

# 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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## Executive Summary

In 2021, 67 years after the historic *Brown* victory, U.S. schools are increasingly re-segregating and are systematically 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.

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.

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

### The Ongoing Fight for Black Educational Equity, Justice, and Opportunity

Black folks' fight for educational opportunity began long before the end of the brutal system of chattel slavery. At the risk of dismemberment and/or death, Black men and women organized clandestine educational spaces, some dating back as early as 1833 (Anderson, 1988). Upon Emancipation, Black folks intensified their fight and went to great lengths to ensure a path toward the kind of schooling they had been systematically denied. African Americans understood education as a pathway to liberation (Douglas, 2014), and newly freed men, women, and children were eager to assert their humanity within society where they recognized education as intimately tied to citizenship and personhood (Anderson, 1988; Butchart, 1988). In fact, former enslaved Africans were the first to campaign for universal, state-supported education. Anderson quotes W.E.B. Du Bois (1903), who notes that in the South, universal state-supported public education was a "Negro idea" (p. 6). Unfortunately, the historical trajectory of African American education reveals the educational aspirations of Black people in America were largely made impossible by state-supported, institutionalized, anti-Black educational policies. White terror in the form of lynchings, mob violence, repressive labor contracts, vagrancy laws, and Jim Crow laws (to name a few) allowed the government to exclude African Americans from public schooling efforts and relegated the Black community to a separate but (un)equal educational experience (Anderson, 1988; Bond, 1934; Wilkerson, 1955).

The purpose of this paper is to build on the profound possibilities of our current historical moment to think deeply about centuries-old conversations about educational equity, opportunity, and justice for Black children. I draw on recent theoretical tools developed by Black scholars and activists, namely anti-Blackness in education (Dumas, 2016; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Wun, 2016), to revisit one of the most significant struggles in the Black educational trajectory: Black students' being relegated to segregated schools—either by law or by practice (or both)—and the fight for desegregation and integration. While many understand this wrong as being remedied with the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court Case decision, this paper draws on anti-Blackness in education to revisit the legacy of *Brown*—examining its efficacy, which numerous scholars have done—but also its potential for creating an equitable educational landscape, and its role in securing educational redress for Black children in particular.

## 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 contemporarily. The final section reflects back across the first three sections using the theoretical framework of anti-Blackness in education. Ultimately, I illuminate 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 meaningful solutions to the enduring denial of equity and justice for Black children in education. As a part of this final section, I discuss interventions for Black students, highlighting the particular policies and practices that attend to the nuances of Black students' educational well-being. I conclude with some thoughts about how we can build toward equitable learning environments for Black children.

## The Aftermath of *Brown v. Board of Education*

Many have seen images of dilapidated segregated schools—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, or the picture 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 was one of the most 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 surrounded 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 1.2 percent of African American schoolchildren were attending schools with whites. In South Carolina, Alabama, and Mississippi, not one African American child attended a public school with a white child in the 1962–63 school year. In North 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 1.63 percent of African Americans attended desegregated schools. (p. 32)

White resistance to *Brown* may have also been encouraged by the wording of the historic *Brown* decision itself. Orfield (2005) 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 in *Brown II*—notably the phrasing of “all deliberate speed”—meant the ruling also called for change to happen at a pace that would not make Southern Whites uncomfortable. 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 as well as major Northern cities like New York's insistence that there was “no official segregation” (Fine as cited in Delmont, 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 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 (Delmont, 2016). Even as late as 1971, in Chicago, Black students made up only 3% of the student population in majority White schools (Hewers, 1971).

As protests to desegregate schools in Northern cities like New York increased, White parents ignited their own protests over fears of “busing” (Dougherty & Leavey, 2020; Formisano, 2004). While busing was only one potential component in Northern policy platforms to mitigate segregation, White parents successfully conflated desegregation and busing in the broader public imagination (Lane & White, 2010). Delmont (2016) notes how White parents adopted the strategies of Black folks protesting segregated schools to launch their own anti-busing movement. While in 1964, Black and Puerto Rican protesters who had recently organized a school boycott that kept over 460,000 students out of school to protest segregated schools—at the time the largest civil rights demonstration in the history of the United States—received disdain from the media and were labeled as misguided for protesting segregation that purportedly didn't really exist. Yet when 15,000 White mothers who called themselves “Parents and Taxpayers” marched against busing, the entire country took note. Delmont argues that by referring to themselves as parents and taxpayers, “these white protestors made an implicit claim that they occupied a higher level of citizenship than black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers, who were also parents and taxpayers” (p. 26).

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White parents used this language to argue that the court was violating their rights as taxpayers and the media followed suit, highlighting a fight for civil rights and dismissing any connection to race.

Still, despite resistance to desegregation efforts across the country, the tireless efforts of Black activists, families, teachers, students, lawyers, and community members ultimately led to substantial shifts in the racial composition of U.S. public schools. Considering the current re-segregation of schools may be one of the most compelling educational travesties of the twenty-first century, there is much we can learn from the “desegregation heyday,” or that period of time in this country's history where students weren't relegated to racially segregated schools in law or in practice.

## A Desegregation “Heyday”

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—separate and unequal.” 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). 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 resources for low-income families (Darling-Hammond, 2003; 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).

Darling-Hammond (2018) points to the ways these investments produced significant results:

By the mid-1970s, urban schools spent as much as suburban schools and paid their teachers as well, perennial teacher shortages had nearly ended, and gaps in educational attainment had closed substantially . . . . Financial aid for higher education was sharply increased, especially for need-based scholarships and loans. For a brief period in the mid-1970s, Black and Latino students attended college at the same rate as Whites—the only time this occurred before or since. (p. 4)

Additionally, during this same period, Darling-Hammond notes Black students made considerable gains in reading and math, reducing the achievement gap by more than half in reading and roughly one-third in math. These incessant efforts had lasting impacts on desegregation as well. Chemerinsky (2005) points out that by 1968 the integration rate had drastically increased to 32% and that by the 1972–1973 school year, 91.2% of Southern schools were desegregated.

Sadly, much of these gains were lost following the election of Ronald Regan to the presidency and his administration's massive cuts to social services, ongoing racialized housing policies that facilitated neighborhood (re)segregation, and particularly significant, key Supreme Court decisions that significantly reversed the gains of previous decades.

## Re-segregation and the Supreme Court

Numerous scholars have argued that desegregation does not occur without judicial action (McNeill & Rowley, 2019; Siegel-Hawley, 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 (Pettigrew, 2004), and helped facilitate large-scale court-ordered desegregation in the South (Lutz, 2011).

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 (Doyle, 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; Khalifa et al., 2016; Kucsera et al., 2014; Lane & White, 2010; Lopez & Burciaga, 2014; Orfield, 2015; Pettigrew, 2004). The 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 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 encouraged White flight (Doyle, 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 tax. 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 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; Godwin et al., 2006; Holley-Walker, 2010; McNeal, 2009; McNeill & Rowley, 2019; Walker & Daniel, 2014). Orfield (2005) signals that while the decisions of the 1970s created limitations, Court decisions in the 1990s amount to a complete retreat and reversal from previous desegregation efforts:

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 goal for 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 v. Dowell* (1991), protesters against segregation wanted to reinstate a court ordered desegregation plan, arguing that the schools had become re-segregated. The Supreme Court, however, ruled that "federal supervision of local school systems [has always] been intended as a temporary measure 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 already been achieved. Thus, the Supreme Court ruled that a desegregation order should end once a school district has complied with the order, even if other desegregation orders for the district continue to remain unrealized. In other words, the Court iterated that once a portion of a desegregation order had been met, the federal court should involve 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 de facto 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 ways 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 racialized disparity in standardized test scores did not justify the continuance 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 re-segregation" (p. 40). Numerous 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.

Tushnet (1996) asserts that these three Supreme Court Cases resurfaced the “we’ve done enough” theory advanced during the Civil Rights cases of 1883. In his opinion, striking down the Civil Rights Act of 1875, Supreme Court Justice Bradley remarked, “when a man has emerged from slavery, and by the aid of beneficent legislation has shaken off the inseparable concomitants of that state, there must be some stage in the progress of his elevation when he takes the rank of a mere citizen, and ceases to be the special favorite of the law” (p. 767). In other words, White America had done enough and it was time for Black folks to stop seeking legal favoritism. Tushnet and others argue that these three 1990s Supreme Court Cases should be understood amidst the backdrop of the erosion of support for desegregation and the Court increasingly favoring decentralized approaches to desegregation in which the Court cedes control to local authorities (Saddler, 2005; Superfine, 2010).

While this “resegregation trilogy” effectively ended Court-mandated desegregation, the Supreme Court Decision in *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District* (2007), also made it more difficult for districts to incorporate voluntary race-based student assignment policies and has facilitated the re-segregation of public schools (Anderson, 2011; Coffee & Frankenberg, 2009; Glenn, 2015; Lutz, 2011; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014; Pitre, 2009). In Chicago, for example, following the PICS decision to strike down race-based voluntary student assignment policies, White students have become increasingly overrepresented in the selective enrollment schools—White students represent roughly 10% of Chicago Public School District and about 43% of selective enrollment students—despite the fact that an original intention for the establishment of these schools was to provide opportunities for students of color (De Voto & Wronowski, 2018). Further, McDermott et al. (2012) note that the PICS decision converged with the 2008 financial recession, which precipitated severe fiscal austerity for school districts. This convergence meant that precisely as schools were re-segregating, there were less resources for Black students and less funding for alternative integrating programs.

## Re-segregation of Schools in the Current Context

In the current educational landscape, schools across all geographies have been increasingly segregating (Houck & Murray, 2019; Tieken, 2017). Within-district segregation is prevalent and more districts have seen increases in segregation than those that have seen decreases (Billingham, 2019). While White students constitute nearly 50% of the nation’s public school enrollment, roughly 20% of public schools have few or no White students enrolled (Williams & Graham, 2019), and there are still areas 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 by 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 670% increase in the growth of intensely segregated schools and by 2010, roughly half of Black and Latino students attended schools in this category (Ayscue et al., 2016). Further, Ayscue et al. note 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 intensely 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 (\$1,655) than original districts. Nationally, 47 districts have seceded from 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., 2011; 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 (Cobb & 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 time with their wealthier 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 (Diem et al., 2019). While there are some examples where 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 choice or race-conscious school assignment policies are necessary to combat segregation and promote integration (Billings et al., 2009; Frankenberg, 2017; Holme et al., 2013; Linn & Welner, 2007; Roda & Wells, 2013; Siegel-Hawley, 2013, 2014; Thompson Dorsey & Roulhac, 2019; Whitehurst, 2017; Williams & Graham, 2019). Seigel-Hawley (2014) argues intentional desegregation policy is necessary to ensure that districts (especially 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 there are clear 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 courts is only 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.

## Desegregation and Black Frustration

While Orfield (2001) argues that despite always having a variance of opinions, the majority of Black folks prefer an integrated education, he also acknowledges:

The struggle was never just for desegregated schools, nor was it motivated by a desire on the part of black students to simply sit next to white students. It was an integral part of a much broader movement for racial and economic justice supported by a unique alliance of major civil rights organizations, churches, students, and leaders of both national political parties. (p. 2)

Black parents in particular grew frustrated and weary in the decade after *Brown* when there was virtually no movement to actualize the fundamental rights of Black students won in the highest Court in the land (Walker, 2009). Many Black families and activists turned instead to ideas of Community Control, Black Nationalism, and Pan-Africanism, and it was not uncommon for Black folks to fight for seemingly mutually exclusive ideals, simultaneously (Perlstein, 2004; Rickford, 2016; Todd-Breland, 2018; Williamson, 2005).

In the late 1960s, frustrated with both a lack of desegregation efforts as well as their children being forced to continue to attend under-resourced schools, Black communities fought for the opportunities their children deserved. Todd-Breland (2018) recalls one Black mother-activist, Rosie Simpson, discussing how she “pursued desegregation as a tool to achieve ‘equal education’ . . . equal opportunity was what we were fighting for, even though we talked about integration” (p. 22). At the same time as

Simpson worked with the Chicago Urban League to fight for desegregation, she also fought for Community Control of existing segregated Black schools. Hence, 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 services, many Black folks were ambivalent about integration. While 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 ills of segregation did not always map onto an ideological commitment to integration” (p. 24). In fact, in a 1955 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 Black parents were tasked with sending their children on busses into racially hostile schools often with racially hostile teachers, administrators, and classmates, White students were not bussed to Black schools. Additionally, Black teachers were not largely sent to teach White children. In other words, as opposed to feeling like the country was ready to genuinely integrate, it may have felt more like Black students were given token opportunities to assimilate into previously all-White spaces. Further, in many cases, the majority of Black students were still left behind. Rickford (2016) quotes Brooklyn Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm: “If a parent wants to bus a child and can do so, all right . . . but I am talking about the welfare mother. I am talking about the masses whose children will still be left behind” (p. 39). Not only were numerous Black children “left behind,” but many of the Black children who sacrificed their own socioemotional well-being to desegregate schools often discovered that enrolling in White schools did not afford them the opportunities and equality they so desperately sought. Rickford continues:

Meanwhile, beginning in the 1950s, school mergers, closures, and other desegregation-related changes led to the massive dismissal and demotion of black teachers and administrators, particularly in the South. The shuttering of beloved black schools or the stripping of their cultural significance and identity through the loss of cherished traditions, emblems, colors, mascots, and names deepened the ordeal. Many black parents struggled to weigh the trauma black children often suffered during forays onto white campuses against the benefits of what they believed to be an objectively superior academic experience. (p. 39)

Thus, as opposed to a linear story of progress, the fight for desegregation is a nuanced and complicated story that makes one thing painfully clear: While the fight may have taken different forms at different historical moments, what Black parents have always wanted for their children is educational opportunity, equity, and justice.

## Holding Onto the Dream: An Argument for Re-energizing 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-tenured and inexperienced teachers with lower teacher salaries (Darling-Hammond, 2000, 2004; Frankenberg, 2009; Houck, 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 (Lane & White, 2010; Reardon & Owens, 2014). Further, many of these schools are overly focused on standardized testing and orderly behavior to the detriment of recess, arts, and play (Au, 2016; Kohn, 2000; Pellegrini & 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; Palardy et al., 2015; Potter, 2013; Rothstein, 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, 2019; Killen et al., 2007; Legal Defense and Educational Fund, NAACP, 2008; Linn & Welner, 2007; Quillian & Campbell, 2003). Further, racially homogeneous schools may not prepare students of any race to participate in a multiracial 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 (Kurlaender & Yun, 2005; Moses & Rogers, 2013; Tefera et al., 2011; Wells et al., 2016). Finally, scholars note that the benefits Black students' experience 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). In perhaps the most comprehensive recent study highlighting the myriad benefits of integrated schooling, Johnson's (2019) latest book, *Children of the Dream: Why School Integration Works*, finds 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. 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 educational 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 five years 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 increase in Black family income. With respect to criminality, for Black students who were exposed to desegregation 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 access to 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 reforms. Specifically, this increase in spending led to children having smaller class sizes and access to better-trained teachers. Numerous studies have demonstrated the importance of quality teachers on student outcomes (Beteille et al., 2009; Clayton, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Rowe, 2003), and given that the bulk of an increase in school spending goes toward instruction, the connection between school spending, 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 racialized housing policy and segregated schools (Card & Rothstein, 2007; Hannah-Jones, 2012; Johnson, 2019; Massey, 2020; Massey & Denton, 1993; Reardon et al., 2006; Rothstein, 2013a, 2017; Shapiro, 2017), the concentration of poverty in schools (Clayton, 2011; Kahlenberg, 2006, 2007; Mickelson & Nkomo, 2012; Potter, 2013; Rothstein, 2013b; Rumberger, 2007; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005), and the Court's abandonment of effective desegregation mandates (Amsterdam, 2017; Chemerinsky, 2003, 2005; Crawford & O'Neill, 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 right 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 enough—and Black students continue to suffer in schools. Much like the difficulties Black students had attempting to desegregate all-White schools in the decades directly after *Brown*, many Black students—even in integrated school settings—still experience schooling as a hostile environment. Horsford (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. To its credit, 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, whereby innocent Black children and youth are murdered at the hands of law enforcement without consequence; 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; Nasir & Vakil, 2017; Oakes, 2005) and 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; Eitle, 2002; Harry & Klingner, 2014; Losen & Orfield, 2002) and continue to be the victims of 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 always translate to meaningful cross-racial social interactions (Rodkin et al., 2007; Wilson & Rodkin, 2011). In some cases, racial segregation in academic courses ensures Black students effectively occupy separate physical space even within a racially diverse school (O'Connor et al., 2011). Thus, having differently racialized bodies within a building does not necessarily translate to an integrated or even desegregated educational experience. William and Graham (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 performance (Brown, 2018; Chapman, 2014; Chapman & Bhopal, 2019; Picower & Kohli, 2017; Staats, 2016; Starck et al., 2020; Young, 2016). Indeed, one of the most severe consequences of the historic *Brown* decision was the mass push out of Black teachers in U.S. schools (Irvine & 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 (Dee, 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; ross, 2020c). To be clear, these 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 significance of Black teachers for Black 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; Nasir 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 (Font & 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; Ferguson, 2000; Gregory et al., 2010; Monroe, 2006), 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; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020; Morris, 2007, 2016; Morris & Perry, 2017; Wun, 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, 1903)—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 of 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, and 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 born 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' socioemotional 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 schools . . . Bused to white schools, we 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)

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 White teachers who reinforced racist stereotypes about Black children and their families. Ultimately hooks argues the transition from “beloved all-black schools” to White schools taught her “the difference between education as the practice of freedom and education that merely strives to reinforce domination” (p. 4).

While hooks's (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 close examination of the history of a segregated school in the rural South. Walker's study focuses on the relationship between community and school, the significance of 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. Whereas most of the writing one may find on segregated 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 resource-focused studies could reveal. Further, she argues that the conclusions of resource-focused studies could mistakenly conflate 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 force in the students' lives. Similar to the teachers hooks (1994) describes in her own classrooms, many of the students in 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 extremely high standards. 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. 122). 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. Teachers “responded to the emotional, affective, 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 within the communities they knew as children” (p. 126). 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 and culture become 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, 2001). Fultz (2001) also contributes to the lesser-told story of the positive aspects of segregated schools in his detailing



the vigilant fight for Black teachers in Black schools in Charleston, South Carolina, where the Black community remarked on Black teachers' ability and White teachers' inability to enter into sympathy with African American children. Petitions demanding Black teachers often cited the need for "reciprocity in love, affection and sympathy between teacher and pupil" (p. 640). Fultz notes that this African American community vehemently protested when White teachers were placed in Black schools and were successful in minimizing White infiltration. In addition to encouraging and fostering new ambitions and aspirations in African American students, Black teachers served as "living textbooks" and utilized their own experiences to role model new possibilities for their futures. While there were some in the Black community who believed the insistence on Black teachers would solidify segregation, the majority of this Black community took the following position: "We don't like it when you enact legislation to segregate us, but we reserve, through our right to self-determination, the prerogative to choose to organize self-help endeavors *of our own and for ourselves*, activities for our mutual benefit and which convey no stigma against others" (Fultz, 2001, p. 646, emphasis in original).

Hence, although segregated Black schools historically suffered from racialized economic policies that rendered them materially inferior, the human relationships between teachers and students (Foster, 1997; Morris, 2001; Walker, 1996) and the mutual project of racial struggle (hooks, 1994) created an educational environment that supported the personal and academic growth of Black students. While the significant role Black teachers played in the lives of Black students attending segregated schools is just one of the positive unintended consequences of a system of racial subjugation, Walker (2000) points to numerous other often ignored benefits, such as curriculum and extracurricular opportunities, parental involvement, and the significance of (Black) school leadership.

Walker (1996) quotes Irvine and Irvine: "the segregated black school was thus . . . an educational institution that addressed the deeper psychological and sociological needs of [its] clients" (p. 4). Given the increasingly documented excessive anti-Blackness Black students experience in public schools today, we may be encouraged to consider whether Black students still possess "deeper psychological and sociological needs" without an "educational institution" to address them. Walker's work raises important questions that the field of education should contend with if it seeks effective answers to difficult, and sometimes painful, questions about the relationship between the Black students and the current public school system. More importantly, Walker's detailed study offers a critical entry point into an examination of the historical significance of exclusively Black educational spaces and the potential role in the current educational context. Further, Walker's thorough exploration of the significant role of Black teachers in segregated schools helps us make sense of some of the aforementioned tensions Black families experienced as a result of desegregation policies.

Still, many of the schools in Walker's work began with a fundamental understanding of the relationship between the school and the transformation of Black consciousness and life. They understood that teaching and educating is always a political project and must always be rooted in antiracist struggle. In today's educational context, when Black students attend segregated schools, they are largely what scholars may refer to as dropout factories or apartheid schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). Rather than a focus on "racial uplift," these schools more commonly ensure 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 the value of many segregated schools in the South is not to argue that today's segregated schools are good or that we should fight to save them. Rather, we should consider the aspects of the schools in Walker's work that we might seek to replicate in our fight for the resources, opportunities, and educational justice Black children have yet to experience en masse. In this next section, I explore the utility in a theory of anti-Blackness in education, 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.

## Anti-Blackness in Education: Black Educational Injury and the Journey Toward Educational Redress

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 life can be taken at any moment—not because of chance but because you are racialized Black in an anti-Black world. Indeed, the language of anti-Blackness became central in how we might make sense of society's inability to recognize our humanity—the disdain, disregard, and disgust for our existence, and for how we might make sense of over 400 years of Black suffering—and our unremitting interminable pain, rage, and exhaustion (ross, 2020a). And this is the same society in which U.S. schools are created and maintained. It is precisely this inability to recognize Black humanity that permeates students' broader anti-Black experiences in schools. Indeed, anti-Blackness in education is not simply about the ways Black students are disproportionately punished by teachers, administrators, and actual gun-toting police officers. It is also about the ways Black students are policed more broadly—the attacks against our hair in locs, braids, and even the Afros that grow naturally from our heads. The ways Black girls are hypersexualized and dress-coded disproportionately. The ways Black boys' bodies are adultified and rendered criminal Black men (Russell, as cited in Alexander, 2012, p. 107). The ways LGBTQ and gender-nonbinary Black students are erased, marginalized, and

othered. The ways our bodies—our skin, our hair, our clothes, our voice, our body language, our cadence, our minds—have always represented a dangerous intrusion within educational institutions structured by anti-Black solidarity. It is about the policing of the boundaries of our existence—the way our very presence, let alone our struggle, our brilliance, our creativity, and our ingenuity, are misrepresented and/or effectively stamped out of the curriculum and denied space in schools more broadly (ross, 2020b).

Thus if we're serious about cultivating equitable educational spaces for Black students, we have to ensure we're asking the right questions. What does it mean to create spaces that move beyond improving test scores or graduation rates and actually attend to Black students' overall well-being? And what does well-being look like in the context of anti-Black schooling? In other words, what kinds of educational environments might help Black students confront, navigate, refuse, and resist anti-Black violence and anti-Black racism in the larger society and in their schools? What kinds of environments might facilitate Black students' move in the direction of genuinely being "okay?"

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

Numerous scholars have articulated various policies and practices that serve to facilitate high academic achievement amongst Black students. Scholars have written about the significance of culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014), politically relevant (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999), culturally sustaining (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017), critical race (Lynn & Jennings, 2009), Afrocentric and African-centered (Asante, 1991; Hilliard, 1995; Jamison, 2020; Lee, 1994; Lee et al., 1990) pedagogies. Scholars have pointed to the importance of student-teacher relationships (Brand et al., 2006; Chhuon & Wallace, 2012; Dance, 2002; Howard, 2001; Irvine, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2007), the significance of Black teachers in Black students' educational experiences (Dee, 2005; Foster, 1997; Walker, 1996, 2000), developing relational teaching and a relational school climate (Howard et al., 2016; Nelson, 2016), and genuine love and care between adults and Black students in schools (McKinney de Royston et al., 2017; Nasir & Givens, 2018; ross et al., 2016). Scholars have also articulated the significance of strong leadership—particularly a principal who believes in the inherent educability of Black students (Brown & Beckett, 2007; Khalifa, 2012; Khalifa et al., 2016; Lomotey, 1989, 2019; Tillman, 2004, 2008).

Still, while education scholars often rightfully focus on students' racialized experiences in schools and explore the ways schools can work to mitigate Black educational suffering, alternative educational spaces for Black students remain less explored. Baldrige (2019, 2020) suggests the pedagogical strategies employed by youth workers to

challenge anti-Black racism are often overlooked. Baldrige highlights the ways community-based educational spaces (CBES) have less constraints than traditional schools and have the capacity to help Black youth navigate the racialized experiences they have in their schools and in the broader society. Just as Irvine and Irvine (1983) argued that historically segregated schools could address the deeper psychological and sociological needs of Black students, other scholars argue community-based educational spaces—particularly programs that meet on a consistent basis (Bandy & Moore, 2011) and employ culturally specific curriculum and activities (Brittian Loyd & Williams, 2017)—are playing an increasingly prominent role in meeting the social, cultural, and academic needs of Black students (Murray & Milner, 2015; Woodland, 2016).

Scholars have also signaled the importance of African-centered youth programming and mentorship (Gordon et al., 2009; Johnson, 2016). While Gordon et al. (2009) highlight the significant academic improvements of Black boys participating in an Afrocentric mentoring program, Johnson points to the positive socioemotional benefits of including Africans as subjects in the development of humanity and history. Still others have signaled that youth programming and mentorship may not be enough to fully resist anti-Black racism in mainstream U.S. schools; thus, scholars have also explored the significance of refusing traditional educational models altogether, and developing Black independent schools including Afrocentric schools, Freedom Schools, religious schools (e.g., Black Catholic schools, Nation of Islam Schools) and charter schools (Green, 2011; Hoover, 1992; Irvine, 1990; King, 2017; Lee, 1992; Lomotey, 1992; 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 students specifically. These courses serve to resist racialized discipline disparities (Nasir et al., 2013); reimagine negative stereotypical notions of Black manhood (Givens et al., 2016); facilitate teacher-student relationships that reflect instructors' political clarity, cultural connection and affirmation of students, and appreciation of students as vulnerable children working within racialized conditions (McKinney de 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, 2018) has also explored space designed

specifically for Black girls with an adult Black woman educator. Similar to the MDP courses, this course was presented 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, emotional, 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 fugitivity 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 makeshift land, and provide makeshift 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 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) historicizes 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 undoing of the American school’s manipulation of Black subjectivity was necessary—this required a reconstitution 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:

History has shown that there are very few cases where Black communities can count on public schools to improve educational outcomes and opportunities for Black children. Without targeted interventions undertaken by knowledgeable and committed educators who understand the importance of partnering with parents and the community, it is not possible to bring about positive change. (p. 131)

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, what is it 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 “freed” 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 injury, and also, 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 possibilities, 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 financial incentives for Black folks interested in entering these professions;
  - Instituting ongoing mandatory anti-racism training for teachers, administrators, and support staff;
  - Supporting 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 HBCUs for example); financially support the establishment of independent cadres where groups of students and educators enact radically different forms of education (see Nxumalo & 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 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 prerequisite 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 these spaces were theirs, too? Even during what we might refer to as the desegregation heyday, what did these 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 socioemotional 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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