On the Road to *Brown* and Beyond: Troubling Integration, Desegregation, and Segregation in the Fight for Black Educational Equity, Opportunity, and Justice

kihana miraya ross  
Northwestern University  

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On the Road to Brown and Beyond
Further, this paper explores Black communities’ complicated relationship to the Brown decision, and Black student experiences in both segregated and desegregated schools in the current context. I conclude with a consideration of how the lens of anti-Blackness in education may be a useful tool in charting a path toward equity, opportunity, and educational justice for Black students.

Findings reveal the Supreme Court was as important in advancing desegregation as it was in facilitating the current re-segregation of schools without a renewed federal commitment to mandate desegregation, schools are unlikely to become integrated. Further, anti-Black racism structures school policies and practices such that Black student experiences in both segregated and desegregated schools remain highly racialized and impede their educational success and well-being. Black communities’ nuanced relationship with the Brown decision and centuries-long fight for education has much to teach us about how we might develop and sustain equitable learning environments for Black students.

Keywords: segregation, desegregation, re-segregation, integration, anti-Blackness, anti-Black racism, race, racism, Black education.

Based on this review, sweeping changes in policy and practice are necessary in order to meaningfully address and redress Black students’ racialized schooling experiences. I conclude with three recommendations for the field related to funding, policy, practice, and educational design.

1. The federal government should formally recognize historical and contemporary Black educational injury and support a platform of educational reparations to provide meaningful redress. Explicitly name and focus on race and specific types of racism.
2. As a part of a project of educational reparations, the federal government should support districts in enacting school-level reforms that support Black students’ social, cultural, and academic development.
3. As a part of a project of educational reparations, the federal government should commit resources to: (a) sustain existing alternative, informal, and out-of-school learning programs designed for Black students and educators, their families, and communities; and (b) support the development of new educational systems, programs, initiatives, curricula, and spaces that foster Black students’ academic, social, cultural, and political agency.

Executive Summary

In 2021, 67 years after the historic Brown victory, U.S. schools are increasingly re-segregating and are systemically failing Black students. In this paper, I review the unfulfilled promise of Brown, and the role of both the Supreme Court and school districts in actively and passively facilitating re-segregation.

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Structure of the Paper

This paper is divided into four sections. In the first section, I provide historical context. I revisit the Brown victory; the fierce resistance to its implementation in both the North and the South, and the infuriatingly slow move toward desegregation. After a discussion of the arc of desegregation efforts, I consider key Supreme Court cases that have facilitated the re-segregation of schools and inform our understanding of many Black students’ current educational reality as deeply segregated. In the second section of the paper, to add nuance and complexity to the portrayal of the fight for desegregation, I explore the less well-known history of Black parents who hesitated in embracing desegregation and/or actively fought to retain Black schools in Black communities with Black teachers. In the third section of the paper, I pivot to consider the work of scholars who study the economics and public policy contexts of public school integration. I explore these works in particular to highlight both the unfinished business of the original Brown decision, and also some of the reasons we may continue to fight for genuinely integrated schools, especially given the number of Black students stuck in segregated “drop out factories,” without access to the material resources more integrated schools often provide.

At the same time, I explore the ongoing racialized experiences of Black students in desegregated schools and problematize the notion that desegregation is enough. I want to suggest that while the promise of integration may be a stop on the road to the Black educational Promised Land, the destination is far beyond Brown. I conclude this section by complicating the narrative of inferior segregated schools and superior desegregated schools, and explore the research examining both what Black families valued about historically segregated schools and what we may learn from them in our desire to cultivate equitable learning environments for Black students of all ages. The final section reflects back across the first three sections using the theoretical framework of anti-Blackness in education. Ultimately, I illustrate how the new analytical tools advanced by scholarship at the intersections of Black Studies and education shift the questions we ask, the way we articulate the problems, and how we envision Black students’ educational opportunities; these efforts reduced childhood poverty (Darling-Hammond, 2018; Orfield, 2005). Three federal initiatives in particular made a drastic impact on reducing the racialized achievement gap and increasing educational opportunity. First, the Great Society’s War on Poverty sought to reduce poverty and provide relief for the nation’s poor. Federal initiatives aimed to increase the availability of adequate health care, affordable housing, and educational opportunities; these efforts reduced childhood poverty to roughly 60% of today’s levels (Bailey & Danziger, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2000). Second, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provided over one billion dollars of educational funding (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Orfield, 2014; Valverde, 2004). Finally, the Emergency School Aid Act of 1972 supported desegregation efforts, and invested in recruiting and retaining excellent teachers, improving teacher education, and research and development (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014).

The Aftermath of Brown v. Board of Education

Many have seen images of disdilated segregated schools so lacking in material resources it is difficult to imagine they existed in an industrialized nation. Many have also seen the iconic images of Thurgood Marshall-smiling brightly after the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that separate was inherently unequal—of a Black mother and her daughter sitting on the Supreme Court steps holding a newspaper with the front-page headline, “High Court Bans Segregation in Public Schools.” Without a doubt, the Brown victory marked significant court decisions of the twentieth century, and carried the promise of equal opportunity in education for all children, regardless of skin color.

Yet, the celebrations of this de jure change quickly turned into frustrations at the lack of de facto differences. Particularly in the South, where segregation had been the most entrenched, White Southerners were adamantly opposed to desegregation. In Mississippi, shortly after the Brown decision was handed down, the governor announced that Mississippi would not abide by nor obey this legislative decision. In Virginia, Senator Harry Byrd declared the need to create a massive resistance to desegregation, where the South would resist desegregation so fiercely that the rest of the country would accept their refusal to abide by the law. To be clear, it wasn’t just government officials who opposed desegregation or vowed to prevent it. In both Virginia and Mississippi, massive public resistance was the topic of Black and White children attending school together.

Perhaps most notoriously, in Arkansas, the resistance to Black students attending previously White-only schools was so intense—by both the government as well as adult and minor White citizens—that federal troops had to be called in to escort Black students to class. Black students endured constant verbal and physical assaults, including being called racial slurs, being beaten, spat upon, and having food thrown on them or dumped on their heads, all so that they could attend a school they were legally entitled to attend.

This resistance to desegregation was so intense that even a decade after Brown, there was little movement toward its actualization (Chemerinsky, 2003; Hannah-Jones, 2014; Lane & White, 2010; Chemerinsky (2005) notes: “In the South, just 1 percent of African American public schoolchildren were attending schools with whites. In South Carolina, only 0.2 percent of the African American students attended desegregated schools in 1961, and the figure did not rise above 1 percent until 1965. Similarly, in Virginia in 1964, only 163 percent of African American students attended desegregated schools.” [p. 32]

White resistance to Brown may have also been encouraged by the wording of the historic Brown decision itself. Orfield (2006) argues that the promise of Brown was matched with very limited means. In other words, while the decision itself effectively acknowledged there was no such thing as “separate but equal” and barred segregation in public schools, the language of Brown—e.g., the phrasing of “‘all deliberate speed’”—meant the rule also led to change for happen at a pace that would not make Social Science an untransformable. Hence most Southern federal district judges ensured that only extremely minimal change occurred, such as allowing a very small number of Black students to transfer to White schools (Orfield, 2005; Pettigrew, 2004).

Northern Resistance to Brown

While the focus of the implications of the Brown decision is often on the South both because of its explicit de jure form of racial segregation and also because of major Northern cities like New York’s insistence that there was no “official segregation” (Fine as cited in Belmont, 2016, p. 25). In reality, Northern White students and their families also struggled against this new mandate. Although public schools in the North weren’t segregated by explicit Jim Crow laws like they were in the South, school zoning policies and housing discrimination contributed to ensuring the majority of schools in the North remained largely segregated even until the 1970s (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014). In New York, for example, in 1955, 71% of elementary schools were extremely segregated, enrolling either over 90% Black and Puerto Rican students or over 90% White students (Belmont, 2016). Even as late as 1997 in Chicago, Black students made up only 3% of the student population in majority White schools (Hawers, 1977).

As protests to desegregate schools in Northern cities like New York increased, White parents ignited their own protests over fears of “busing” (Dougherty & Leavay, 2000; Formisano, 2004). While busing was only one potential mechanism of desegregation and busing in the broader public imagination. In 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed the Kerner Commission to investigate the cause of the numerous “race riots” erupting across the country. The Kerner Commission was a bi-partisan collective tasked with understanding what was actually happening, why it was happening, and what could be done to prevent it from happening again (Gooden & Myers, 2018). In 1968, following seven months of research and in the midst of the slow progress following Brown, the Kerner Commission report underscored White racism and warned the U.S. was “moving toward two societies, one black, one white—that could and should never coexist.” In the decade following the Kerner Commission, as a result of desegregation efforts and school finance reform, there was a significant reduction in educational inequality (Darling-Hammond, 2018; Orfield, 2005). These federal initiatives in particular made a drastic impact on reducing the racialized achievement gap and increasing educational opportunity. First, the Great Society’s War on Poverty sought to reduce poverty and provide relief for the nation’s poor. Federal initiatives aimed to increase the availability of adequate health care, affordable housing, and educational opportunities; these efforts reduced childhood poverty to roughly 60% of today’s levels (Bailey & Danziger, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2000). Second, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provided over one billion dollars of educational funding (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Orfield, 2014; Valverde, 2004). Finally, the Emergency School Aid Act of 1972 supported desegregation efforts, and invested in recruiting and retaining excellent teachers, improving teacher education, and research and development (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014).

On the Road to Brown and Beyond

A Desegregation “Heyday”

In 2014, President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed the Kerner Commission to investigate the cause of the numerous “race riots” erupting across the country. The Kerner Commission was a bi-partisan collective tasked with understanding what was actually happening, why it was happening, and what could be done to prevent it from happening again (Gooden & Myers, 2018). In 1968, following seven months of research and in the midst of the slow progress following Brown, the Kerner Commission report underscored White racism and warned the U.S. was “moving toward two societies, one black, one white—that could and should never coexist.” In the decade following the Kerner Commission, as a result of desegregation efforts and school finance reform, there was a significant reduction in educational inequality (Darling-Hammond, 2018; Orfield, 2005). These federal initiatives in particular made a drastic impact on reducing the racialized achievement gap and increasing educational opportunity. First, the Great Society’s War on Poverty sought to reduce poverty and provide relief for the nation’s poor. Federal initiatives aimed to increase the availability of adequate health care, affordable housing, and educational opportunities; these efforts reduced childhood poverty to roughly 60% of today’s levels (Bailey & Danziger, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2000). Second, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provided over one billion dollars of educational funding (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Orfield, 2014; Valverde, 2004). Finally, the Emergency School Aid Act of 1972 supported desegregation efforts, and invested in recruiting and retaining excellent teachers, improving teacher education, and research and development (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014).
Numerous scholars have argued that desegregation does not occur without judicial action (McNeill & Rowley, 2019; Soss, Hays, 2013, 2014; Thompson Dorsey & Roulhac, 2019; Williams & Graham, 2019). After significant resistance to the historic Brown decision, additional Supreme Court battles became necessary to actualize substantive change. For example, in Green v. County School Board (1968), the Supreme Court ruled that New Kent County’s “Freedom of choice” plan was not a sufficient step to bring about a desegregated unitary school system. This decision established the district’s affirmative duty to desegregate (Lane & White, 2010), insisted on true desegregation plans that would not rely on the willingness of individual families to make the choice to integrate (Walker & Daniel, 2014), or place the burden of integration on Black children (Pattigrew, 2004), and helped facilitate large-scale court-ordered desegregation in the South (Lutz, 2017).

Still, Kent County was unique in that at the time of the Green decision, the district operated only two schools, one serving White children and one serving Black children. In larger districts, or geographic areas with multiple school districts, desegregation efforts were more complicated. By the 1970s, White flight to the suburbs presented a significant problem to desegregation efforts (Dye, 2005; Logan et al., 2017; Reber, 2005). As a result of increasingly White suburbs and increasingly non-White inner cities, interdistrict remedies were required to reverse the re-segregation of schools. Still, in cases such as Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education (1971), while the Supreme Court ruled that district courts have broad authority in developing remedies to support desegregation, and ruled busing constitutional, Swann focused solely on remedies within a school district. Thus if the majority of students within a district are non-White, for example, the level of desegregation that can be achieved without interdistrict remedies is severely limited. While the Supreme Court has been a critical factor in facilitating school desegregation nationwide, Supreme Court decisions have also played a critical role in re-segregating American schools and dramatically diminished the possibility of achieving desegregation or educational opportunity (Amsterdam, 2017; Chemerinsky, 2003; Crawford & O’Neill, 2011; Lane & White, 2010; Orfield, 2015).

Interdistrict Limitations

Scholars often point to Milliken v. Bradley (1974) as one of the most significant Supreme Court decisions in imposing significant limits on district courts’ powers to remediate segregation in schools (Chemerinsky, 2005; Kalfà et al., 2016, Kucsera et al., 2016, Lane & White, 2010, Lopez & Burchia, 2014, Orfield, 2015). This case focused on Detroit area schools where Black children comprised the majority of students in the district and White students comprised the majority of students in the surrounding suburban school districts. While a federal district court imposed a multi-district remedy to school segregation, the Supreme Court ruled such an interdistrict remedy was impermissible. Thus Milliken had a devastating effect on desegregation efforts. Particularly given the reality of a number of predominantly Black urban cities surrounded by predominantly White suburbs, the inability to utilize interdistrict solutions made desegregation efforts virtually impossible. Further, while residential segregation has always been facilitated by racialized housing policies, the Milliken decision (1974) allowed White flight (Dye, 2005; Reber, 2005), as White families who didn’t want their children to attend desegregated schools simply moved to the suburbs.

Pervasive Inequalities in Funding

Scholars also highlight the extreme disparities in school funding that remained in the 1970s (Chemerinsky, 2003, 2005; Moran, 2004; Walker & Daniel, 2014). On average, predominantly White school districts spent far more per pupil than predominantly Black school districts. Unequal school funding was largely the result of school funding coming primarily from local property taxes. Where real estate values are lower and property taxes are lower, there is less money for schools. Similarly, where residents pay more money in property taxes, schools and the students who attend them have more resources at their disposal. The Supreme Court had an opportunity to remedy this profound inequality, but failed to do so. In San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez (1973), Rodriguez argued that a school funding scheme based on property tax revenues that disadvantaged students residing in poorer districts because their schools did not have the same property tax base as schools in wealthier districts. This reliance on property value facilitated racialized disparities in per-pupil expenditures. In a severe blow to the fight for funding equality, the Court ruled, “Inequalities in funding did not deny equal protection” (Chemerinsky, 2005, p. 36). Taken together, Milliken and Rodriguez ensured that schools would be both racially segregated and unequally funded.

The 1990s: A Re-segregation Trilogy

Beyond the Supreme Court decisions of the 1970s, scholars have also pointed to significant Court decisions in the 1990s that effectively halted desegregation orders (Crawford & O’Neill, 2011; Chemerinsky et al., 2006; Holley-Walker, 2010). McNeil (2009; McNeil & Rowley, 2019, Walker & Daniel, 2014) Orfield (2005) signals that while the decisions of the 1970s were required to reverse the re-segregation of schools, the desegregation plan could be abandoned. In a stunning reversal of earlier expectations, the Court adopted the basic ideas first put forward by President Reagan’s Justice Department—that desegregation was a temporary rather than a permanent solution to public schools and that courts could dissolve existing orders and permit the restoration of segregated neighborhood schools as long as the school districts said that they made these changes for educational rather than racial reasons. (p. 12)

First, in Board of Education of Dowell (1991), protesters against segregation wanted to reinstate a court ordered desegregation plan, arguing that schools had been forced to re-segregate. The Supreme Court, however, ruled that “federal supervision of local school systems [has always] been intended as a temporary mechanism to remedy past discrimination.” Thus even where it was clear that ending a desegregation order would lead to the re-segregation of schools, the Supreme Court ruled that as long as the school board had acted in good faith to achieve a practical level of desegregation, the desegregation plan could be abandoned.

The following year, in Freeman v. Pitts (1992), Georgia’s DeKalb County School District sought to be declared desegregated and to withdraw from court supervision, as it could be considered successful in 4 out of 6 categories of achieving desegregation in pupil assignments and facilities (as established in Green v. County School Board). Still, another aspect of the desegregation order concerning teacher assignments had not yet been fulfilled. When a school system planned to construct a facility that would benefit Whites more than Black folks, the Supreme Court stated it could not review the discriminatory nature of this construction because the portion of the desegregation order related to facilities had not yet been achieved. Thus if the majority of students within a district are non-White, the federal court that ordered desegregation had been met, the federal court should move itself only in aspects of the order that had not yet been achieved.

Three years later in Missouri v. Jenkins (1995), the final Supreme Court case in what Crawford and O’Neill (2011) call the “re-segregation trilogy,” the Supreme Court effectively limited the remedies to do factual segregation that local courts could mandate. Chemerinsky (2005) notes that even though Missouri schools had previously been segregated by law, and a federal court did not issue a desegregation order until 1977, the significant progress that had been made by 1995 was halted when the Court ruled in favor of the state on every issue. Chemerinsky demonstrates the way the Court used the Milliken ruling to argue against interdistrict remedy, ruled against the district court’s authority to order an across-the-board teacher salary increase (despite it being deemed a necessary component of ending desegregation), and ruled that a continued racial disparity in standardized test scores did not justify the continuation of a desegregation order. Chemerinsky writes, “Together, Dowell, Freeman, and Jenkins have given a clear signal to lower courts: the time has come to end desegregation orders, even when the effect could be resegregation.” (p. 40) However, lower courts ended desegregation orders in the decade that followed, even when it was clear that doing so would result in the re-segregation of schools.
Re-segregation of Schools in the Current Context

In the current educational landscape, schools across all geographies have been increasingly segregating (Hicks & Murray, 2019; Takan, 2017). Within-district segregation is prevalent and more districts have seen increases in segregation than those that have seen decreases (Bingham, 2019). While students in approximately 50% of the nation’s public school enrollment, roughly 20% of public schools have few or no White students enrolled (Williams & Graham, 2019), an increasingly larger half of the country where Black and Latino students constitute 90% of enrollment (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014). In fact, over the last three decades, Black students have increasingly attended intensely segregated schools, and as of 2016, 40% of all Black students were in schools with 90% or more students of color (Frankenberg et al., 2019). Charlotte, for example, experienced a 67% increase in the growth of intensely segregated schools and in 2016, 21% of Black and Latino students attended schools in this category (Ayscue et al., 2016). Further, Ayscue et al. noted that in both the Raleigh and Charlotte school districts, Black students’ exposure to White students has decreased significantly in the last 20 years (51% in Charlotte and 32% in Raleigh). Similarly in Washington, D.C., nearly 3 out of 4 students of color attend intensely segregated schools, in Detroit almost 9 out of 10 students attend these schools, and in Camden, New Jersey every student of color attends a school classified as intensively segregated (Adamson & Galloway, 2019).

District Resistance to Desegregation

While the aforementioned Supreme Court cases are largely responsible for the re-segregation of schools, districts have also used other means to resist desegregation, including district fracturing/succession and race-neutral voluntary choice programs. District fracturing leads to increased segregation as smaller districts that separate from original larger districts tend to be less diverse and create a resource shortage for low-income and Black students left behind (Houck & Murray, 2019; Taylor et al., 2019). In fact, Houck and Murray note that for each pupil, seceded districts received $1,837 more overall funding, $395 more state funding, and substantially more local funding ($1655) than original districts. Nationally, 47 districts have seceded larger districts in the last 30 years to create Whiter, wealthier districts and only four states require approval from voters in the original district to allow succession (Brennan, 2018). Houck and Murray argue that district fracturing is a legal way to re-segregate schools to the benefit of Whites and is another “mechanism within a taxonomy of white resistance to integration” (p. 399).

Similar to district fracturing, school choice policy is often “race neutral” in language but privileges White families (Thompson Dorsey & Roulhac, 2019) and facilitates segregation between schools within districts (Holme et al., 2013; Knoester & Au, 2015; McDermott et al., 2015; Whitehurst, 2017). For White families, exercising choice is strongly associated with choosing a predominantly White school (Bifulco et al., 2009; Sikkink & Emerson, 2008), and White parents may utilize their personal networks to help navigate the choice process and facilitate getting their children into “good” (mostly White) schools (Roda & Wells, 2013). Often the schools deemed “good” also have high test scores; test scores can serve as a proxy for families to make racialized judgments about schools without discussing race explicitly, and high-stakes testing combined with school choice functions as a mechanism for racial coding that facilitates segregation (Aske et al., 2017; Knoester & Au, 2015). At the same time, Knoester and Au (2015) argue race-neutral language allows school segregation to be interpreted as simply a function of the market and individual choices.

While White parents may be advantaged in race-neutral school choice models, low-income Black parents may face numerous obstacles in “choosing” the school they want. For example, these parents may desire their students attend a specific school but may lack transportation; thus they may not have the option to attend their school of “choice” or they may be confronted with lengthy bus rides to and from school (Cable & Glass, 2009; Holme et al., 2013). Further, the absence of transportation options or options that present extreme inconveniences may also prevent or limit students’ participation in sports, extracurricular activities, or social times with their White counterparts (Holland, 2012). Black students may also self-select to attend schools with higher concentrations of other Black students—even when neighborhood schools are not selected (Whitehurst, 2007).

Necessity of Race-conscious Policy

Unfortunately, districts are more likely to pursue diversity through choice and the creation of specialized schools rather than employing the more politically difficult strategy of altering school attendance boundaries, which would challenge certain families’ privilege (Diam et al., 2019). While there are some examples of voluntary integration strategies such as magnet schools with accessible transportation have had a positive impact on integration (Kucsera et al., 2014), others have little to no effect and may even increase school segregation (Bifulco et al., 2009; Seigel-Hawley, 2013). Ultimately scholars are clear that race-neutral policies most often facilitate racial segregation and that controlled race-neutral school assignment policies are necessary to combat segregation and promote integration (Billings et al., 2009; Frankenberg, 2017; Holme, 2017; Linn & Weimer, 2007; Roda & Wells, 2013; Seigel-Hawley, 2016; Thompson Dorsey & Roulhac, 2019; Whitehurst, 2017; Williams & Graham, 2019). Seigel-Hawley (2014) argues intentional desegregation policy is necessary to ensure that districts (except those released from court orders) continue to desegregate and cannot use district boundary rezoning or other strategies as a means to segregate. Further, schools are unlikely to integrate unless they have a court order or other policy mandating that they do so (Kucsera et al., 2014; Seigel-Hawley, 2013), and unless their court mandates that force desegregation, it is likely that we will see re-segregation (Thompson Dorsey & Roulhac, 2019).

Consequently, it is critical that we understand the significance of the Supreme Court’s role in both helping to lay the groundwork for the desegregation heyday and also the sharp turn towards the re-segregation of schools across the country. Any serious conceptualization of a plan to reverse the current course must necessarily wrestle with the role of the Court in precipitating tangible change in the nation’s schools. Yet, the role of the Court is one part of a much larger, complex equation. And long before the re-segregation of schools, during the arduous battle for movement towards actual desegregation, Black families grew frustrated with a project that seemed to require a lot but offer very little in return. A consideration of how desegregation efforts were understood and experienced is a critical component for understanding the long arc of Black families’ struggle for educational equity, opportunity, and justice in this nation.
Simpson worked with the Chicago Urban League to fight for desegregation, she also fought for Community Control of existing segregated spaces. Rather than a singular fixation on integration alone, many Black folks understood desegregation as one means to an end: equal opportunity.

Todd-Breland (2018) argues even during the heyday of the Civil Rights struggles to desegregate other public spaces, many Black folks were ambivalent about integration. While Black communities were certainly in opposition to the ways segregation restricted access to opportunities, constrained Black communities were certainly in opposition to the ways segregation restricted access to opportunities, constrained liberties, and was a tool of stigmatization, “opposition to the establishment of any school that map onto an ideological commitment to integration” (p. 24). In fact, in a 1935 poll of Black Southerners, only 53% of respondents approved of the Brown ruling. Not only did they question whether desegregation could dismantle White supremacy or create racial justice, they also worried that desegregation would require assimilation into White culture, eliminate Black teachers, and undermine the work of Black schools (Ewing, 2018; Lipman, 2009).

Desegregation plans also may have felt one-sided to many Black families (Delmont, 2016; Hilbert, 2018); while desegregation could dismantle White supremacy or create educational opportunity, equity, and justice.

Holding Onto the Dream: An Argument for Re-energying the Fight for Integration

Numerous scholars have documented the myriad ways Black students continue to be disadvantaged in racially segregated schools. These schools are allocated less material resources, and have higher numbers of non-tutored and inexperienced teachers with lower teacher salaries (Darling-Hammond, 2000, 2004; Frankenberg, 2009; Hourck, 2010; Noguera & Wing, 2006). Schools with high populations of Black students are also often housed in inferior facilities, offer fewer advanced courses, and have poorly equipped science labs, less enrichment activities, and inadequate numbers of counselors and related services (Lana & White, 2010; Bearden & Owens, 2014). Many of these schools are overly focused on standardized testing and orderly behavior to the detriment of recess, arts, and play (Au, 2016; Koh, 2000; Pallegnini & Bohn, 2005; Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2004).

Conversely, racially diverse schools have demonstrated more positive short-term and long-term outcomes for Black students (Ayscue et al., 2017). Specifically, scholars point to improvements in academic achievement (Billings et al., 2014; Mickelson & Bottia, 2010; Mickelson & Nkomo, 2012; Palleray et al., 2015; Potter, 2013; Rotherston, 2013; Tefera et al., 2011; Wells et al., 2016) as well as the myriad benefits of academic and social interactions with racially diverse peers (Bifulco et al., 2012; George & Darling-Hammond, 2007; Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2008; Linn & Welner, 2007; Guillain & Campbell, 2003). Further, racially homogeneous schools may not prepare students of any race to participate in a multicultural society (Jayakumar, 2008; Seigel-Hawley, 2012), whereas racially diverse schools may increase students’ civic engagement and desire to interact and participate in democratic processes with people who are different from themselves, facilitating a direct benefit to the larger U.S. democracy (Kurlansky & Yun, 2005; Messer & Rogers, 2013; Tefera et al., 2011; Wells et al., 2016). Finally, scholars note that the beneficial experiences in desegregated schools are not detrimental to White students and in some cases, may even benefit them as well (Johnson, 2019; Linn & Welner, 2007; Seigel-Hawley, 2012, 2020).

Desegregation and Life Outcomes

These in-school benefits also translate to long-term positive financial, health, and well-being life outcomes (Hannah-Jones, 2015; Hawley, 2007; Legal Defense and Educational Fund, NAACP, 2008; Mickelson & Nkomo, 2012; Wells et al., 2016). According to a comprehensive recent study highlighting the myriad benefits of integrated schooling, Johnson’s (2019) latest book, Children of the Dream: Why School Desegregation Matters, experienced a significant increase in educational attainment for Black children, including greater college attendance and completion rates, and attendance at more selective colleges; the more years they are exposed to desegregated schools, the more years they are exposed to desegregated schools. This is particularly true for Black students able to participate in desegregated education in their elementary years and in places where desegregation facilitated substantial increases in school resources. Johnson found Black students exposed to desegregated education institutions for the entirety of K-12 completed an entire additional year of schooling compared to Black children in segregated schools. Johnson also argues that desegregation is a central force in the fact that college attendance for Black high school graduates was similar to their White counterparts by the late 1970s. Johnson writes, “The effect of desegregation exposure throughout all twelve school-age years for black children proved large enough to eliminate the black-white educational attainment gap, which has flummoxed education reformers for decades” (p. 62).

This work signals that the benefits of desegregation go far beyond educational attainment. Johnson finds the average effects of exposure to mandatory school desegregation led to a 15% increase in wages, an increase of annual work time by 165 hours, and hence a 30% increase in annual earnings. Further he argues, the average effects of five years of exposure to court-ordered desegregation also led to a decline of 11 percentage points in annual incidences of poverty in adulthood, a roughly 25% increase in family income, and increases in marriage stability, which he notes may account for the increases in Black family income. With respect to criminality, for Black students who were exposed to desegregated education in their elementary school years, Johnson found a reduction of 3 percentage points in annual incidences of incarceration and a decline of 22 percentage points in the likelihood of adult incarceration. Findings also indicate that adult health outcomes improved for Black children who had received desegregated schools “on par with being seven years younger” (p. 64). Further, there is a clear pattern of improved outcomes for low-income students in schools where there have been increased spending reform, most recently, this increase in spending led to children having smaller class sizes and access to better-trained teachers. Numerous studies have demonstrated the importance of school spending for student outcomes (Batelle et al., 2009; Clayton, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Rowe, 2003), and that the bulk of an increase in school spending goes toward instruction, the connection between school spending and superior instruction, and better adult outcomes is clear.

Despite the overwhelming evidence suggesting the short- and long-term benefits of school desegregation policy, confronting the ongoing segregation and re-segregation of U.S. schools will also require attention to other forms of institutional racism and their intersection with education policy. For example, numerous scholars have lamented the relationship between school integration and the re-segregation of Black students (Card & Rothstein, 2007; Hannah-Jones, 2012; Johnson, 2019; Massey, 2020; Massey & Denton, 1993; Reardon et al., 2006; Rothstein, 2017, 2018), the concentration of poverty in schools (Clayton, 2011; Kahnberg, 2006, 2007; Mickelson & Nkomo, 2012; Potter, 2013; Rothstein, 2013b; Rumberger, 2007; Rumberger & Palardy, 2000), and the concentration of poverty in desegregated metropolitan areas (Amsterdarm, 2017, Chemerinsky, 2003, 2005; Crawford & N nell, 2011; Lane & White, 2010; Orfield, 2015). Despite these monumental challenges, these scholars are arguing there are tangible things that can be done right now to begin to fight the racialized wrongs this country continues to grapple with.

Black Student Experiences in Desegregated Schools

And yet, in 2021, despite everything we know, the tangible things that can be done are not being done—or are not always done—and Black students continue to suffer in schools. Much like the dificulties Black students had attempting to desegregate all-White schools in the decades directly after Brown and the difficulty in maintaining desegregation in integrated school settings—still experience schooling as a hostile environment. Horford (2019) writes:

To continue to integrate Black children into a burning house where they experience discrimination and violence if and when received, is irresponsible and undermines the spirit of integration. For the credit of school integration research and policy advocacy have been effective in bringing attention to the problem of segregation in the post Civil Rights Era, yet remains detached from the racial realities associated with growing up Black in America, wherein innocent Black children and youth are murdered at the hands of law enforcement or killed in fatal police encounters. And controversial is the declaration that Black lives matter. (p. 270)

Indeed, having a racially diverse school doesn’t always mean that all students will experience that school similarly, or that students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds will be presented with the same academic opportunities. Black students are disproportionately absent from advanced courses (Cobb & Glass, 2009; Conger, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2006, 2010; Mickelson & Nkomo, 2012; Nayar & Vakil, 2004; Nayas, 2003), often still experience largely segregated classrooms in both magnet and traditional schools (Davis, 2014; Holme et al., 2013; Riel et al., 2018). Further, beyond being denied access to higher-level courses, Black students remain overrepresented in special education
programs in desegregated schools (Blanchett, 2009; Ette, 2002; Harry & Klingner, 2014; Loosen & O’Reifl, 2002) and continue to be the persistent achievement or opportunity gap (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

In addition to the racialized disparities in academic opportunities available to Black students, and despite scholarship that suggests the positive impact of engagement with racially diverse peers, desegregated schools do not inherently foster cross-racial social interactions (Rodkin et al., 2007; Wilson & Rodkin, 2017). In some cases, racial segregation in academic courses ensures Black students effectively occupy separate physical space even within a desegregated school (O’Connor et al., 2011). Thus, having differently raced bodies within a building does not necessarily translate to an integrated or even desegregated educational experience. William and Grahain (2019) suggest that schools must set explicit, inclusive, and democratic goals if they hope to facilitate genuine cross-racial interactions.

Black student experiences differ from their White peers in other significant ways as well, including but not limited to their interactions with their teachers and school disciplinary systems. Even in desegregated schools, Black students must navigate many of their teachers’ implicit and explicit racial biases and the ways their predominantly White teachers may conflate race with deficit perceptions of their academic abilities (Chapman, 2014; Chapman & Bhopal, 2019; Picket & Kohli, 2017; Staats, 2016; Starch et al., 2020; Young, 2016). Indeed, one of the most severe consequences of the Brown decision was the mass push out of Black teachers in U.S. schools (Irvin & Irvine, 1983, 2007; Milner & Howard, 2004; Tilman, 2004). The legacy of that tragedy is a current Black teacher population of roughly 7% (Will, 2020), less than half of the current Black student population; this is especially devastating given the special role Black teachers play in Black student academic achievement and socioemotional well-being (Daec, 2005), holding Black students to high expectations (Beady & Hansell, 1981; Irvine, 2003; Ware, 2006), and in connecting their students’ lived racial and cultural experiences to classroom content (Foster, 1994; Henry, 1998; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1991a, 1991b; Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1990; Milner, 2006; Morris, 2004). Further, Black teachers have historically and contemporarily infused their curriculum with pedagogical philosophies and practices that served to refuse and resist curricular misrepresentation and erasure (Brown & Brown, 2010, 2015, 2020, Givens, 2019, 2021, 2020c). To be clear, those scholars’ work do not suggest that one must be racialized Black in order to be a good teacher to Black children, nor that Black teachers are always superior teachers to Black children. Neither of those notions is true. Just as there are Black teachers who do not work to resist racialized disparities in education, there are also non-Black teachers who work consciously to do so, even where it means working against a system that privileges them.

Still, the ability for Black teachers to see students is undeniable, and their scarcity in U.S. schools today is detrimental to the holistic education of Black children.

In addition to navigating academic centered racialized interactions with a predominantly White teaching force, Black students also continue to suffer from racialized disparities in discipline and punishment in U.S. schools (Gregory et al., 2010; Monroe, 2005; Morris, 2016; Nair et al., 2013; Noguera, 2003; Skiba et al., 2011). In fact, Black students from pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade are overrepresented in every form of discipline—from teacher issued referrals (Anyon Jenson et al., 2014) to corporal punishment (Fent & Gershoff, 2017) to suspensions, expulsions, and police arrests (Rocque, 2010; Ross, 2020b; Skiba et al., 2014). This disproportionate punishment of Black students is often rooted in teachers’ negative racial beliefs about Black students (Gregory & Roberts, 2017). Further, while racialized disparities in discipline for Black boys have been widely documented in the literature (Caton, 2012; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Fergusson, 2000; Gregory et al., 2010; Monroe, 2004), scholars have increasingly pointed to the ways Black girls are as disproportionately punished as Black boys (Annamma et al., 2019; Blake et al., 2011; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Hansa Danis & Andrews, 2020; Morris, 2007, 2016; Morris & Perry, 2017, 2016).

Thus, while the Brown victory was one of the most significant court decisions of the twentieth century, and carried the promise of equal opportunity in education, in 2021, 67 years after the Brown victory, we are still struggling with the problem of the color line (Du Bois, 1932)—with the ways schools have continuously and systematically historically and contemporarily failed Black students. Further, the fight for desegregation and the disappointing re-segregation of U.S. public schools often paint too simplistic a portrait: that is, historically segregated schools were under-resourced educational ghettos, and Brown’s mandate to desegregate was the beginning of Black educational progress. Yet when we fail to fully conceptualize the meaning and actual experiences of Black children within historically segregated schools, beyond their material poverty, we miss important clues about what genuinely integrated schools have the potential to be for Black students in the current moment.

Understanding What Black Families Valued in Segregated Schools

Thus far, I have focused on the ongoing fight for desegregation in U.S. public schools and the tragic reality that schools are increasingly re-segregating. In detailing the fight against re-segregation, this paper has also pointed to the unequal distribution of material resources to students in segregated schools based on race and socioeconomic status. It has illustrated the myriad short term and long term benefits for Black students in desegregated schools. At the same time, I have explored some of the racialized experiences of Black students in desegregated schools, and the ways in which Black students have also borne the physical and psychological weight of desegregation. Further, in elevating the ways segregated schooling oppressed Black students and prevented them from having access to the kinds of material resources White students had, many scholars are perhaps hesitant to explore the myriad ways historically segregated schools attended to Black students’ social-emotional needs, and encouraged a positive association between Blackness and education. (Du Bois, 1903). Key historical scholarship reveals that there were aspects of segregated schools that Black students and parents did appreciate, and understanding what those things are is a critical component in developing a comprehensive strategy for an equitable Black educational experience.

In Teaching to Transgress (1994), renowned Black feminist professor bell hooks describes the segregated schools she attended in the South. She recounts Black women teachers who took the time to get to know their students, their families, their churches and so forth. She recounts the sheer joy she experienced in school and describes her school as a place of ecstasy. As hooks shifts to a discussion of the effects of integration, though, her tone changes dramatically:

School changed utterly with racial integration. Gone was the messianic zeal to transform our minds and beings that had characterized teachers and their pedagogical practices in our all-black school context. Where we had known that obedience, and not a zealous will to learn, was what was expected of us... realizing this, I lost my love of school. (p. 3)

hooks goes on to elucidate how “racist, desegregated, white schools” caused her to lose her love of learning. She describes having to leave her Black teachers to be taught by the overwhelming White adult presence in school. She soon learned that obedience, and not a zealous will to learn, was what was expected of us... realizing this, I lost my love of school. (p. 3)

On the Road to Brown and Beyond

While hooks’ (1994) reflection only speaks to her own experience, other scholars have argued for a reconsideration of our understanding of historically segregated schools more broadly and highlight their unintended positive consequences (Delpit, 2006; Foster, 1997; Morris & Morris, 2002, Walker, 1993, 2000, 2009). In particular, Walker (1996) challenges this paradigm through a deep examination of the history of a segregated school in the rural South. Walker’s study focuses on the relationship between community and school, the history of the relationships between principals, teachers, and students, the professional preparation and orientation of teachers, and the effects of the 1968 court order to desegregate the school in her study. While most of the written history of desegregated Black schools focuses on their lack of economic resources, Walker (2000) notes that the total reality of these schools was perhaps richer and more nuanced than the resources-focused studies could reveal. Further, she argues that the conclusions of resource-focused studies could mistakenly confute a lack of economic resources with low standards—a conclusion she contends lacks supporting data.

Walker’s (1996) work centers on a formerly segregated school in rural North Carolina originally called Caswell County Training School. Revealed in her interviews with previous students, teachers, and administrators is the relationships fostered within the school were a positive influence in the students’ lives. Similar to the teachers hooks (1994) describes in her own classroom, Walker’s study is replete with stories of teachers who demonstrated care for their students, their families, and their communities. Walker’s study commented on the extent to which their teachers demonstrated care for them, encouraged them to do their best, and held them to high expectations. More importantly though, the school became a haven for those students navigating overt White supremacy and Jim Crow laws in the larger society. Walker notes, “Although the students lived in a world outside the school that offered negative appraisals of what they were capable of doing, the teacher functioned to counter these messages and offer new ones of hope and possibility through education” (p. 12). Walker contends that teachers interacted with students like family—that they were raised to care for members of their communities and they extended this way of being into the classroom, creating an environment where students were expected to learn, students were expected to be successful, and financial needs of their students in addition to responding to their intellectual needs...[they] interacted with their students like any responsible Negro adult related to children in the community as children...” (p. 12). If teachers’ caring about their students was largely an extension of their interactions with their own families, their churches, and the Black community at large, a shared African American experience, it is also central motivating factors behind this positive dynamic.

While Walker’s study is perhaps the most comprehensive, other scholars examine the significance of the relationship between Black students and teachers that was lost upon desegregation (Acosta et al., 2018; Foster, 1997; Morris, 2003). Fultz provides another lesser-told story of the positive aspects of segregated schools in his detailing
Still, many of the schools in Walker’s work began with a fundamental understanding of the relationship between the school and the community, and how the Black community can make sense of the history of Black people in those schools. Therefore, when teaching and educating is always a political project and must always be rooted in antiracist struggle. In today’s educational context, when Black students are continuously marginalized, it is urgent what scholars may refer to as dropout factories or apartheid schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). Rather than focus on ‘racial upperclass’ in Black schools, a recognition of the Black students who attend them are denied access to well-trained caring teachers, rigorous courses, technology, extra-curriculars, school counselors and so forth. Hence, understanding new ways of seeing and doing things, and how this lens may help us to better understand the extent of Black educational injury and also how we might move toward meaningful redress.

On the Road to Brown and Beyond: The Meantime in Between Time and Otherwise Possibilities

Following the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, Black folks’ articulation that “No, we are not ‘okay’” proliferated widely. There were numerous attempts to try and explain what it feels like to live in a world where no matter how loud you shout, “Black lives matter,” your okay” proliferated widely. There were numerous attempts to try and explain what it feels like to live in a world where no matter how loud you shout, “Black lives matter,” your (Black) school leadership.

For example, the African American Male Achievement Taskforce’s Manhood Development Program (MDP) is an exclusively Black program that operates daily within various Oakland public schools during school hours. These courses are taught by an African American male from the local community and offered as an elective course to attend to the political, socioemotional, and academic needs of Black male students specifically. These courses serve to resist racialized discipline disparities (Nair et al., 2013); reimagine negative stigmatized identities of Black manhood (Givens & Irvine, 2016); facilitate the development of relationships that reflect instructors’ political clarity, cultural connection and affirmation of students, and appreciation of students as vulnerable children working within racialized contexts (McKee-Royston et al., 2017) and enact pedagogical philosophies and practices of reciprocity, (re)humanization, and love (Ross et al., 2016). While MDP was a program designed specifically for Black boys and adult Black male educators, Ross (2016, 2019) has also explored space designed to challenge anti-Black racism in mainstream U.S. schools; thus, scholars have also explored the significance of crossing traditional educational models altogether, and developing Black independent school pedagogies (DeFrancisco, 2019; Nair et al., 2013). African American independent schools (e.g., Black Catholic schools, Nation of Islam Schools) and charter schools (Green, 2001; Hoover, 1991; Irvine, 1990; Johnson, 1991; Polite, 2000; Rashid & Muhammad, 1992; Rickford, 2016; Shujaa, 1992, Williamson, 2005).

In addition to youth programs and mentoring programs that may take place after school and/or on the weekend, and Black independent schools, which often operate along a traditional school schedule, there are also examples of hybrid spaces that are embedded within public schools themselves. For example, the African American Male Achievement Taskforce’s Manhood Development Program (MDP) is an exclusively Black program that operates daily within various Oakland public schools during school hours. These courses are taught by an African American male from the local community and offered as an elective course to attend to the political, socioemotional, and academic needs of Black male students specifically. These courses serve to resist racialized discipline disparities (Nair et al., 2013); reimagine negative stigmatized identities of Black manhood (Givens & Irvine, 2016); facilitate the development of relationships that reflect instructors’ political clarity, cultural connection and affirmation of students, and appreciation of students as vulnerable children working within racialized contexts (McKee-Royston et al., 2017); and enact pedagogical philosophies and practices of reciprocity, (re)humanization, and love (Ross et al., 2016). While MDP was a program designed specifically for Black boys and adult Black male educators, Ross (2016, 2019) has also explored space designed to challenge anti-Black racism in mainstream U.S. schools; thus, scholars have also explored the significance of crossing traditional educational models altogether, and developing Black independent school pedagogies (DeFrancisco, 2019; Nair et al., 2013). African American independent schools (e.g., Black Catholic schools, Nation of Islam Schools) and charter schools (Green, 2001; Hoover, 1991; Irvine, 1990; Johnson, 1991; Polite, 2000; Rashid & Muhammad, 1992; Rickford, 2016; Shujaa, 1992, Williamson, 2005).

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specifically for Black girls with an adult Black woman educator. Similar to the MDP courses, this course was offered to Black girls (grades 9–12) as a “women’s studies” class (for which they would receive elective credit), and girls were encouraged but not required to participate. The course’s curriculum was designed to address student needs across a variety of domains—physical, mental, academic, and social. It was aimed at encouraging students to learn more about themselves, their cultural and racial history, and their communities with the goal of helping them think more expansively about Black girlhood.

All of these interventions, from afterschool and weekend programming, to Black independent schools, and the in-school interventions, may serve as examples of what Ross (2020c) calls Black educational fugitive space, or the ways Black students and educators enact educational fugitive through the social production of Black space in the margin. Black educational fugitive space is born, created, and in direct response to the rampant anti-Blackness in the larger world, and in U.S. public schools; it may serve as a Black desert sand, and provide Black citizenship to people whose humanity is consistently made impossible on the outside. As opposed to a system of racial segregation that is imposed upon Black people, purposefully constructed racially exclusive spaces have historically, and continue contemporarily, to offer Black students the kinds of educational experiences they may not otherwise have had access to. To be clear, this is not to suggest that this kind of fugitive resistance fights anti-Blackness and wins, or erases the markings of existing while Black in anti-Black ecologies. But the production of fugitive space can facilitate a very powerful resistance—a reimagining of what it means to be Black—with other Black folks, both in these spaces and in the larger society.

Givens (2019) highlights this reimagining through the work of famed scholar, historian, educator, and activist, Carter G. Woodson, who worked with teachers in the early twentieth century to reimagine the experience of Black schooling altogether. Givens writes, “A fundamental undying of the American school’s manipulation of Black subjectivity was necessary—this required a reorientation of what counted as knowledge, who was worthy of producing it, and clarity on what kind of knowledge was necessary to support African American students in navigating an anti-Black world” (p. 1462). Indeed, there is much overlap in the kind of education scholars suggest Black folks fought for long before emancipation, built and valued in many historically segregated schools, and the kind of education Black activists, scholars, and community members have been fighting toward for Black students and their families since the historic Brown decision.

Thus, the problem is not a scarcity of ideas around policies and practices that may be beneficial for Black students. Rather, it is about how we may implement and sustain these practices in a society and in schools where districts, school-level administrators, and even teachers themselves may lack the desire, let alone determination, to realize them. Noguera (2018) notes:

Hence, whether you understand public schools as irredeemable for Black children—that they have never been and will never be what we need them to be—or whether you believe in their potentiality while recognizing there is much work to be done before that potential is actualized, there is a need to operate in what I call the “meantime in between time” (Ross, 2019). That is, is what it is that we can do right now to mitigate the suffering of Black students in schools? To make the educational lives of Black students better? To (most ideally) develop and sustain places and spaces where Black children are okay? And what can we learn from Black folks’ centuries long multifaceted fight that we may utilize to develop a more enduring refusal and resistance of anti-Blackness in schools?

Anti-Blackness in Education and the Possibilities of Redress: Toward Educational Reparations

ross [in press] suggests anti-Blackness provides an analysis of Black suffering as connected to the idea of theft—the theft of Black bodies, the theft of anything Black folks dared to build and/or own as newly “free” people, and critically, the theft from generations of Black families whose educational opportunities were systematically stolen from them. Ross builds on the notion of educational debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006) in order to understand what this debt actually means for Black students specifically, and how what we might call educational reparations may serve to begin the process of meaningful redress. The notion of educational reparations is particularly powerful as it attends to both the depth of Black educational injuries and also to the extent of what it will take to build toward meaningful redress.

In the broadest sense then, a project of educational reparations helps us honor Black communities’ historical and contemporary multidimensional fight for Black educational opportunity and justice through a recognition of the range of what is owed to Black students, Black educators, their families and communities more broadly. Thus, the idea of educational reparations must necessarily move beyond the notion of school “reform” for Black children and consider the potentiality in reimagining the Black educational landscape in its entirety. At the same time, while a project of educational reparations should support Black communities in our re-envisioning otherwise possible futures, it would also necessarily attend to supporting Black students, teachers, and parents in the continued fight to make U.S. schools what they should be for Black students.

Recommendations

Forwarding a project of educational reparations would necessitate the U.S. making good on the educational debt owed to Black communities and ensuring Black communities have access to anything and everything we need or desire to continue (as we always have) to confront, navigate, refuse, and resist anti-Black violence and anti-Black racism in schools in multiple ways simultaneously. To that end, I offer the following three recommendations:

1. The federal government should formally recognize historical and contemporary Black educational injury and support a platform of educational reparations to provide meaningful redress. One strategy includes:

   - The federal government should develop a truth and reconciliation commission (TRC) to meaningfully address anti-Blackness in education and Black students’ historical and ongoing racialized schooling experiences. This commission would provide a platform for interested Black families to address their past and present racialized educational injury and also to serve as partners in the development of policies and practices that will provide meaningful redress.

2. The federal government should formally recognize historical and contemporary Black educational injury and support a platform of educational reparations to provide meaningful redress. One strategy includes:

   - Developing a plan to recruit and retain Black teachers, administrators, support staff, and district leaders; provide meaningful reparations for Black folks interested in entering these professions;
   - Instituting ongoing mandatory anti-racism training for teachers, administrators, and support staff;
   - Providing schools of education in developing mandatory Black studies courses for all pre-service teacher candidates;
   - Restructuring disciplinary policies and practices to eliminate racialized disparities;
   - Removing police and school resource officers from schools serving Black children;
   - Supporting innovative curricular efforts that respect and honor Black communities’ cultural ways of knowing and learning across all academic disciplines;

   - Providing Black students access to material resources, advanced courses, and additional academic support;
   - Given the legal, political, and ideological obstacles (i.e., parent beliefs about what constitute good schools, who constitute good students, etc.) in place to achieving racially integrated schools, districts should ramp up efforts to make voluntary and controlled student assignment policies more successful in achieving diverse learning environments; and

   - Establishing free tuition programs for Black students to attend colleges and universities.

3. As a part of a project of educational reparations, the federal government should commit resources to (a) sustain existing alternative, informal, and out of school learning programs designed for Black students and educators, their families and communities, and (b) support the development of new educational systems, programs, initiatives, curricula, and spaces that foster Black students’ academic, social, cultural, and political agency. Possibilities include:

   - Financially support the development of an optional pre-K–12 alternative system of public schooling for students and educators racialized as Black (a pre-K–12 version of HB120s for example); financially support the establishment of independent cadres where groups of students and educators enact radically different forms of education (see NNK and Ross, 2019, for example).

   - Financially support current community-based education spaces, Black independent schools, youth programs, and mentoring programs serving Black students and their families; provide financial resources necessary to develop and sustain additional community-based education spaces, youth programs, and mentoring programs as needed/desired.

On the Road to Brown and Beyond

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On Forward Motion

Writing at the fiftieth anniversary of Brown, Powell (2005) argues that our history and collective future “demand we initiate a discussion of what constitutes true integration” (p. 281, emphasis in original). In other words, while it is important to address the reality that schools were never completely desegregated in the first place, and the rapid re-segregation of many schools that did desegregate, it is perhaps even more important to have a vision for what lies beyond these ideas of “segregated” and “desegregated.” While scholars may sometimes use desegregation and integration interchangeably, they are not interchangeable at all. And while a desegregated school may be a pre-requisite for an integrated one, the former does not ensure the development of the latter, and the development of genuinely integrated schools are few and far between if they exist at all (Horsford, 2011).

Certainly one of the main reasons Black families grew weary of pursuing integration as a strategy for equal resources was the sheer absence of any sense of integration that could be deemed “true” efforts (Powell, 2005). In other words, where Black students had been allowed to enter previously all-white spaces, what changed about those spaces as a result? In what ways did they work to restructure their schools such that Black students felt like those spaces were theirs, too? Even during what we might refer to as the desegregation heyday, what did those previously all-White schools do such that Black students didn’t feel like “trespassers among the human race” (Morrison, 1988, p. 125)?

While the work illuminating the positive outcomes for Black students exposed to desegregated school environments is particularly powerful, what emotional defeats accompany these material victories? What part of Johnson’s (2019) three-pronged policy platform attend to the historical trauma of Black students on the frontlines of hostile all-White schools? To the sociomotional needs of current Black children who may be required to make similar journeys in contemporary ways? To the need to build in assurances that this will never happen again? How can we challenge ourselves to envision something that has never been done before? To freedom dreams without sacrificial Black children? How can we build on the radical possibilities in recognizing, refusing, and resisting anti-Blackness in education to stretch our collective minds and hearts to imagine a new color?

While a consideration of the ways many segregated schools were valued by Black communities pre-Brown, or a look at exclusively Black spaces in the current context, may appear to be in conflict with Brown, it may be quite the opposite. We are in the midst of a historic national reckoning—if we want to seize this moment to develop a platform that centers Black children, that honors their previous battles and contemporary struggles, that envisions and actualizes an educational system where Black children are okay, then we must explore the myriad places and spaces where Black children are thriving, laughing, playing, learning, and becoming. We must be looking toward examples of educational spaces that support Black students’ academic and non-academic needs. If we are serious about creating equitable educational spaces for Black children, we must continue to think imaginatively and expansively about what education can and should look like for Black communities in all of our diverse dimensions. We know the problems, we have the solutions, and we can dream the dreams. Dreams of Brown and way beyond. Dreams of true integration. Dreams of a world where Blackness doesn’t mark children—deny them or afford them anything—where they’re just kids laughing, playing, learning, and becoming.

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