in the face of chronic injustice, social derision, and cultural intimidation (Thomas, Chinn, Perkins, & Carter, 1994). As the country marched past segregation, social mobility was supposed to spread across the country (Labaree, 1997).

However, as U.S. schools moved farther away from *Brown*, they have arguably moved further away from its promises. Segregation continues to have a powerful sway in U.S. schooling, denoting a painful legacy of legal and illegal separation of peoples by race and increasingly by class (Ladson-Billings, 2002; Orfield & Yun, 1999; Prendergast, 2002). This practice of forced separation has centralized the values of the social and cultural elite, projecting elite privilege onto mechanisms of social organization and apparatuses of social capital (Coleman, et al., 1966; Noguera, 2003a; Wells & Serna, 1996)—chiefly schools. In turn, schools have displaced non-elite groups, resigning them to marginal postures that limit their social mobility (Fruchter, 2007; Noguera, 2003a; Wells & Serna, 1996). In this way, the non-elite have been compartmentalized to specific sectors of society—reservations and ghettos, poor ethnic districts, and rural communities (Borjas, 1999; Thorne, 1997; Willis, 2002; Wong, 1988).

This division of people into spatial camps can sometimes fog differences experienced by groups. For example, individuals living in cities experienced the consequences of segregation differently than individuals living in other regions of the US. According to Fruchter (2007):

[In many Northern, Midwestern, and Western cities] The threat of integrated schooling, combined with the process of industrial dispersion, suburban housing

development, and highway construction influenced millions of white middle- and working-class families to leave central cities for the neighboring suburbs. Low-cost mortgages, subsidized by the federal government but made available almost entirely to white families only, helped spark this movement. In many cities, blockbusting by the same consortia of realtors that had maintained white-only neighborhoods also helped to swell the exodus and turn the core neighborhoods of central cities into all-black districts (p. 13).

Noguera (2003a) suggests, “Changes in nomenclature [a naming system peculiar to a social group] reflect more than just ideological and political trends” (p. 23). For Noguera:

The association between the term *urban* and people and places that are poor and non-White is tied to the demographic and economic transformations that occurred in cities throughout the United States during the past 50 years.... In the 1950s, federal policies hastened the decline of cities as new highways were constructed, making it easier for the middle class to move out of cities to obtain a piece of the American dream: a single-family home located in the suburbs (pp. 23-24).

As many cities grew darker following precipitous White Flight, White city school enrollments drastically declined. In cities such as Detroit, this decline has been as much as 90 percent post-*Brown* (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2007). With jobs and housing moving to suburban regions, many people began to view cities such as Detroit through

a deficit lens. By the early 1970s, cities like Detroit were no longer seen as housing the best institutions—schools, jobs, families, etc. Instead, they became associated with crime and violence (Anyon, 1995; Fine & Weis, 1998; McLaughlin, Irby, & Langman, 1994; Wilson, 1987) and “disproportionately comprised of residents who were poor and non-White” (Noguera, 2003a, p. 25).

This deficit view of the city and its poor, non-White residents questioned not only its economy, but also its morality. In this light, cities as vast as New York and as luminous as Las Vegas were better known for drugs, gangs, and sex than for any other alluring qualities they might possess. Further, with the rise of drugs, gangs, and a culture of burlesque, the 1980s would see another dip in the public’s perception of U.S. cities (Wilson, 1987). The resulting image produced a spectacular range of things, chiefly a deteriorating city positioned against an imagined suburb. By many accounts (cf. Baker, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Orfield & Yun, 1999), this image has given way to discourses of resegregation, which have served to extend segregation’s legacy not simply into separate and unequal classes, but also into a better and worse America.

There is evidence that segregation has not only continued today but has, in fact, increased (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2007; Orfield & Yun, 1999). The modern presence of segregation—what Orfield has termed “resegregation” and what I call neosegregation³—updates the ravages of segregation. For Orfield and his colleagues, desegregation efforts have not fully worked as they are merely positing an idea of change under the illusion of “choice.” Schools, they believe, reproduce many of the abuses of segregation, including high concentrations of capital and resources to a few privileged hands. New trends of segregation are particularly disturbing as student populations become

more diverse. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2008), “The percentage of racial/ethnic minority students enrolled in the nation’s public schools increased from 22 percent in 1972 to 31 percent in 1986 to 43 percent in 2006” (p. iv). The most dramatic growth is seen among Latino students, who “represented 20 percent of public school enrollment, up from 6 percent in 1972 and 11 percent in 1986” (p. iv.).

In spite of growing trends in diversity, Latino students, the fastest growing demographic enrolling in American schools, are also the most segregated minority group, with steadily rising segregation since federal data were first collected a third of a century ago (Gándara, 2000; Moll & Ruiz, 2002; Orfield, 1995; M. M. Suárez-Orozco & Pérez, 2002). According to Frankenberg, Lee, and Orfield (2003), “Latinos are segregated both by race and poverty, and a pattern of linguistic segregation is also developing” (p. 4). For some scholars, such trends are especially damning because it gives U.S. society one more way to exclude its minority populations (M. M. Suárez-Orozco & Pérez, 2002; Suro, 1998).

Neosegregation has affected other American racial groups as well. For example, a growing proportion of Black students, as much as one-in-four in the Northeast and Midwest, attend what Frankenberg *et al.* calls “apartheid schools,” schools with overwhelming minority populations (99-100%) where “enormous poverty, limited resources, and social and health problems of many types are concentrated” (p. 5). In addition, White students are perhaps the most segregated racial group attending American public schools. According to Frankenberg *et al.*, “they attend schools, on average, where eighty percent of the student body is white” (p. 4). These educational trends demonstrate that while America is an excitingly diverse place made richer by its diversity, it is

also a divided nation, troubled by its deep divisions, where trends of poverty and miseducation correlate too well with racial segregation.

While the *Brown* ruling set forth the course of legal reforms needed to challenge these divisions, it also seemed to strengthen the dominant discourses that, in effect, have reproduced segregation—that White is right, that elite values are most desirable, that cities are slums when compared to suburbs, etc. In effect, *Brown*, while promoting school desegregation, never set forth a real plan to stimulate school integration (Noguera, 2003a). Such a plan would imply not only the allowance of cultural hybridity where groups take on many of each other’s ways of living and thinking, but also the allowance of free choice where groups are given a liberal set of options that come with few consequences.

Brown’s biggest and perhaps only success has been to promote massive school desegregation particularly through busing programs that forced choices⁴ onto people who did not necessarily want them. In this way, the *Brown* solution came in the form of massive appeals garnered by coercion, which brought communities and cultures together in unholy unions, wedding two under-committed partners for better or worse. Indeed, it has been for worse that the discourses of choice that have been internalized and (I argue) have helped to transmit urban educational inferiority. This explains in part why even non-racist White parents (the vast majority of White parents) resist sending their children to most public schools in culturally diverse cities. While it can be argued that such resistance to integration only undermines desegregation, we must also keep in mind that White parents are not the only ones running away from such city schools. As perceptions of schools in U.S. cities grow worse, non-White parents too

have increasingly sought educational alternatives for their children within and outside the city limits (Fruchter, 2007; Noguera, 2001, 2003a; Oakes & Lipton, 2002; Willis, 2003).

While parents throughout American cities and suburbs desire the best possible education for their children, questions remain about the role of segregation in American education. Do we remain a set of divided school systems? Do we continue to push for integrated schools? While these questions require much thought and complex solutions, what seems clear is that, as it becomes more diverse, America needs stronger schools capable of unifying its students in order to meet the challenges and capitalize on the promises of its unique blend of people. These schools must be designed to bridge cultural and linguistic differences and educate all youth regardless of ethnic, linguistic, and socio-economic background. As the nation tiptoes farther into the new millennium, a deeper question shall become more pressing: how do we move the nation beyond the petty divisions that have long fractured it into separate and unequal parts?

POSTCOLONIAL STIRRINGS IN THE SHADOW OF *BROWN*: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Using postcolonial theories, I view the discourses framing school choice as constructing sets of distinctions, where a hegemony of western cultural norms prevails. Such distinctions have also gained critique in Whiteness studies, which have examined the ways in which dominant social and cultural discourses prop up White privilege (Marx, 2004; Richardson & Villenas, 2000). It is thus through a postcolonial lens that the hegemony of western culture and the privilege of Whites become visible. Once revealed, such visibilities can never again be hidden in objective light. As Fanon (1961) puts it: for non-Whites,

“objectivity is always directed against him” (p. 77).

On the other hand, unexamined acts, such as school choice are revealed to be particularly political ones, which intermingle with the cultural vibrations of history, the polity of social space, the articulations of identity, etc. Parents might not recognize all that is going on when choosing “the best school” for their child(ren). Thus, the question—can the parents of the subaltern choose—raises the specter of how choices can be rendered and received. That is, the choices that one makes can be seen as constructions based on positions of privilege and power, neglect and marginality that—like a colonizing relation—trade on false notions of individuality to sustain prevailing interests that sanction and serve western cultural hegemony and White privilege. Situating school choice in this context challenges our understanding of how choices exist. It changes choice from something individual to something historical that is buried in a sea of elite discourses.

“AIN’T NOWHERE ELSE TO GO”: THE HIDDEN COSTS OF CHOICE

Parents who do choose to send their children to what they believe are “inferior” schools seem forced to do so because of a perceived lack of options (Diamond, Wang, & Gomez, 2004; Lareau, 1987). According to Gwen and Manuela, “We have to send our kids to the neighborhood schools [schools in the City] because we can’t afford to send them anywhere else.” Perhaps a bit more optimistic than Manuela, Gwen admitted, “At least I can send my daughter to [a magnet] school, but even [the magnet school] ain’t good as the one out there [in the suburbs].” Conversely, parents who choose to send their children to what they feel are “superior” schools do so because they feel it is the best option they have. According to Kara:

I don't mind getting up taking Chris across town to school. I mean it's a lot of work sometimes, and he sometimes don't like going to school way out there [in the suburbs]. But he getting a good education, and at the end of the day, I know my son is safe. I don't have to worry about people hurting him or whether he gon be prepared for college or not. So it don't make no difference to me if he not here around his friends and stuff. He where he needs to be, and I'm ok with that.

Each of the parents' sentiments suggests that school choice is complicated, especially for parents living in a city like Detroit. Yet, each parent has made conscious and unconscious decisions that appear to blot out some of the very real consequences of their choices.

Their dichotomous views of schools set in place what I see as a forced choice, a choice that one makes given limited or insufficient options such as voting in a two-party political system when your politics disagree with both parties. Of course, you can choose not to participate in the electoral process at all. But even this choice does not absolve you from the consequences of the election, it may in fact shape the consequences of the election less in your favor. Given this, forced choice reifies the dominant discourses of the ruling order—in this case segregation. In education, forced choices have ensured that schools remain separate and unequal.

What gets constructed through such choices is a new form of segregation that is more pernicious than its predecessor. This new form of segregation, neosegregation, is legitimated (Bowels & Gintis, 1976) through dominant discourse of segregation. It too is capable of quieting the unspoken consequences of the forced choice

itself—chiefly the consequence of a system of chattel schooling that reproduces the abuses of segregation (the gross concentration of wealth and capital, undemocratic schools, ethnic and racial demagoguery, White privilege, the exploitation of poor and working communities, the displacement of local populations, and restrictions on speech and civil liberties). Drowning in a sea of consequences, neosegregation transforms into a form of modern-day colonialism, where the ravages of the past become the conditions of the present. It is through examining such conditions that the hidden discourses of school choice—*internalized inferiority*, *otherness*, and *false agency*—are revealed.

INTERNALIZED INFERIORITY

Perhaps the greatest consequence post-*Brown* has been in the way it has constructed individuals' perceptions of schools and communities. As mentioned earlier, such perceptions usually get couched in dichotomous language: superior/inferior, good/bad, black/white (Darder, 1991). In fact, one of the major arguments given to desegregate schools is not simply because there is something essentially wrong with the system of segregation, but because some schools are viewed as essentially superior to others. Following this logic, a range of scholars have argued, in order to challenge educational inequity, children of inferior schools should be given access to superior ones, even if that means movement away from one's community, one's friends, one's knowledge, etc. (Chapa, 2002; Gilmore, 1991; Lee, 2002; Ogbu, 1990; Walqui, 2000; Willis, 2003). This argument has promoted a discourse on schools that has shaped a lingering set of beliefs, which project perhaps the most vicious stereotypes on the subaltern and its residents.

This discourse of inferiority was, indeed, internalized by the parents of the subaltern. Hence, I use, here, the concept of *internalized inferiority* to speak to the

way in which the parents saw themselves and their communities as fundamentally lacking, especially in comparison to some other group or community (cf. Collins, 1986; Tatum, 1992; West, 1993). In this way, the parents of the subaltern did not see their communities or the schools in their communities in very positive light. For example, Kara believed that the schools in Detroit were “beneath” her son. According to her:

I want the best education for Chris and the schools in the City are a mess. It is a little inconvenient for us [to send Chris to school in a suburb of Detroit], but my family chips in. I don't trust Detroit Public Schools to educate my child and that's a shame. I know kids around the block who attend the neighborhood schools. It feels like they are getting the worst education possible. And the kids around here are bad. That makes schools around here dangerous, and I fear for my son's life if I send him to one of these [neighborhood] schools. A boy up the street just got shot the other day coming from school. All Chris's cousins, they go to the school just around the block. They get picked on, beat up. They beatin people up. There just aren't any good schools around here, that's it. So, I send Chris to school where I know he will get a good education.

Gwen had a similar view of the City schools:

I guess I'm satisfied [with the magnet schools she sends her daughter too]. But I know that these [schools in Detroit] ain't the best schools. . . I don't know if there are benefits [to sending your children to City schools]. I mean, we all know

that White folks got better schools, but I'm glad that Tiffani is where she is at. If we move to [a northeast suburb], I do feel she will get a better education though. But she might not be able to keep up with the kids out there, so I am glad where she's at.

Rachel's view of City schools even appeared bleaker than the other two parents:

I send [Grace to school in the City] because I ain't got nowhere else to send her. I'm very dissatisfied with her school. It wouldn't be my first choice. It wouldn't even be my second choice if I had one. It is hard on Grace going out there. Grace is smart. She makes friends at school, but with her being White, most of her friends don't go to school around her. . . She does fine at school, but I don't think that they are preparing her well to succeed in life.

Manuela's view of the City schools was perhaps the most nuanced. At the time of this study, she had two sons, José and Antonio, who attended high school on Detroit's Southwest side. Manuela's first language is Spanish, so she saw the school as a place where her children could gain access to mainstream English and American values:

I send him and his brother to that school for a good education. I can't help them that much. I want them to learn English because language is a barrier for us. I think we hurt them at home by speaking Spanish, sometimes. I don't let them speak Spanish that much. . . I want them to speak Spanish, but it is like a choice you have to make. . . I know that there are better schools

out there. But we can't get to them, and I think the issues might be worse there because those schools [are] harder even though I think they are better.

What is interesting about the parents' discussion of the City's schools is the overwhelming belief they shared that the schools were "bad." Perhaps one of the most extreme interpretations of this sense of "badness" was expressed by Kara, who also believed that City children were equally bad. From their conversations, we can infer how the parents felt about suburban (White) schools. I think Manuela summed up the group's sentiment when she said: "I think they are better." Hence, the parents shared an overall feeling that the City was bad, and the suburbs were good, that schools in the City offered diminished possibilities, while schools in the suburbs offered "a good education." Moreover, when they "had" to send their kids to City schools, parents like Rachel did so under tremendous duress. Perhaps ironically, Gwen and Manuela felt, too, that their children would be best served in the "inferior" schools of Detroit because, as Manuela put it, suburban schools are "harder."

DISCUSSION OF INTERNALIZED INFERIORITY

Operating within the historical backdrop of segregation, it becomes clear that the parents of the subaltern viewed their neighborhood schools as inferior to the schools outside their local contexts, which they imagined as superior. The idea of inferior urban schools and communities is often reinforced through the news and popular media, which depict city schools in the worst light as chaotic, barbaric, and bellicose (Fine & Weis, 1998; Noguera, 2003a). The parents, as well as popular media, imagined schools outside city limits as inherently better. By all accounts "better" never meant anything declarative. The notion

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”

of "better" that drives the image of suburban schools, for example, promotes a kind of grand illusion that romanticizes suburban schools and vilifies city ones.

This illusion is not necessarily based on what goes on in suburban schools, however. It is fundamentally constructed on how we perceive the city and use this perception to inform our desire for a better place. That is, since city schools are seen as demonstrably inferior, suburban schools, then, must house better teachers, better facilities, better resources, and better students. This grand illusion is ever-present in the parent interviews, particularly in Kara's discussion of fleeing the city so that her son could get a "better education."

While the parents held concrete assumptions about schools in general, it was never entirely clear to me what they based their assumptions of neighborhood schools on. A kind of myth world surfaced in these parents' words, where everything about their communities was negative and everything outside of it, positive—particularly the schools. Perhaps their perceptions of what was "bad" about their communities were overstated: "Kids getting killed every day at these schools"; "These teachers around here don't know a thing"; "All of the schools around here are falling apart. The schools out there are brand new."

Such comments were made even as forceful and effective policies against school violence had decreased violence in Detroit schools; as more skilled teachers were being recruited into the districts and effective ones were being rewarded by the district; and as facilities were undergoing some major renovations.

Even while “positive” projects were sweeping through Detroit schools, I cannot and do not discount the parents’ sentiments. Indeed, their apathy suggests the degree to which as a nation we need an even educational playing field that covers all communities. These parent testimonies offer clear evidence of the fixed mythologies at play when it comes to their symbolic and imagined readings of the world. According to Fanon (1952), such mythologies carry interesting and disturbing sociological and psychological consequences. For example, they could reinforce stereotypes that have been used to justify social discrimination and isolationism. Or they can provoke a “pride” counterreaction, especially as segregation had gone so far to strip marginalized populations of their sense of self-respect and proud history. Either way, segregation is reinforced in the discourses that make such myths available.

Clearly this reinforced form of segregation—neosegregation—looks differently than segregation of old. However, the system of forced separation remains the same. For example, to extend choices and unabashedly voice cultural pride, “national identity” schools⁵ have been cited as a remedy to the failure of *Brown*. These schools are supposed to provide the children of the subaltern a “good” education based on a decentering and disruption of the colonial discourses that maintain bad schools. Such forms of schooling deliberately slip back to *Plessey*, however, as certain groups established national identity schools in response to their exclusion from mainstream education. Such schools have called for pride in one’s heritage, blurring diasporic borders around a “collective

personality” that differs radically from the established norm. However, while these efforts call for cultural reversal in schooling itself, by insisting upon an alternative discourse of cultural dominance, they further stroke the sensation to segregate.

Even as efforts persist to extend better (not freer) choices to parents of the subaltern, national identity schools should be criticized for what can be seen as a defensiveness in their assertion of a false sense of pride. According to Nigerian playwright and Nobel Prize laureate Wole Soyinka, “A tiger does not proclaim his tigritude, he pounces.” In a similar way, Fanon (1952) believes that in the guise of rejecting internalized inferiority, false pride reinvigorates the same stereotypes in which the elite group believed and perpetuated.

Other scholars have argued that the competing discourse of internalized inferiority and “tragic nationalism” have both worked to sustain the exploitation of oppressed people—their histories and identities—through a self-colonizing and self-segregating neo-segregationist movement (Levitt, 1997; Waylen, 1996; West, 1993). The movement has happened in two directions: away from oneself and away from others. Moreover, analysis of the parents’ testimonies reveals the distortions in such inferiority and romanticizing discourses that marginal groups possess about schools. What we miss is that schools—like all structures—change continuously.

THE DOUBLE-CONSCIOUSNESS AND OTHERING

Another dominant discourse of school choice that helps extend school segregation are the concepts of *the double-consciousness and Othering*. In the postcolonial sense of the term, the “Other” expresses a degree of marginality, a distance from the center that gazes in from the periphery. It is the position or positioning of the outsider or

marginalized in relation to the position of the insider or the elite. DuBois (1903/2003) describes the double-consciousness when he writes about the social position of Black Americans at the turn of the Twentieth Century:

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (pp. 16-17).

Du Bois's description of double-consciousness and Othering (what I call double conscious Othering) bears similarities to how the parents of the subaltern saw themselves, their communities, and the schools within their communities. According to Kara:

We see what's going on outside of the City. Those [suburban] parents out there enjoy so much more, and they see us as good-for-nothings. [Chris] complains a lot about not going to school out there, not being with his friends. He also says that it's harder and that his teachers are prejudiced. They don't like him because he's Black. I tell him that he doesn't go to school for friends. I send him there for an education. He has to see the world differently, like they see it because that's what's going to get him out of

[the City]..... I always tell him that he has to do what it takes to fit in. He can't worry about his teachers. He just has to worry about making good grades so that he can go to a good college.

Rachel, too, viewed herself, her daughter, and community with suspicion. By this, she believed that her daughter, Grace, was "marked" by her city education. For Rachel, "Grace can't go nowhere without people knowing that she went to school in the City. This make people feel, including people in my family, that Grace is behind." What's revealing about Rachel's feelings of Otherness is how she interpreted for herself the feelings of others. This interpretation maps well onto her belief

that ain't a school in the City worth a damn. The people who run the schools—take money. They ain't got no control of the bad students. I'm in the mind that most of the kids are good. But they just let the few wreak havoc. That means that there is something about us in the City that's set apart from people in other places.

Both Gwen and Manuela expressed similar views concerning who they were and how they viewed their city. According to Gwen, "We are the outcast. That's why they give us the crumbs. They don't have to give us anything else. And when I look out into these streets and see all that is going on, I see what they see: that we do not have our stuff together." Manuela expressed her views using a less forceful tone; nonetheless, it carried a similar sentiment: "The people in this city are not seen in very good light. It is hard for me to talk about anybody in this city using positive terms."

As a matter of perception, the double-conscious discourse of the parents constructed the City, its residents, and its schools as the Other to the suburban

Self. This Self was, for the parents, the desired image. For them, it was also the location from which to view themselves, others around them, and the schools in their communities. That is, their construction of the Other was based on a self-viewing that did not emanate from the parents' individual circumstances at all, but from the system of differences that encouraged their circumstances. In this process of viewing the City, the parents had been compelled into unconsciously accepting the assumptions underneath the actual conditions of the City (Althusser, 1969).

These assumptions both constructed them as Others and allowed them to distance themselves from Others. Hence, the idea of the Other takes on a nuanced meaning, as one aspect of "they" described the City residents, and quite another aspect of "They" described individuals living outside the City. In this way, these parents thought hard about suburban school interiority (see example above), inviting myths that helped them to understand it. However, I would bet that suburban parents rarely speculate about the interiority of education in the city. Indeed, because they were subject to a special gaze, these parents—the parents of the subaltern—had little choice but to see themselves from a perspective outside the subaltern. They could not afford the denial of the suburban image that the parents outside the city luxuriate in and depend on to uphold and rationalize their privilege.

DISCUSSION OF DOUBLE-CONSCIOUSNESS AND OTHERING

I would like to connect the notion of double-conscious Otherness to our larger discussion about *Brown*. That is, it can be argued that the dominant discourse of segregation that *Brown* failed to disrupt reinforces constructions of the Other as sensual, lazy, exotic, irrational, incapable individuals and communities, ruled by their deficiencies.

The actions of such individuals and communities are, therefore, seen as determined by national, racial, and geographic categories. In constructing the Other, then, the dominant discourse of segregation has also constructed the desired Self—a romanticized place of rational, hardworking, kind, democratic, moral, modern, progressive, technological, individualist—as the center of the world, the norm against which everything else, including the City, is a deviation.

Following this logic, the parents' testimonies can be read as propping up segregation, as their views about neighborhood schools and neighborhood people as Others seamlessly follow the cadences of the dominant discourses of school choice. These discourses can best be explained using the language of postcolonial theories. It is within this literature that Said (1993) has suggested that colonial (but in this case segregationist) discourses continue to shape economic, political, and social relations between the social center and its margins. The ruling assumption is that since the center had means of projecting itself on the rest of the world, the schools that occupy the center (e.g. suburban schools) are normal and the ones that occupy the margins (e.g. city schools) are aberrations. As such, these parents treated suburban schools as if they were universal and simply natural rather than culturally specific and constructed. By contrast, they viewed city schools through an exotic lens as cultural accidents flung along the margins of Otherness.

FALSE AGENCY

In spite of the discourses of inferiority and otherness that influenced their school choices, the parents of the subaltern felt they had a degree of autonomy in choosing the schools their children attended. Hence, it was not unreasonable when I learned that

Kara, Gwen, Rachel, and Manuela sided in favor of policies like vouchers to “extend” their school choice. These parents perceived a freedom in such policies. Moreover, their perception of these—vouchers and the freedoms they would bring—fed the impression that parents could have some control over their children’s education. For example, Kara explains, “School choice gives parents more power over where their children will go to schools.”

The power Kara is alluding to also suggests that parents felt they had some stake in their children’s destinies. Kara continues, “It is up to us to do what’s best for our kids. If we don’t, we are responsible for what happens to them.” Kara’s sentiments summed up the overall feelings of the group. These parents took their choices seriously, weighing competing concerns. Each of them felt that it was their “responsibility to make sure [their child(ren)] got a good education.”

Even while some parents felt that school choices were available, each however also felt the tensions associated with the existing choices available to them. For Kara:

It’s expensive sending him there, I won’t lie. I don’t know how we are going to keep it up, but I’m going to do what I have to keep him in there because it’s a good school. Right now, I’m doing hair on the side [in addition to her other job]. We living check to check, but we’re living. You know. I’m trying to do everything I can so Chris doesn’t have to live like this.

Gwen suggested that sending her daughter to a suburban school would be difficult because “those schools do not always teach the kinds of things [urban Black] children need to learn about, like their history.” Given this, Gwen concludes, “I’m making the best choice for [my daughter] because I ain’t got

nowhere else to send her. All my kids went to [the magnet school].”

Rachel “would have loved more choices” in terms of schools for her daughter; however, as she sees it:

It’s hard to get Grace out there [to the suburbs] every day. She will be old enough to drive in about two years. I could send her then, but by then she will have made a lot of friends, got involved in all those activities—you know—and started doing whatever high school students do. I wouldn’t want to take her out of school then. That just doesn’t seem right to me. We just have to make the schools we have work. We’ve been able to do it all these years. I think we can last for four more.

Manuela’s options seemed to be the fewest:

There are no choices for Spanish- and English-speaking schools, see. I would love for my sons to have both because they have to live in both. If I sent them to a school outside the City, I am sure that they will not have teachers who are Hispanic like we are. In this area, this is pretty much where the Spanish speaking people live.... I want my boys to feel like they are part of something, and I also want them to learn. Out here, we have tough choices.

Based on their testimonies, what seemed like “free choices” were not so free at all. The options that each parent perceived revealed what I call “figments of choice”—a series of forced options that express an ability to choose but not a desired choice. These figments of choice were usually costly in some way. For example, in choosing to send a child to a school outside the community,

parents would also be choosing to endure the hardship of a daily commute, the consequences of racism and economic oppression, and the tragedy of loss that accompanies assimilation.

The greatest costs would, perhaps, be to the child. For example, Kara's son who travelled miles away from the city and his neighborhood to attend school in the suburbs may experience a good deal of grief from the lack of association with neighborhood friends, confusion due to the imposition of "foreign" knowledge, isolation due to feelings of internalized inferiority and otherness, and fatigue due to many other socio-psychological and physical factors associated with commuting a long distance to school (cf. Mabokela & Madsen, 2003; Nasir, 2004; Ogbu, 2003; C. Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). By choosing to keep their children in city schools, Rachel and Manuela faced what they perceived to be high costs too. Their perceptions fall in line with current scholarship which suggests that children attending city schools will experience poor instruction, declining facilities, the threat of violence, low parental involvement, etc. (Fine, 1993; Fruchter, 2007; Kearney, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2002; McLaughlin, et al., 1994; Noguera, 2003b). These costs multiply in industrial cities like Detroit due to higher concentration of segregation, stark divisions of wealth and poverty, and the overall erosion of the educational infrastructure.

While they may feel that they have options—or at least the illusion of options—the parents of the subaltern still made difficult school choices that they did not entirely believe in—send your child away from home and endure social and cultural threats; leave your child in city schools and endure physical threats. So, while they felt a sense of relative autonomy, they actually possessed less autonomy in choosing a school for their children than what they hoped or believed.

This idea seems to be what Kara was getting at when she admitted: "There are pros and cons for every choice you make." It is also captured in Manuela's sentiment that "no [school] choice is going to give you everything you want. You have to choose when you choose—what you can live with and what you can live without."

DISCUSSION OF FALSE AGENCY

The parents' discourse on school choice suggests that their choices were never free ones. What they experienced as agency (the ability to make things happen) was in fact *false agency*. False agency is the condition of powerlessness that operates ideologically under the guise of true choice. For example, when Kara believed that she could make something happen by sending her son Chris to a suburban school, she was playing into a discourse of inferiority that suburban (White) schools are essentially better than urban (Black) schools. For a parent with means, the choice between better and worst is oxymoronic. It isn't really a choice. That is, the discourse of inferiority essentially leads to one choice, a false choice, which reveals another discourse of exclusion that further props up segregation or promotes a racist reality that victimizes city students of color who commute to White suburban schools. Hence, Kara's false choice illustrates false agency.

The testimonies of the parents of the subaltern also reveal a key but hidden issue in the school choice discourse: the lie that we can extend liberties by promoting a system of nomadic practices that we pass off as educational reforms. Regardless of where you stand in the school choice debate, the choices that such "reforms" permit come with enormous consequences—suburban communities do not want poor city kids of color attending them and urban communities are made more tragic when their children are made to abandon their schools. Given these consequences, what

feels like agency and free choice in one sense is in another, stagnation and a vote for the status quo.

Still, Kara, Gwen, Rachel, and Manuela were not fixed or locked into static positions. Indeed, they felt that they could move and send their children to schools beyond the split corridors of the margins, away from the broken promises and buried dreams that rested in their neighborhoods. They felt they could migrate across political and cultural borders. Hence, rather than seeing borders as dividing lines, these parents saw them as porous transit points that sifted and sorted people as much as they separated them (Bhabha, 2004).

However, somewhere in the travel and the exchange of human bodies, each of the parents—in their own way—ended up “mimicking” the imagined elite, desiring with very few questions to adopt the elite language, the elite knowledge, and so on. They intently believed that the schools on the other side of the tracks were better. They did not seem to care as much that accommodating for these schools would come at a price. Hence, the promising passage into a place that could finally yield their dreams turned on them. Whatever school choice they made for their children in one way or another came to alienate them and their children from the confidence in their own identities, truths, knowledges, and often their languages. The hidden discourses behind their school choices, hence, destabilized the choice itself.

CONCLUSION

While there are many lessons about school choice and social relations yet to learn from *Brown*, perhaps the most meaningful lesson has been in revealing the hidden discourses of school choice that influence the continuation of segregation in American education. Questions, now, exist not only as to how to finally disrupt these discourses, but

also how to promote a new discourse on choice in its place that truly brings people together. We cannot, however, achieve this goal—the goal of true integration—by simply desegregating schools. Desegregation policies have long proven flawed, as they leave in place the dominant discourses of inferiority, otherness, and false agency that limit choices.

In order to bring people together, parents and students need true choices. They require a pool of schools that are integrateable,⁶ or capable of occupation without consequences to self and community. Integrateable schools are schools where parents, regardless of race or class, would desire to send their children. These schools would be cosmopolitan spaces (Appiah, 2006), addressing the concerns of city parents—safety, quality, effectiveness, etc.—without injuring students, as Chris’s suburban school seemed to have injured him. That is, if we are to achieve in practice the theory that integration implies, then these schools must reframe how we approach integration.

Integrateable schools are not simply intergraded or desegregated schools, they are schools that represent the rich and transitory cultures, knowledges, and perspectives of all Americans, made available to all students who wish to attend them. They are safe destinations, not reached by giant social, cultural, and geographical leaps. They do not serve the interests of the few, but of the many, and are accessible to all. In this way, we can’t integrate schools by forcing diverse populations together. We’ve tried this, and it failed. Further, we can’t meet our students’ needs in a tiered educational system that works for some but not all, that embraces the cultures, knowledges, and languages of some and yet ignores that of others. We don’t have integrated schools simply because people refuse to come together; we don’t have integrated schools because most of our schools are not yet integrateable.

Creating integrateable schools is all the more urgent, particularly as the political and cultural borders between cities and suburbs have emerged as figures of the irrepressible yet contested migration of peoples. For her part, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987/1999) has insisted on a similar sort of mixing of national, racial, sexual, and gendered cultures and identities. Her notion of *mestiza* (racially “mixed”) can be extended to my vision of integrateable schools, which can (and should) structure a setting and a system of education based on mixings of ideas, languages, and knowledges representative of all “American cultures.” This calls for a reinvention of American education across multiple borders. In reinventing schools, we must seek to represent multiple identities and languages, multiple thoughts and social philosophies instead of supposing that our differences can continue along separate paths.

Many might find my call for integrateable schools to be overly idealistic. However, I take license from Glissant (1989), who has described an existing model of many cultures, languages, and peoples mixing together. He sees, for example, the Caribbean as an “integrateable” society, where there is a compatible mixture of African, French, English, Spanish, indigenous, and South Asian origins. This mixture of many selves has in Glissant’s words produced a *métissage*—or mixing—that never settles into the stable and stale sameness of conventional social structures that characterize many traditional schools. As they privilege mixing over segregating, integrateable schools become an important model for rethinking schools. Such a rethinking is needed because throughout the U.S. in cities like New York and Los Angeles, city schools are becoming more and more worlded by diverse cultural and linguistic groups from across the globe whose mere presence challenges borders and begs for a new set of choices.

In Detroit, this call for a new, integrateable school model couldn’t be more urgent. In 2010, the city announced the closing of 45 of its public schools (with 13 more public schools to close a year later). Detroit’s students are scattering in droves, retreating to suburban schools that do not want them, charter schools that are on a mission to “save” them, and failed city schools that simply still exist. New charter schools are poised to open; accepting suburban schools are revising their missionary statements (hopefully into true mission statements) to meet the needs of Detroit’s refugee student population. My hope is that when the dust settles, out of the ashes will arise a set of schools that are integrateable, a set of schools that can give parents like Kara, Gwen, Rachel, and Manuela choices they can believe in.

NOTES

1. The term *subaltern*, according to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1985), refers to people with less power, for example South Asian Indian women. I have adapted the term here to refer not only to the children of the city but also to the ideological and physical place of disempowerment in which city parents with less power and fewer choices than their suburban counterparts reside. In this sense, I use the term to denote a tension in their choices, where decisions submit to questions that are open, continuous, and unanswerable.
2. By *discourse*, I mean the entity of signs, symbols, and statements that represent larger relations (or associations) to objects, subjects and other enouncements. A *discourse*, in this way, constitutes the substance and content of such relations and associations both in linguistic and extralinguistic forms (Foucault, 1969, 1970, 1972).
3. I use the term *neosegregation* as opposed to Orfield’s (1999) term *resegregation* to signal the differences between segregation in the past as compared to the present. That is, segregation today is similar but not the same as the segregation of yesterday. Today’s segregation is far more class-based and has different consequences due to differences in the modern postindustrial economy and culture.

4. By this I mean the choice to leave one's community or the choice to adopt unwanted guests.

5. National identity schools are usually developed by centering a particular race or religion.

6. To reframe my approach to integration, I channel William Julius Wilson's (1997) concept of marriageable men. In reference to the marriage gap between White and Black families, Wilson (among others) explains the gap by suggesting that Black women seeking a mate of comparable character have the limited choices in available—or as he puts it—marriageable Black men. Extending his idea to school contexts, I contend that parents seeking a school of comparable character have limited choices in what I call “integrateable,” schools. For the parents of the subaltern, neighborhood schools were questionable because of issues of quality and safety; however, out-of-neighborhood schools were also questionable because they did not always reflect them, their children, or their interests.

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- David E. Kirkland is the executive director of the NYU Metro Center and professor of English and Urban Education in the Department of Teaching and Learning at the NYU Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. He can be contacted at: davidekirkland@gmail.com. Please follow him on Twitter: @davidekirkland.*



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