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Vestiges of desegregation: Black superintendent reflections on the complex legacy of Brown v Board of Education

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VESTIGES OF DESEGREGATION: BLACK SUPERINTENDENT REFLECTIONS
ON THE COMPLEX LEGACY OF BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION

by

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Bachelor of Arts
Colorado State University
1997

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2002

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Doctor of Education Degree in Educational Leadership
Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 2007

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Dissertation Approval
The Graduate College
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February 20 ______^ 2007

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On The Complex Legacy Of Brown V. Board Of Education

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ABSTRACT

Vestiges of Desegregation: Black Superintendent Reflections on the Complex Legacy of Brown v. Board of Education

by

Sonya Douglass Horsford

Dr. Edith A. Rusch, Ph.D., Examination Committee Chair
Professor of Educational Leadership
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Research reflecting the diverse thoughts, experiences, and perspectives of the Black school superintendent is scarce despite the noteworthy role Black leaders and educators have demonstrated within and beyond the Black community. Although there is extensive literature on the impacts of segregation, desegregation, and resegregation on Black student achievement and the promise and failures of school choice reform, my review of related literature revealed an absence of voices belonging to those individuals who possess the personal and professional experiences that may inform these very complex issues—Black school superintendents.

This qualitative dissertation study documents and explores the reflections and perspectives of eight retired Black school superintendents on desegregation policy and its perceived impact on the self-concept, education, and communities of Black students. The questions guiding this study are: (1) How do the standpoint and lived experiences of Black school superintendents before, during, and after desegregation influence their
perspectives on public school choice and Black student achievement? (2) In what ways can the standpoint, lived experiences, and perspectives of Black superintendents provide insight to Black families concerning school choice and achievement? (3) In what ways do the lived experiences of school desegregation provide insight for how Black educators and families respond to school choice policy and policies designed to improve Black student achievement? (4) How should the next generation of Black educators and community leaders move forward to improve Black student achievement?

In-depth interviews, narratives, and counterstorytelling were used to illustrate and examine the promises, both fulfilled and broken, of desegregation policies in the Black community. Standpoint theory and critical race theory (CRT) framed the study, revealing three counternarratives that challenge key assumptions located within mainstream education discourse concerning desegregation and Black education: (2) all Black schools are not inherently bad, (2) many problems attributed to Black education began with desegregation, and (3) schools and school systems have never truly integrated.

This study is important because it can inform those concerned with the plight of all students, and Black students in particular, about the personal and professional experiences of Black school superintendents, and give voice to their perspectives concerning desegregation and race-conscious education policy. It is also adds to the growing literature that applies a racial realist perspective of critical race theory to education.
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DEDICATION

To my husband, Steven –
For always standing up for what is right.

To my children, Benjamin, Bryson, and Ella –
For teaching me how to laugh loud, love hard, and dream big.

To my parents, Kil Cha and Gilbert Douglass –
For all the sacrifices you made for my education.

This is for you.
PREFACE

At a very early age, my mother gave me a clear understanding of the unjust, yet inescapable, reality of racism in America. My mother, a first-generation Korean American, did not complete high school, but she placed a strong value on education as the key to a good quality of life. In her imperfect yet commanding English, she would constantly remind me that because my father, her husband, was Black, I was Black and therefore required to work harder and better than others. It didn’t seem fair, but I somehow knew it was a truth to be accepted, and I did so with a serious sense of personal and social responsibility. I committed myself to making my parents proud and showing the others that color did not matter.

Fortunately, good grades came easy to me. I enjoyed school and was always at the top of my class. My elementary school principal recommended I skip the second grade, but my parents decided against it because I was already one of the youngest among my peers. Perhaps these personal realities helped to support my belief in the notions of meritocracy and individual responsibility. My neighborhood grade school was fairly diverse, as were my friends, but the majority of my classmates and teachers were White. This changed drastically during my sixth grade year when I was bused from my fairly ethnically diverse, but majority White, neighborhood to school in a largely Black area of town. As an adult, I would understand this was part of my school district’s "sixth grade center
plan," an integral part of its larger desegregation plan, designed to create more racial balance within schools throughout the county.

My anxiety about entering the sixth grade and trying to make new friends paled in comparison to the sorrow I would feel on the last day of school. After creating much desired friendships and sharing joyous memories, my newfound friends and I shared tears and unfulfilled vows to keep in touch despite our distance. This was a very confusing time for me. Why did I have to attend school in another neighborhood? What schools were many of my sixth grade friends going to attend the following year? Why was I bused across town for only 1 year when many of them would be bused throughout their entire 4 years of high school? How did this desegregation plan affect our respective educational opportunities and learning experiences? Our overall life chances?

Not until I became an adult and attended a local community panel discussion in recognition of the 50th anniversary of the Brown v. Board of Education was I prepared to critically reflect on my sixth grade experience. I was consumed for months by mixed feelings of anger for those African American students who suffered the burden of desegregating the district’s schools because of where they happened to live, and shame for not knowing more about the intricacies of this landmark decision. I committed myself to reading the cases and exploring their implications to understand the not so distant legacy of oppression and injustice as demonstrated in our nation’s system of schooling.

Now as the mother of two young inquisitive boys, I have inherited the serious obligation of acknowledging, and attempting to explicate, the same troubling and seemingly unanswerable questions of race, identity, opportunity, and equality. I am concerned with the future of public education, what it means for my children, and all
children in this country. Should they be in schools where integration and diversity are valued, but the curriculum not culturally relevant? Is it better for them to attend predominately Black schools where their teachers and classmates look like them, but do not necessarily reflect the cultural differences and realities of racism that are part of the American experience? When they are treated differently because they are Black, how do I explain racism, and nevertheless comfort them despite my own inability to understand it and why it continues to exist?

This dissertation study is my attempt to explore these difficult questions about race and racism and its impact on the education of African Americans by reflecting on my own experiences alongside the experiences, struggles, and dreams of those have come before me. It is not my intention to offer a silver bullet for the problems associated with and subscribed to the education of Black children. Rather, this work is an attempt to use lessons from the past to inform, reframe, and reconsider the current debate on desegregation and other race-based educational policies and their implications for the education of all students.

As with anything else in life, this project would not have been possible without those individuals who encouraged, supported, and assisted me in this professional and personal journey. First, I’d like to thank my dissertation committee members: Edith Rusch, Robert McCord, James Crawford, Laurence Parker, and Helen Harper, for their expertise and support in the development and completion of this research.

Very special thanks to the chair of this committee, Edith Rusch, for her leadership and guidance through the dissertation process. As my chair, professor, advisor, mentor, and friend, you have consistently treated me like a colleague-in-the-making, even when I
was unsure of what my professional future would hold. Your high standards and expectations have made me a better writer and researcher, and your mentorship has exposed me to opportunities that I never would have realized without your support. For that I am truly grateful.

I must express my deepest appreciation for the superintendents who participated in this study. Your willingness to devote time from your busy schedules, and trust me with your life stories, means more than I can say. It was a privilege to share the company of individuals who, as African Americans, have blazed trails in the field of education, and it is my hope that your personal and professional experiences as presented in this work will inspire others as much they have inspired me.

Last, but never least, I want to thank my family for being God’s manifestation of love, patience, mercy, grace, and joy in my life. Your faith pulled me through just when I thought it would never end. To my dear son, Benjamin, thank you for compelling me to write more quickly by repeatedly asking me when I would be finished with the computer. To my baby boy, Bryson, thanks for the spontaneous hugs and kisses you granted while I was stuck, sometimes motionless, in front of that same computer. To my daughter, Ella, thank you for being due in March, as there was no more effective deadline than yours.

And to my dear husband, Steven, thank you for believing in me and gently ushering me into retirement from my career as a professional student. I’m so blessed to have a partner and best friend who shares my values for faith, family, and community. We’ve only just begun.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

More than 50 years after the landmark Brown v. Board of Education decision, school desegregation remains a complex issue in education. Laws, policies, and strategies developed to "mix" the racial make-up of schools has resulted in what Bell (2004) characterizes as the "mixed legacy" of Brown, and that mixed legacy includes the unfulfilled promise of equal education for all students regardless of race, color, or creed (Bell, 2004). Although some scholars believe the promise of Brown was not realized because it overlooked the existence of race as a social construct (Bell, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), others contend the promise of integration and racial equality should not be abandoned, but rather pursued in the same spirit of Brown to combat the current trend toward resegregation and racial isolation (Kozol, 2005; Orfield & Eaton, 1996; Wells, 1993).

That spirit of the historic Brown decision is captured in the following as acknowledged by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1954:

We consider that in the field of public education, the doctrine of separate but equal has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal . . . . To separate them from others of similar age and qualification solely because of their race

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generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely to ever be undone.

After reading aloud that statement during a lecture in 2000, social psychologist Dr. Kenneth Clark, a key expert witness in the Brown case who happens to be Black, responded with the following:

Those were their words in 1954. Those are their words today, except today they are presented as though they were part of a dream, rather than reality. In the years since that statement was made, we have had copious examples of the harm inflicted upon our children, and our society. For segregation not only damages Black children, but also interferes with the growth and development of White children.

The complex issue of school desegregation and its implications for the education and self-concept of Black students, as well as their families and communities, garners varied opinions based on various racial, economic, and political standpoints and perspectives. Despite the significant role Black educators have historically played in the lives of Black families and communities, particularly related to the schooling of Black children, research reflecting the standpoint, lived experiences, and perspectives of the Black educator is scarce (Morris, 2001; Murtadha & Watts, 2005; Walker, 2005). Even more rare is the voice of the Black superintendent, which continues to be marginalized, if not seemingly forgotten, in education research. The voices are particularly silent on issues where they may be of great value—race, desegregation, equity, choice, and social justice.

Since the first dissertation study on Black superintendents published in 1971, there have only been 16 dissertations on Black superintendents with 3 of those 16 delimited to the study of Black women (Alston, 1996; Banks, 1988; Caldman, 1989; Coates, 1980;
Dawkins, 2004; Edwards, M., 1974; Edwards, R. 1989; Hall, 1990; Henson-Governor, 1998; Jones, 1984; Jones-Mitchell, 1993; Marshall, 1987; McClain, 1974; Napier, 1984; Sanders-Lawson, 2001; Williams, 1984). Collectively, the studies are quantitative and qualitative in nature, examining the personal experiences, employment conditions, career development, and patterns of success demonstrated by participants through biographical information, statistical data, survey instruments, and in-depth interviews.

The first of these dissertations, *Black Superintendents in Public School Districts: Trends and Conditions* (Moody, 1971) sought “to investigate the conditions of school districts prior to the appointment of a Black superintendent” (p. 11). Moody found that the majority of Black superintendents inherit school districts with significant financial deficits, growing majority non-White student populations, majority non-White school boards, and an increasing non-White teaching staff. In 2004, Dawkins replicated Moody’s study by examining Black superintendents in Michigan, and more than three decades after Moody’s pioneering study, the findings were essentially the same.

Thus, the standpoint of Black school superintendents is presented in this study as a way to explore and share the ways of knowing and understanding that may be unique to individuals who are Black and have served as superintendents. As indicated in the literature, a number of these experiences, such as double-consciousness, result from the challenging conditions and barriers Black superintendents faced both prior to achieving the superintendency, and during their terms of service (Dawkins, 2004; Moody, 1971; Scott, 1980). These experiences also stem from their histories and encounters with racism and oppression as Americans of African heritage. As Delgado and Stefancic (2001) argue in what they describe as a *voice-of-color thesis*, the “experiences and narratives of people..."
of color have inherent value" because they may be able to convey to their White peers, situations or perspectives that Whites may not have otherwise known or been in a position to understand. Although it is important to understand that the standpoint and lived experiences of all Black superintendents cannot and should not be essentialized or generalized to the broader population, shared perceptions and experiences, such as those documented in the research and literature, are important to informing conversations concerning equity, race, and racism in education.

Background

Declining student achievement scores, and the glaring disparity between poor and minority students and their White peers, have caused many to argue that the public school system is not able to ensure a quality education for all children (Hakim, Seidenstat, & Bowman, 1994, Merrifield, 2001). In response, desegregation and public school choice policies have been presented as saving graces for Black students trapped in low-performing public schools (Chavous, 2004; Nathan, 1990; Rofes & Stulberg, 2004). Although the discussion surrounding both desegregation and choice in public education is vast and varied, one particular concern is the potential relationship between these efforts and matters of equity in light of America's history of segregation and discrimination in education (Fuller, Elmore, & Orfield, 1996; Wells, 2002).

Critics of public school choice contend this type of reform perpetuates the unequal education and racial separation of students through "resegregation" or the quiet reversal of prior desegregation efforts (Fuller, Elmore, & Orfield, 1996; Levin, 2001; Orfield & Eaton, 1996; Wells, 2002). Still others have reluctantly come to grips with the
unfortunate reality of de facto segregation within and among America’s public schools and suggest the redirection of energies toward ensuring high quality and culturally relevant educational programs for Black students (Faltz & Leake, 1996; Henderson, Greenberg, Schneider, Uribe, & Verdugo, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Shujaa, 1996).

In light of the history of oppression, segregation, and inequality in American education, it is important to view and discuss issues of educational policy through a lens that acknowledges the prevalence of race and racism in our nation’s institutions, in this case, educational institutions. This view is critical to understanding the standpoint of Blacks and their perceptions concerning desegregation and school choice policies and their effect on the schooling experiences of Black children. Despite historical accounts of substandard facilities and the stigma of inferiority, the oral histories and personal testimonies of Black educators and students during segregation help to illustrate how Black schools enjoyed a sense of community and prepared students to “compete in the desegregated world that did not yet exist” (Walker, 2001, p. 769). Through struggle and oppression, students developed an appreciation for their culture, their teachers, and their ability to overcome unjust circumstances (Dempsey & Noblit, 1993; Du Bois, 1903; Shujaa, 1994, Walker, 1996). Thus, struggle was a form of education (Bennett, 1972).

Statement of the Problem

The combination of low-performing schools and educational inequity has contributed to a sentiment among parents and policymakers that embraces greater choice in public education. Brown v. Board of Education (1954) personifies this “mixed legacy” of an unfulfilled promise for equal education for all students regardless of race, color, or creed.
(Bell, 2004). Further, many scholars believe the promise of Brown was not realized because it overlooked the existence of race as a social construct (Bell, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Others contend the promise of integration and racial equality should not be abandoned, but rather, should be pursued in the same spirit of Brown to combat the current trend toward resegregation and racial isolation (Orfield & Eaton, 1996; Wells, 1993).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to document and explore the lived experiences and perspectives of Black school superintendents concerning desegregation policy, public school choice, and its perceived impact on the education of Black children. Narrative data collected from in-depth, semi-structured interviews were used to illustrate the promises, both fulfilled and broken, of desegregation and school choice policies. Building on the emergent themes in extant research and literature, I designed the study with the intention and objective of informing future educational policy efforts and community-based strategies for improving educational outcomes for Black and other historically marginalized students. If the needs of marginalized students can be served equally, the promise of Brown, a quality education for all children, can be fulfilled.

Theoretical Framework

This study documents the untold story of the struggle for quality education for Black students as uniquely experienced by the Black school superintendent and uses the method of counterstorytelling, which Delgado & Stefancic (2000) define as “writing that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the
majority” (p. 144). As evidenced by the paucity of research on the lived experiences of Black superintendents, their voices continue to be marginalized, if not seemingly “forgotten” in education research (Morris, 2001). Thus, the eight superintendents in this study are retired, self-identified as Black or African American, and possess personal recollections of attending segregated schools and working in desegregated schools in desegregated school environments.

Standpoint theory and critical race theory (CRT) frame and interpret the narratives presented by the participants to provide insight into the ways the participating Black educators perceive desegregation policies affecting the schooling experiences of Black children. Standpoint theory, which is a type of critical theory in the feminist tradition, seeks to improve the conditions of the marginalized and oppressed by empowering them through the opportunity to present their own accounts and understanding of the everyday world that may prove more useful to them than representations by the dominant group (Harding, 1991; Smith, 1974). It also lends credibility and value to the position of marginalized groups, in this case Black school superintendents, and challenges what have traditionally been accepted as objective truths (Collins, 1990).

These objective truths are also contested through a CRT framework, which as a “discourse of liberation,” entreats the use of narratives, stories, and chronicles as effective and necessary methods of challenging the status quo and subverting the prevailing mindset of the dominant group (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2005; López, 2003; Parker, Deyhle & Villenas, 1999). CRT is employed both methodologically and epistemologically in this study to reveal the role of race and racism in the everyday lives of people of color (Parker & Lynn, 2002).
Research Questions

In order to document and explore the standpoint, narratives, lived experiences, and perceptions of Black school superintendents on desegregation, school choice, and Black student achievement, the following questions guided the study:

1. How do the standpoint and lived experiences of Black school superintendents before, during, and after desegregation influence their perspectives on public school choice and Black student achievement?

2. In what ways can the standpoint, lived experiences, and perspectives of Black superintendents provide insight to Black families concerning school choice and achievement?

3. In what ways do the lived experiences of school desegregation provide insight for how Black educators and families respond to school choice policy and policies designed to improve Black student achievement?

4. How should the next generation of Black educators and community leaders move forward to improve Black student achievement?

Limitations and Delimitations

This study focused specifically on Black school superintendents to explore their unique standpoint and lived experiences with segregation and desegregation. I chose to delimit this study to this particular population because these perspectives are currently in short supply in the education research literature, despite the rich history of Black schooling documented in other disciplines such as legal studies, history, and sociology.
The nature of the dissertation study, which often results in time constraints and limited financial resources, informed my decision to select a total of eight participants for this study. Although other racial, ethnic, and/or cultural groups may have and may continue to share segregated schooling experiences similar to those of the participating superintendents, those experiences will not be discussed in this study. Furthermore, there is no assumption that the data collected in this study can be essentialized or expected to reflect the experiences of all Black school superintendents or all Black educators. Rather, this exploratory study was designed to serve as an opportunity to lay the groundwork for future research.

The retrospective nature of this study poses additional limitations due to its reliance on narrative inquiry, participant reflection, and selective memory. Marshall and Rossman (1999) caution that retrospective narratives “may suffer from selective recall, a focus on subsets of experience, filling in memory gaps through inference, and reinterpretation of the past” (p. 123). Further, my standpoint as a Black woman presents the potentiality of bias, which is openly acknowledged in narrative inquiry since the role of the researcher includes “constructing the narrator’s reality, not just passively recording and reporting” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 123). Thus, part of my analysis will require the utilization of my own standpoint in order to critically reexamine my own experiences and construct meaning from them based on the narratives and lived experiences of the study participants.
Researcher's Perspective

As a Black woman, the Black standpoint is of import to me because it offers a perspective and worldview that can be strikingly different from what is experienced and understood by members of the White dominant culture (Collins, 1990; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). As noted in the preface, I believe my educational experiences were shaped greatly by my being a Black woman and played a large role in my desire to investigate this area of study. I expect my identity also had implications for the style, content, and manner in which the study participants shared and communicated with me during the interview process. In fact, several of the superintendents in the study explained that somebody helped them get to where they are today, and so they felt an obligation to support a young Black student in her academic and professional journey.

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it can inform parents, community leaders, and those concerned with the plight of Black students about the perceived implications and personal experiences concerning school desegregation policy. It will also add to the growing literature that applies a “racial realist” perspective of critical race theory to education—the “view that racial progress is sporadic and that people of color are doomed to experience only infrequent peaks followed by regressions” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. 154). By understanding that “racism is a means by which society allocates privilege and status,” this article seeks to reframe the discourse concerning desegregation, school choice, and other race-conscious education policies and their implications for our society’s most vulnerable students and marginalized communities. Results may help
stakeholders determine whether or not they should support efforts to continue school desegregation in its current form or find alternative methods for improving racial equity and social justice in public education. It is also significant that this research process seeks to interrogate the standpoint of a Black woman researcher who is exploring the standpoint of Black educators. My careful attention to this dynamic may provide insights to other researchers who seek to study participants of similar or different racial standpoints.

Organization of the Study

This study documents and explores the complex challenges and implications of desegregation policy for Black children through the eyes and voices of Black superintendents who attended racially segregated schools. Further, it attempts to critically interpret these narratives and perceptions through a lens that situates race and racism at the center of how desegregation and school choice policies have been perceived by Black educators to have an effect on the schooling and education of Black students.

The next chapter, Chapter 2 presents a review of related literature including (1) the historical, legal, social, and cultural context of Black education, (2) the viability of school desegregation and race-conscious education policies today, (3) the current debate surrounding school choice and its implications for equity and student achievement, and (4) the missing voice of the Black school superintendent.

An overview of the study’s research design, conceptual and methodological framework, participants, methods of data collection and analysis, and procedures for constructing the participant narratives are presented in Chapter 3.
One version of the study’s findings are discussed in Chapter 4. It begins by providing the social context of segregated schooling and communities for the study participants, followed by their lived experiences as students in these schools. It then focuses on the role of parents, teachers, and students as perceived factors affecting achievement within a segregated context and how these experiences shaped and informed the participants and their work as educators.

In Chapter 5, a thematic analysis of the study’s findings is discussed. More specifically, this collection of narrative responses and vignettes reveal what appear to be challenges to widely held assumptions in the mainstream literature concerning the benefits of desegregation policy for Black children, families, and communities.

Chapter 6 attempts to interpret the study’s findings utilizing a framework based on the five tenets of critical race theory: counterstorytelling, the critique of liberalism, Whiteness as property, interest convergence, and the permanence of racism. It discusses the ways in which the participants’ standpoints and experiences can be effectively examined through a critical race perspective.

The study concludes with Chapter 7, which summarizes the findings and analysis and outlines implications for theory, practice, policy, and future research. Most importantly, it pursues the moral activist role of critical race scholarship by identifying strategies that can be utilized by parents, schools, and communities to promote a political race discourse and social justice agenda in education. The following definitions are provided to assist readers with the content of this study:

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Definitions

Afrocentrism: Paradigm in which the peoples of Africa and the African Diaspora and their worldviews are central to the schooling process (Asante, 1991).

Color blindness: Belief that one should treat all persons equally, without regard to their race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Counterstorytelling: Writing that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Critical race theory: Radical legal movement that seeks to transform the relationship among race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Desegregation: Policy to integrate the races in schools or housing (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Equity: Fair distribution of educational access, opportunities, and resources such as public funds, qualified teachers, and educational facilities (Petrovich & Wells, 2005, p. 4).

Diversity: Policy founded on the belief that individuals of different races and ethnicities can contribute to workplaces, schools, and other settings (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Integration: Process of desegregating environments such as public schools or neighborhoods (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Race: Notion of a distinct biological type of human being, usually based on skin color or other physical characteristics (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Racism: Any program or practice or discrimination, segregation, persecution, or mistreatment based on membership in a race or ethnic group.
Resegregation: (1) Quiet reversal of prior desegregation efforts (Orfield & Eaton, 1996); (2) Process by which students are separated into racially or ethnically isolated groups within desegregated schools (Eyler, Cook, & Ward, 1996)

School choice: Any arrangement that allows parents to decide which of two or more publicly funded schools their children will attend (The National Working Commission on Choice in K-12 Education, 2003).


Voice: Ability of a group, such as Blacks or women, to articulate experience in ways unique to it (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

To effectively and responsibly examine the perceived impact of desegregation and public school choice on Black student achievement, such discussion must be contextualized with historical and legal analyses to understand what may be the “contemporary manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage” (Matsuda et al., 1993, p. 6). This chapter begins with an overview of the historical and legal context of desegregation, including the major Supreme Court cases that sanctioned racial segregation, declared it unequal, and most recently, contributed to what Orfield (1996) has termed resegregation. Next I present the arguments that support and question the viability of school desegregation efforts in light of continued Black student underachievement and offer the case for integrated schools, the case for separate schools, and the case for culturally relevant instruction in both independent Black schools and schools experiencing de facto segregation. Then I provide an overview of the public school choice debate and how the current discourse demonstrates concerns for the choice movement’s impact on equity and diversity. Finally, I introduce a review of the previous, albeit scarce, body of literature that gives voice to the experiences and perspectives of the Black school superintendent.
The limited supply of prior research regarding the Black superintendent demonstrates the need for studies that examine the lived experiences and perceptions of these district leaders. These perspectives have the potential to inform the current debates concerning the viability of desegregation, the opportunities and risks associated with public school choice, and the impact of both efforts on Black student achievement.

Navigating the modern-day debates centered on desegregation policies, the school choice movement, and Black student achievement requires an initial examination of what America established and embraced as a separate but equal dual system of education. The legal context and social climate that sanctioned and enforced racial separation are critical to understanding the dual education system of the past and the contemporary manifestation of a Black-White achievement gap that happens to be divided along the same color line. This contextualization informs the complex role race has played and continues to play in American public education (Carbado, 2002; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; López, 2003; Lynn & Adams, 2002; Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1996; Tate, 2005), especially as it pertains to desegregation efforts, schools of choice, and Black student achievement (Bell, 2004; Morris, 2001; Margonis & Parker, 1999; Saddler, 2005).

Historical and Legal Context of Desegregation

America’s historical subjugation of people of African descent through slavery, limited citizenship, and government sanctioned segregation serves as a significant prologue to the unique plight and lived experiences of Black Americans today (Bell, 1987; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ogbu, 2003; Shujaa, 1994). Unfortunately, the public
education system was not exempt from the oppression and inequities experienced by Black educators, parents, and children (Bell, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Shujaa, 1994). A historical-legal review of the laws and policies concerning America’s public school system underscores how the socially accepted construct of Black inferiority supported and sustained a racially separate and inequitable system (Bell, 2004; Brooks, 2004; Brown v. Board of Education, 1954; Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896).

The illegality of teaching a slave to read or write provides a context whereby Black Americans have traditionally valued education because it existed beyond the grasp of their forebears (Gadsden, 1994; Irons, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Fairclough (2001) explained, “The efforts of the slave regime to prevent black literacy meant that blacks early on associated education with liberation” (p. 3). Thus, for many generations, Black America held fast to the belief that access to a quality education would help right the wrongs of a racist past and equated education with opportunity and freedom. Gadsden (1991) described the continuing challenges facing Black students despite the incremental, yet inadequate, progression of schooling unique to this population.

For African American learners, in particular, literacy has been an especially tenuous struggle, from outright denial during slavery, to limited access in the early 1900s, to segregated schools with often outdated textbooks well into the 1960s to—many might argue—marginal acceptance of their culture and capacity as learners even into the 1990s (p. 275).

Gadsden’s observation summarizes the legacy of educational oppression, both physical and psychological, which has historically disadvantaged the Black learner. From slavery and restricted access to substandard schools and low expectations, Black students today
continue to experience the long-term effects of the collective mistreatment suffered by their forbears (Ogbu, 2003). In his study, *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb*, Ogbu (2003) explained that Black children “did not have to have been slaves to internalize the beliefs about the mentality of the slaves; memories of the collective experience of the past influenced their thinking” (p. 80).

In addition to acknowledging the historical realities of slavery, subjugation, and collective mistreatment of Black people in America, it is important to recognize the legal context of the role of race in U.S. jurisprudence and its implications for education policy. The following overview of legal cases related to issues of racial inequality and racial prejudice in education, from *Roberts v. City of Boston* in 1849 to *Brown* in 1954, presents what Alexander and Alexander (2001) describe as “an evolution of judicial thinking in overcoming discrimination, while preserving individual rights and freedoms” (p. 499).

“Badge of Inferiority” vs. “Separate-but-Equal”


What made the enforced separation of black children from white most damaging . . . was not tattered books or untrained teachers, but the stigma of inferiority that segregation inflicted on black children. School officials could buy newer books and hire better teachers for black children, but they could not erase feelings of inferiority from their minds (p. 63).
This argument was originally made in 1849 in Roberts v. City of Boston. Mr. Roberts, who was Black, sought to dispute the inequitable treatment his 5-year-old daughter experienced by being forced to “walk through the streets of the city of Boston past five elementary schools for White children to reach the Smith Grammar School, which had been established in 1920 for Blacks,” lacked adequate equipment, and was in poor physical condition (Alexander & Alexander, 2001, p. 499). Roberts’ attorney, civil rights leader and later U.S. Senator, Charles Sumner, argued that forcing Black children to attend racially separate schools was to “brand a whole race with the stigma of inferiority and degradation” (Roberts v. City of Boston, 1848, 59 Mass. 198). However, Justice Shaw of the Massachusetts court was not convinced, and “merely asserted that school segregation was for the good of both races” and introduced the notion of “separate-but-equal” in education, which would live on for more than 100 years (Alexander & Alexander, 2001, p. 500).

In 1868, the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified and stated: “Nor shall any State . . . deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.” However, the amendment had minimal effect beyond instances of state-sanctioned discrimination. Upon reflection of how the South began to develop “Jim Crow laws,” which were simply the transformation of the private practice of racial discrimination into state-sanctioned law, Justice Powell acknowledged: “[T]he Equal Protection Clause was virtually strangled in its infancy by post-Civil War judicial reactionism.”

The most important action regarding segregation occurred in 1896 with Plessy v. Ferguson, in which the justification for separate-but equal, as declared by the Roberts court, became the standard to be applied to the Fourteenth Amendment. The Court
concluded, "If one race be inferior to the other socially, the constitution of the United States cannot put them upon the same plane" (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S., 1896). However, in his lone dissenting opinion, Justice John M. Harlan declared, "[I]n view of the Constitution, in the eye of the law, there is in this country no superior, dominant, ruling class of citizens . . . Our constitution is colorblind, and neither know nor tolerates classes among its citizens." Despite what Alexander and Alexander (2001) describe as Harlan’s articulation of a “desirable moral standard for the nation,” the Supreme Court “made the equal protection clause subject to custom and tradition in accordance with legislative interpretation, no matter how blatantly and objectionably the law affected a particular classification of people” (p. 498, 500).

Although *Plessy* did not deal with education directly, the separate-but-equal precedent was quickly applied to the field of education. In 1899, the case of *Cumming v. Board of Education of Richmond County, Georgia* resulted in a decision by the U.S. Supreme Court that abdicated the school board from the responsibility of accommodating the needs of Black children by declaring that “the matter of education and how it was conducted . . . was solely a state concern” (Alexander & Alexander, 2001, p. 501). In 1908, the rationale for segregation in education was expanded in *Berea College v. Kentucky*, in which the U.S. Supreme Court “upheld a state law that forbade any institution as a corporation to provide instruction to both races at the same time unless the classes were conducted at least 25 miles apart” (Alexander & Alexander, 2001, p. 501). Although the cases of *Plessy, Cumming, and Berea College* protected states in their desire to require separate educational institutions and systems for Blacks and Whites, the Court moved beyond the Black-White binary in *Gong Lum v. Rice* (1927), which “held
that states could segregate a Mongolian child from the Caucasian schools and compel her to attend a school for black children, which became a common practice in the North and the South (Alexander & Alexander, 2001, p. 501).

Not until the 1930s, when the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) began to question the widely accepted practice of legal segregation, was the concept of separate-but-equal challenged. In 1938, in the landmark desegregation case known as *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada*, the Supreme Court determined a Missouri law that refused Blacks from enrolling in the University of Missouri Law School unconstitutional since there were no other schools in the state that Blacks could attend. The decision was significant because it "represented a reassertion of judicial authority in construing the equal protection clause as a limitation on a previously unfettered state action in education" (Alexander & Alexander, 2001, p. 501). It also paved the way for another case involving a law school in 1950. In *Sweatt v. Painter*, the concept of separate-but-equal was further eroded when Chief Justice Fred Vinson "virtually eliminated the use of separate law schools for blacks," exposing what Alexander and Alexander (2001) describe as "the obvious educational infirmity of the separate-but-equal doctrine" (p. 502).

Despite the incremental progress that was being made in dismantling the notion of separate-but-equal, which was previously accepted and perpetuated by courts across the country, there was still no relief for those Black elementary and secondary students who were forced to attend substandard schools with inadequate equipment and resources (Alexander & Alexander, 2001, p. 502). It is important to note that despite the numerous accounts and depictions of Black schools during segregation as substandard facilities...
with unqualified teachers and meager resources (Irons, 2002), the oral histories and personal testimonies of Black educators and students during segregation help to illustrate how Black schools enjoyed a sense of community and prepared students to “compete in the desegregated world that did not yet exist” (Fairclough, 2004; Walker, 2001, p. 769).

Blacks Schools under Segregation: Struggle, Hope, and Community

Through struggle and oppression, students developed an appreciation for their culture, their teachers, and their ability to overcome unjust circumstances (Dempsey & Noblit, 1993; Du Bois, 1903; Shujaa, 1994, Walker, 1996). Thus, struggle was a form of education (Bennett, 1972). In articulating the distinction between schooling and education, Madhubuti (1994) wrote:

Many believed that if we had first rate facilities/buildings, supplies, environment, teachers and support personnel, a quality education would follow. This is obviously not true. We now understand that there is a profound difference between going to school and being educated (p. 3).

Black students had teachers who exemplified the “willingness to be involved in the community, their dedication and commitment to the academic achievement of Black children, and their willingness to support one another through various forms of mentoring” (Tillman, 2004). In their historical analysis of Black educational leadership perspectives, Murtadha and Watts (2005) noted the emergence of three key themes: (1) the practice of educational leadership by individuals and organizations of people of African descent throughout U.S. history, (2) the linkage of “struggle for education with social justice” and fighting to overcome the social barriers of poverty and racism, (3) and the centrality of community engagement to Black educational leadership.
However, Orfield (1996) argued, "The memory of good black schools is not entirely inaccurate, but it obscures the substantial educational gains of blacks in the desegregation era" (p. 84). Whether or not these gains outweighed the costs suffered by the Black community through its loss of Black educators, closure of Black schools, and sole burden of integrating hostile all-White schools illustrates the duplicitous nature of the landmark school desegregation case commonly referred to as Brown.

The "Mixed Legacy" of Brown

Brown v. Board of Education (1954) is widely regarded as one of the most significant and noble Supreme Court decisions in the history of the United States. For Blacks, Brown presented the dawning of a new day where Black people could finally enjoy the educational rights previously denied their ancestors. The historic decision's broader appeal was its implications for social relations and more specifically, the opportunity for Blacks to also share in the pursuit of—the formerly elusive—American Dream (Tate, Ladson-Billings, & Grant, 1996).

After nearly 60 years of government-sanctioned segregation, a group of litigants argued that "state laws permitting and requiring such segregation, denies to Negro children the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment— even though the physical facilities and other 'tangible' factors of white and Negro school may be equal" (Brown v. Board, 1954). The Supreme Court unanimously concluded that segregation did not belong in education and that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" (Brown v. Board, 1954).

However, it was another year before Brown II occurred, when the Supreme Court made its initial effort to determine and outline how and when desegregation was to take
place. The Court concluded that desegregation should occur with “all deliberate speed,” and the ambiguity of that standard resulted in desegregation efforts being deferred in school districts across the country (Orfield & Eaton, 1996 p. xxi). More than 50 years after the decision and its deliberately measured implementation, reflections on the decision have resulted in what Bell (2004) describes as the “mixed legacy” of Brown. He observed:

The passage of time has calmed both the ardor of its admirers and the ire of its detractors. Today, of little use as legal precedent, it has gained in reputation as a measure of what law and society might be. That noble image, dulled by resistance to any but minimal steps toward compliance, but transformed Brown into a magnificent mirage, the legal equivalent of that city on a hill to which all aspire without any serious thought that it will ever be attained (p. 4).

A Dream Deferred: White Flight and Choice Plans

Lack of government action after Brown, coupled with White flight and resistance to the integration of Black children into all White schools, illustrate what many described as a climate of racism and White self-interest that existed post-Brown (Bell, 2004; Tate et al, 1996; Wells, 1993). Various reactionary strategies were employed by Whites to circumvent attempts to integrate the public schools on individual, collective, and institutional levels. An individualized response was for Whites to simply flee impacted neighborhoods to avoid the possibility of having their children attend school with Black children, who they perceived to be culturally and genetically inferior (Wells, 1993).

One “massive resistance” tactic included Southerners “convinc[ing] the nation that blacks were content living under segregation” (Bell, 2004, p. 13). School boards used
their local authority to craft and implement legislation that authorized districts to close their schools and provide tuition vouchers to Whites who could avoid attending schools with Blacks by selecting the schools of their choice (Wells, 1993). These efforts were referred to as ‘freedom-of-choice’ plans and are often cited by supporters of traditional public education as the reason modern-day school choice plans do not support integration and diversity (Fuller & Elmore, 1996; Wells, 1993). This argument will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

Numerous strategies, enacted by state and local governments, circumvented the U. S. Supreme Court’s decision to end segregation. Virginia provides one example of this in the passage of the Virginia Pupil Placement Act of 1964, through which state placement boards “required that student transfers not upset: (1) the orderly administration of the public schools, (2) the competent instruction of the pupils enrolled, or (3) the health, safety, education, and general welfare of the pupils” (Wells, 1993 p. 65). These highly subjective measures made it nearly impossible for Black students to attend the schools without violating one, if not all, of the indicated criteria. Today, this tactic correlates with concerns expressed by school choice opponents who believe unresolved issues such as transportation, capacity, and safety may be used as indirect methods to ensure schools of choice exclude students who may upset the above criteria (Fuller & Elmore, 1996; Wells, 1993).

In Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward County (1964), the Supreme Court determined that a Virginia Law permitting the closing of all public schools in Prince Edward County was unconstitutional. In a special session, the Virginia General Assembly passed legislation that closed and cut off state funds to public schools where
White and Black children were enrolled together. Further, using the money previously allocated to the closed public schools, the state provided tuition vouchers to White students who attended newly established private segregated schools and granted state funded retirement benefits to the teachers of these new schools (Alexander & Alexander, 2001).

In April 1959, the General Assembly vacated its 'massive resistance' efforts to desegregation and adopted a 'freedom of choice' program, which consisted of a new tuition grant program. The Assembly also repealed Virginia’s compulsory attendance laws, making school attendance a matter of local choice and preference (Alexander & Alexander, 2001). A similar program was enacted in 1965 in New Kent County, Virginia. Wells (1993) explains that “as a result of harassment by local whites and the tactics employed by state pupil-placement boards, by 1965 almost 94 percent of southern black students remained in all-black schools, and in several states only the slightest change had been made in the system of separate and unequal schools” (p. 66).

Four years later in Green v. County School Board of New Kent County, Virginia (1968) the Supreme Court determined that rather than “dismantling the dual system,” the freedom-of-choice plan operated simply to burden children and their parents with a responsibility that the Court had placed squarely on the School Board. The Board must be required to formulate a new plan and, in light of other courses which appear open to the Board, such as zoning, fashion steps which promise realistically to convert promptly to a system without a ‘white’ school and a ‘Negro’ school, but just schools” (391 U.S. 430).
In fact, throughout the plan’s 3 years of operation, no White student elected to attend the all-Black school, and despite 115 Negro students enrolling in the formerly all-white school in 1967, 85 percent of the Negro students still attended the all-Black school. The system was still dual with no intention of complying with *Brown II* (*Green v. County School Board of New Kent County, Virginia, 1968*).

Freedom-of-choice plans never dismantled the segregated school system or provided equal educational opportunities for Black children in Virginia. Critics of modern-day school choice plans contend that most proposed choice plans similarly place the burden of transforming segregated schools and systems toward integration on the Black children and parents who desire greater educational opportunities than the inadequate, racially isolated schools their children may currently attend (*Fuller & Elmore, 1996; Orfield & Eaton, 1996; Wells, 1993*).

**Consequences of Desegregation on Black Educators**

Although some recollections of segregated Black schools may be viewed through rose-colored glasses (*Fairclough, 2004; Orfield, 1996*), one documented post-*Brown* outcome is the disproportionate number of jobs lost by Black educators (*Morris, 2001; Walker, 2003; Tillman, 2004*). Many Black teachers, principals, and to a lesser extent, school superintendents were either demoted or fired once schools were required to integrate. This had a particularly significant impact on the Black community since a large number of its middle-class members served in the field of education (*Fairclough, 2004; Foster, 1997; Walker, 2001; Tillman, 2004*). The following table highlights important dates and statistics regarding what Walker (2003) described as the “decimation of black
leadership in the wake of desegregation” (p. 57). Tillman (2004) refers to this displacement of Black educators as the “(un)intended consequences” of Brown, noting that “The wholesale firing of Black educators threatened the economic, social, and cultural structure of the Black community, and ultimately the social, emotional, and academic success of Black children” (p. 280).

Table 1

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<th>The Impact of the Brown Decision on the Employment Status of Black Educators</th>
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The disproportionately small number of Black teachers and principals to Black public school students is arguably one of the most devastating consequences of desegregation on Black education (Jones-Wilson, 1990; Walker, 2003; Tillman, 2004; Dempsey & Noblit, 1993). Although data exist on the number of Black teachers and principals who were demoted, fired, or forced to resign during this era, literature on Black superintendents before Brown is scarce and did not develop until the 1970s (Tillman, 2004). Ethridge (1979) reported the complete absence of a Black superintendent in 1954 and fewer than 12 Blacks in the position of assistant superintendent.

Despite the devastating impact of desegregation efforts on Black educators, they have become the “forgotten voices,” excluded from discussions concerning the educational policy implications of desegregation, integration, and resegregation concerning Black children (Morris, 2001). Tillman’s (2004) historical look at the impact of Brown on Black educators suggested that these “(un)intended and (un)anticipated consequences” of job loss for Black teachers, principals, and superintendents were, in fact, the result of intended and anticipated strategies used to force Blacks out of the profession (p. 300).

Bell (2004) also questioned the motivation behind Brown as not altruistic, but a prime example of interest-convergence, the phenomenon whereby the rights of Blacks are only acknowledged and guarded if lawmakers believe their decisions will benefit their own desires. Bell’s principle of interest-convergence maintains that the Brown decision was not a manifestation of the nation’s desire to provide equal educational opportunities for Black students. Rather it was an anticommunist, foreign policy decision that was essential to improving America’s image as a nation that purported the virtues of freedom, equality, and democracy for all its citizens (Bell, 2004).
Another criticism of the *Brown* decision is the court’s approval of an “essentially mathematical solution to a sociocultural problem” (Tate et al, 1996, p. 33). Tate, Ladson-Billings, and Grant (1996) argued that *Brown’s* “model of educational equality, coupled with white self-interest, has not produced (and cannot produce) the expansive vision of equality that will lead to equal educational outcomes regardless of physical placement of students” (p. 47). They further observed that, “The major gains blacks thought were obtainable with the desegregation model were the very ones lost as a result of not accounting for an important law of the system, white self-interest” (p. 37). Bell (2004) articulated this overlooked factor of the interests of Whites over the interest of Blacks in his two rules of interest-convergence:

1. The interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when that interest converges with the interest of whites in policy-making positions. This convergence is far more important than gaining relief than the degree of harm suffered by blacks or the character of proof offered to prove that harm.
2. Even when interest-convergence results in an effective racial remedy, that remedy will be abrogated at the point that policymakers fear the remedial policy is threatening the superior societal status of whites, particularly those in the middle and upper classes (p. 68).

As a result of this miscalculation, “The wave of triumph that engulfed the black community in the wake of the *Brown* decision was soured by the realization that change
would not occur . . . as mandated by the Court” (Faltz & Leake, 1996, p. 229). Thus, Brown I’s promise of equal educational opportunities and access for Black children and Brown II’s ‘all deliberate speed’ provision coupled with de facto segregation, White flight, and ‘freedom-of-choice’ plans rendered the promise of Brown empty.

Resegregation: Sleepwalking Back to Plessy

Despite the realization of desegregated schooling across the country via demographic manipulation, busing, and court orders, the 1990s experienced what Orfield and Eaton (1996) describe as the “quiet reversal of Brown” or “resegregation.” Cases such as Board of Education of Oklahoma v. Dowell (1991), Freeman v. Pitts (1992), and Missouri v. Jenkins (1995) have released districts from their obligations to maintain desegregated schools while mitigating the harmful effects of segregation. In response, Orfield (1996) suggests the nation is “sleepwalking back to Plessy” (p. 331).

Numerous scholars are deeply concerned about a possible return to the days of segregated schools (Eaton, 1996; Eaton & Meldrum, 1996; Orfield & Eaton, 1996; Wells, 1993) while others are more troubled by the continued disproportionate levels of academic underachievement experienced by Black students across economic and geographic lines (Henderson et al. 1996; Irvine, 1990; Lomotey, 1990; Ogbu, 2003; Shujaa, 1996). Still others note that desegregated schools do not necessarily translate into integrated learning opportunities, since many schools utilize methods such as ability tracking, specialized programs, and “school within a school” programs, which ironically result in segregated classrooms and racially separated learning experiences for Black and White children (Dempsey & Noblit, 1993; Saddler, 2005). Today, a great number of Black parents have lost faith in desegregated schools and feel their children have a better
chance at succeeding in resegregated schools since there is no real difference academically (Saddler, 2005).

The debate surrounding the viability of desegregation plans, programs, and policies are still important to informing the strategies needed to increase Black student achievement. There are numerous arguments for and against the continuation of desegregation efforts in education, including the justifications for integrated schools (Kozol, 2005; Orfield, 1996); African-centered or independent Black schools (Faltz & Leake, 1996; Pollard & Ajidrotutu, 2000; Shujaa, 1994; Shujaa & Afrik, 1996); and schools that offer culturally relevant and responsive teaching in an involuntarily segregated school environment (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lee, 1994).

Viability of Desegregation

The conundrum of determining whether desegregation should take priority in developing school systems that afford Black students high quality learning opportunities is not new. In 1935, W.E.B. Du Bois articulated the complexity of this debate and his philosophy concerning the education of the Black student:

Theoretically, the Negro needs neither segregated schools nor mixed schools. What he needs is education. . . . A mixed school with poor and unsympathetic teachers, with hostile public opinion, and no teaching of truth concerning black folk, is bad. A segregated school with ignorant placeholders, inadequate equipment, poor salaries . . . is equally bad. Other things being equal, the mixed school is the broader, more natural basis for the education of all youth. It gives wider contacts; it inspires greater self-confidence; and suppresses the inferiority complex (p. 335).
The Case for Integrated Schools

Increased self-confidence and suppression of Black inferiority is fundamental to the argument supporting integrated schools. It served as the basis for Thurgood Marshall’s case in Brown. He contended that segregated schools placed a “stigma of inferiority on Black children” that was far more damaging that the substandard facilities or inadequate resources to which they were also subjected. This ‘badge of inferiority’ was injurious because it not only hindered their learning, but also their future life chances. “Brown’s judgment that segregated schools are inherently unequal remains correct, not because something magic happens to minority students when they sit next to whites, but because segregation cuts students of color from critical paths to success in American society” (Orfield, 1996, p. 331). Kozol (2005) made a similar observation regarding the benefits of integrated school environments. He stated:

The suggestion is virtually never made that one of the most direct ways to reduce the damage done to children by peer pressure is to change the make-up of their peers by letting them go to schools where all their classmates are not black and brown and poor, and children and grandchildren of the poor, but where a healthy confidence that one can learn is rooted in the national assumptions of Americans who haven’t been laid waste by history (p. 36).

In many cases, Black parents wanted their children in integrated classrooms, but not because they believed the presence of White students would improve their learning. According to Bell (2004), it was a matter of trust. Many did not believe White teachers would teach or treat their children fairly without other White students in the classroom. They also believed they would not receive equitable economic support for facilities and
instruction. Thus, there is a seeming distinction between the case and support for integrated schools contingent upon the standpoint of the observer. Many White supporters believe integration is necessary to ensure the future success of Black children while Black supporters have a more concentrated view that integration may possibly provide access to greater opportunities for equality in a desegregated environment. Further, it seems Black supporters, unlike White supporters, grapple with the question of whether or not the mere possibility of greater access, opportunity, and equality through integration outweigh the burden and consequences of desegregation that have primarily been placed on Black students, families, and communities.

Decades before Brown, W.E.B. Du Bois necessitated a distinction between segregation and discrimination, which was not supported by the NAACP or many other Blacks who were fighting diligently for the cause of desegregation. He maintained that “oppression and insult [had] become so intense and unremitting that until the world’s attitude changes . . . volunteer union for self-expression and self-defense was essential” (Bell, 2004, p. 119). More than 60 years later, Ladson-Billings (1994) offered a similar sentiment:

In a better world I would want to see schools integrated across racial, cultural, linguistic, and all other lines. But I am too much of a pragmatist to ignore the sentiment and motivation underlying the African American immersion school movement. African Americans already have separate schools. The African immersion school movement is about taking control of those separate schools (p. 3).
The Case for Separate Schools

Although Du Bois' urging in the 1930s fell on the deaf ears of many civil rights activists, a number of parents, educators, and community members over the years have shared Du Bois' position on voluntarily separate schools (Ratterey, 1994; Shujaa, 1994). During the 1990s, another shift took place in the attitudes of some African Americans who preferred adequate funding to desegregation. School boards dominated by Blacks in Yonkers, New York; Seattle, Washington; and Prince George's County, Maryland elected to end busing and dismantle their desegregation plans in exchange for increased funding for their neighborhood schools (Twohey, 1998). Ladson-Billings (1994) offers some insights, stating:

An often-asked question of people of color, women, and other marginalized groups is ‘What is it you people want?’ Surprisingly for some, what these people want is not very different from what most Americans want: an opportunity to shape and share in the American dream. But when these people say what they want, it is seen as ‘separatism,’ ‘reverse racism’ (a strange concept), ‘tribalism,’ and ‘special privilege’ (p. 137).

Decades after Brown, “some African American educators and parents are asking themselves whether separate schools that put special emphases on the needs of their children might be the most expedient way to ensure that they receive a quality education” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 2). Another view offered viewed Orfield and Eaton (1996) suggests:

So deep is our resistance to acknowledging what is taking place that when a school district abandons integrated education, the actual word “segregation” hardly ever
comes up. Proposals for racially separate schools are usually promoted as new educational improvement programs or efforts to increase parental involvement (p. 24).

The Case for Culturally Relevant and Responsive Schools

Ladson-Billings (1994) explains that although we should never want to return to the segregated schools of the pre-Brown era, it is important to acknowledge the reality that our schools are segregated. Hochschild (1997) painted a picture of what seems to be a conceptual backing of desegregation by Whites and desegregation fatigue on the part of Blacks, noting:

Despite their abstract support for school desegregation, most white members of the American public simply do not want very many black (and disproportionately poor) children in the same classroom as their own children, and they will do what they can to keep them out. Most black members of the American public either return the compliment, or have abandoned the desegregative effort in disgust (p. 461).

Henderson, Greenberg, Schneider, Uribe, and Verdugo (1996) observe that Black student achievement will only increase by “improving the quality of their schools, rather than the demographic manipulation of populations” (p. 182). Ladson-Billings (1994) argues that learning can be improved through the use of culturally relevant teaching, which she defines as “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 18). By examining the dominant culture and student’s own culture through cultural referents that are embedded in the curriculum, culturally relevant pedagogy establishes the student’s ability to develop a skill necessary for school and life success.
This skill is the ability to understand and navigate through the concept W.E.B. Du Bois described as “double-consciousness.”

Despite being an outspoken critic against segregation, renowned Black educator and mentor to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Dr. Benjamin E. Mays (1974) warned:

Black people must not resign themselves to the pessimistic view that a nonintegrated school cannot provide Black children with an excellent educational setting. Instead, Black people, while working to implement Brown, should recognize that integration alone does not provide a quality education (cited in Fairclough, 2004, p. ##).

Along those same lines, Bell (2004) reflected, “Zealous faith in integration blinded us to the actual goal of equalizing educational opportunities for black children, and led us to pursue integration without regard to, and often despite, its ultimate impact on the well-being of students” (p. 113).

School Choice: Inequitable or Emancipatory?

For the past 40 years, school choice has been a vehicle for school integration, meeting the individual needs of students, granting greater educational control to parents, and supporting the model of an increasingly competitive education marketplace (Wells, 1993). These programs have included alternative schools, neighborhood schools, community schools, targeted schools, priority schools, magnet schools, and more recently, charter schools.

The school choice movement encompasses various approaches and agendas. Numerous variations of opposing views and expectations within this type of school reform may not be obvious, since many different agendas are introduced under the
umbrella of school choice. As Wells (1993) explained, “when a phrase such as ‘school choice’ is used by educators and policymakers to describe programs that have little in common, parents and taxpayers become confused. Proposals bearing ‘school choice’ or ‘parental choice’ labels often garner broad support, although they may or may not reflect what most people consider sound educational goals” (p. 4).

There are two major schools of thought who support the broad notion of school choice. Some advocate school choice as a result of their value for freedom and competition while others believe choice is a means of promoting educational equity and social justice. In support of a competitive educational market, Merrifield (2001) stated, “No school policy will completely eliminate neighborhood or student body separation but socioeconomic industry will minimize separation.” He also argued that school choice is an opportunity to challenge the status quo by creating competition, thus improving the quality of public education.

On the other hand, some who believe school choice contributes to racial separation and unequal systems warn us against what Gary Orfield of the Harvard Desegregation Project has termed resegregation. He explained that our knowledge of the outcomes of Plessy should caution us to the potential reappearance of strict racial isolation and discrimination based on racist notions and sentiments (Orfield & Eaton, 1996). This possible consequence of resegregation and racial separation is just one of several concerns voiced by authors and scholars who warn against the dangers associated with the school choice movement.
School Choice and the Charter Movement

The National Working Commission on Choice in K-12 Education (2003) defines school choice as “any arrangement that allows parents to decide which of two or more publicly funded schools their children will attend.” This Commission also divides the types of school choice into two categories: traditional (magnet schools, open enrollment, and the opt-out provisions in No Child Left Behind) and non-traditional (charter schools, vouchers, and home schools). For the purposes of this study, school choice will be limited to the ‘traditional’ public-to-public school choice options to include charter schools, which are by definition nonsectarian public schools (US Charter Schools website).

School choice proponents Chubb and Moe (1990) described choice as a movement “embraced by liberals and conservatives alike as a powerful means of transforming the structure and performance of public education – while keeping the public schools public” (p. 206). They continued:

It is being used to combat racial segregation; indeed, it has become the preferred approach to desegregation in districts throughout the country – in Rochester and Buffalo (New York), Cambridge (Massachusetts), and Prince George’s County (Maryland) to name a few.

Despite Chubb and Moe’s view, that choice is being effectively used to “combat segregation,” much of the literature that informs this study points to the historical context and background relevant to understanding the implications for these types of programs on resegregation, equity, diversity, and achievement (Fuller & Elmore, 1996; Orfield, 1996; Rofes & Stulberg, 2004; Wells, 1993). Charter schools will be examined in particular
because much of the related literature and studies examining the promises, opportunities, consequences, and dangers of school choice have focused specifically on these increasingly popular nontraditional public schools (Bulkley & Wohlstetter, 2004; Chavous, 2004; Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2000; Kane & Lauricella, 2001; Nathan, 1996; Rofes & Stulberg, 2004; Wells, 2002; Wells, Holme, Lopez & Cooper, 2003).

**Charter Schools**

The U.S. Department of Education defines a charter school as a “nonsectarian public school of choice that operates with freedom from many of the regulations that apply to traditional public schools” (US Charter Schools website). Despite some of the freedoms and independence enjoyed by charter schools, they are still by definition, public schools. In fact, they are “public schools under contract” – the contract being the charter. Among the many definitions and explanations in the literature, Manno (1999) provided a comprehensive, yet succinct description that captures the essence of the charter school. He defined it as:

an independent public school of choice, given a charter or contract for a specified period of time (typically five years) to educate children according to the school’s own design, with a minimum of bureaucratic oversight. It may be a new school, started from scratch, or an existing one that secedes from its school district. It is held accountable to the terms of its charter and continues to exist only if it fulfills those terms. As a public school of choice, it is attended by students whose families select it and staffed by educators who choose to teach in it (p. 1).
Critics of charter schools are concerned with the role they play in what appears to be the resegregation of students who attend these schools of choice (Orfield, 1996; Wells, 1993). Some argue these types of choice programs are simply a throwback to the freedom-of-choice plans implemented in response to Brown as a strategy to avoid integration and equal educational opportunities for Black students. Others find them to be emancipatory opportunities for learning and a progressive type of school reform that can improve student success (King, 2004; Rofes & Stulberg, 2004).

However, there is a new dynamic at play today. Unlike the Black and minority parents who historically had no say in where they children attended school, some of today’s parents of color are frustrated with the public school system and are choosing schools that reflect the educational and cultural values they desire for their children. Fuller, Gawlik, Gonzalez, and Park (2004) observed the following trend:

The widening rejection of common schooling—or perhaps it’s the impersonal, bureaucratic rendition of the one best system—is energized by strange bedfellows, from Latino and African American activists fed up with unresponsive city schools to affluent parents who seek a pristine school behind their gated community (p. 94).

The difficult question is whether or not racial integration and diversity is important to schooling and student success. Mickelson (2005) explained, “If diversity is inconsequential in and of itself, the racial composition of schools matters very little for educational outcomes. However, if school racial composition affects school outcomes, any policy that subverts it must be carefully scrutinized, if not avoided” (p. 131). The following table demonstrates the demographic breakdown of charter schools in...
California, Texas, and Minnesota in comparison to their traditional public school counterparts.

Table 2

Racial/Ethnic Isolation in Public Schools and in Selected School Choice Programs (numbers in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proportion of Minority Students in School</th>
<th>0-20% (Mostly Anglos; Few Minorities)</th>
<th>&gt;80-100% (Mostly Minorities; Few Anglos)</th>
<th>Total Percentage of Racially Distinctive Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. public schools</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter schools in ten-state study</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public schools in California</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter schools in California</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public schools in Texas</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter schools in Texas</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public schools in Minnesota</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter schools in Minnesota</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Kemerer (2001)

The data in the above chart, collected in 1995-1996 as part of the first definitive study of all charter schools, illustrates the tendency of charter schools to be as "racially and ethnically distinctive" as their traditional public school counterparts (Kemerer, 2001).
While 70% of U.S. public schools were identified as racially distinctive, meaning they have either predominately White or minority populations, the same was true for only 65% of charter schools represented by the 10-state study, which included California, Arizona, Michigan, Colorado, Minnesota, Massachusetts, Wisconsin, New Mexico, Georgia, and Hawaii. These distributions vary across states, districts, and individual schools. In California, a larger number of traditional public schools are distinctively minority (23%) while a greater percentage of charter schools are Anglo (37%). The opposite is true in Texas and Minnesota where the public schools are predominately Anglo (22% and 83% of schools respectively) while the percentage of charter schools in those states have distinctively minority student populations (58% and 31% of schools respectively). Mickelson’s (2005) study of the Charlotte-Mecklenberg Schools district wide Family Choice Plan in North Carolina found patterns of resegregation in both the elementary and high schools.

*Charter Schools and Black Student Achievement*

As public schools, charter schools are accountable to meet the requirements of their charters and in most cases, must also meet their state or district’s educational accountability standards (Weil, 2000). Thus, accountability plays an inherently important role for charter schools and becomes increasingly significant when it comes to the discussion of whether or not charter schools are living up to their promises. Most researchers studying the impact of charter schools on student achievement have indicated there is not enough data available to substantiate that relationship (Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2000; Miron & Nelson, 2004). Miron & Nelson’s (2004) attempt to present a synthesis of research on student achievement in charter schools revealed that “more
striking than the substantive findings of the studies is how few studies there are and how few states these studies cover" (p. 171).

This lack of evidence on charter schools’ impact on student achievement further problematizes the ability to determine whether or not enrollment in these schools has translated into higher levels of Black student achievement. This is particularly important to note since Black students make up the largest minority student population enrolled in charter schools (Yancey, 2004). In fact, some states have several charter schools that are 85-100% Black or have an African-centered curriculum or philosophy developed in response to the “underachievement, overcrowding, and lack of accountability” realized in large, urban, traditional public schools (Yancey, 2004). Thus, research on the impact of charter schools on student achievement is particularly important to informing the discussion on Black student achievement.

Another reason the charter movement, and its relationship to Black student learning and success, should be examined is the movement’s more recent role in the development and sustainability of the Black independent school or “Independent Black Institution” (Shujaa, 1994). Independent Black Institutions or IBI’s are they are commonly called, compose a formal network of Black alternative schools that vary in structure and curriculum, but share an organizational philosophy centered on communalism, decolonization, African personality, humanism, harmony, and nation building (Shujaa & Afrik, 1996). IBI’s founded in the 1960s and 1970s did not enjoy great popularity due to their reliance on tuition and financial support from Black families and community organizations, but the emergence of charter school legislation has created an opportunity for charter school founders to establish new independent Black charter schools or convert
private IBI’s into charter schools (Yancey, 2004; Bush, 2004). Although Bush (2004) warns against this newfound access to public funds as posing “a deleterious threat” to the future of IBI’s, he ultimately concedes it is “a risk worth taking” (p. 399).

Several case studies have illustrated models of school success and failure for charter schools serving predominately Black student populations (Chavous, 2004; King, 2004; Nathan, 1996; Yancey, 2004). Despite these examples, whether or not there is a causal relationship between charter schools and increased Black student achievement remains to be seen. The potential harms of resegregation and the perpetuation of inequity further complicate the debate centered on whether or not these schools of choice help or harm Black students. Missing from the current discourse are the voices of a key group of individuals who may possess insight valuable to this discussion—the Black school superintendent.

Missing Perspective: The Black School Superintendent

Despite the noteworthy role Black leaders and educators have demonstrated within and beyond the Black community, research reflecting the diverse thoughts, experiences, and perspectives of the Black school superintendent is scarce. I located only 16 dissertations on Black superintendents, and 3 of those 17 focused solely on Black women (Alston, 1996; Sanders-Lawson, 2001). Some of the studies used quantitative methods; while others were qualitative in nature, and examined the personal experiences, employment conditions, career development, and patterns of success demonstrated by their participants through biographical information, statistical data, survey instruments, and in-depth interviews.
Dr. Charles Moody, founder of the National Association of Black School Educators, wrote the first of these dissertations in 1971. It was entitled, *Black Superintendents in Public School Districts: Trends and Conditions* and was sought “to investigate the conditions of school districts prior to the appointment of a Black superintendent” (p. 11). He found that a majority of Black superintendents inherit school districts with significant financial deficits, growing majority non-White student populations, majority non-White school boards, and an increasing non-White teaching staff. He concluded by recommending further study concerning the role of the superintendent and the dynamics and politics of Black communities, training of Black administrators, career patterns in relation to White superintendents, changes in student achievement and self-concept, and a follow-up study every 10 years on the trends and conditions of districts led by superintendents.

More than three decades after Moody’s pioneering study, Dawkins (2004) researched Black superintendents in Michigan and presented similar findings: “Black educators remain a small portion of the population of superintendents. They typically serve in small school districts and/or districts that are having financial difficulties. The districts with Black superintendents generally have a majority of Black members on their school board and Black students in their schools” (abstract, page xx).

In 1975, Hugh J. Scott, a former superintendent of schools for the District of Columbia Public School System, penned an article for the *Journal of Negro Education* entitled, “Black Consciousness and Professionalism.” Scott explored how the emerging Black consciousness and black power movement of the 1970s connected to Black administrators’ ability to function as professionals. He explained, “rarely is the Black
school administrator permitted by Whites or Blacks to function as an educational leader whose race is incidental to his expertise and performance" (1975, p. 437). This dichotomy was later presented in greater detail in Scott's (1980) book, *The Black School Superintendent: Messiah or Scapegoat?* Using data collected in March of 1974, his qualitative study of seven school systems led by Black superintendents revealed the challenges of balancing Black consciousness with professionalism, integration with all-Black schools, and being responsible for leading school districts that were usually in financial and economic disarray, which is what Moody hypothesized and concluded in his seminal study.

*On Desegregation, School Choice and Black Student Achievement*

Scott's subsequent studies delved into the viewpoints and perceptions of Black school superintendents (35 respondents in his 1983 study and 62 respondents in his 1990 study) on issues concerning: racial bias, Black America, integration, school desegregation, Black consciousness, the educational needs of Black students, and the promises of *Brown* (Scott, 1990; 1983). He (1983) found that Black superintendents “support neither a return to the concept of separate-but-equal of the pre-*Brown* days nor an endorsement of school desegregation strategies that neglect educational intervention efforts to improve academic achievement” (p. 382). My search of the literature revealed little or nothing written on the perspectives of Black school superintendents on topics concerning the proliferation of school choice programs and charter schools and their impact on Black student learning and achievement. Although the era of the Black power movement and Black consciousness has diminished on a broader scale, there is little exploration on culturally relevant models of education and cultural competence in the school systems today. Also
absent is the Black superintendent perspective on the widening achievement gap amid current accountability systems and reforms and their implications for the education of the Black child.

To even begin to tackle these difficult questions, it is imperative to give voice to the Black school superintendent. Their perspectives are noticeably minimized or altogether absent from the discourse that disproportionately impacts the communities, school systems, families, and children they lead and serve (Morris, 2001; Murtadha & Watts, 2005; Walker, 2001). Murtadha and Watts (2005) indicated that, “the omission of Black leadership narratives, along with an adequate analysis of the contexts in which leadership has worked, limits our ability to develop ways to improve schools and communities for children who live in poverty and children of color who are becoming the majority of the nation’s schools (p. 591).

The standpoint, narrative, and potential counternarrative of the Black school superintendent may further inform our understanding of the duality uniquely experienced by Black leaders and educators. Dr. Charles Moody, in his remarks to the newly created National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE) in 1973 shared his motivation for convening the first ever meeting exclusively for Black superintendents in November of 1970: “As well as getting information for a dissertation I was interested in seeing whether or not the other black superintendents were catching the same kind of hell that I was getting” (Scott, 1980, p. 164). There were only six or eight Black superintendents in the U. S. at the time Moody decided to conduct his dissertation study. The number increased to sixteen by the November 1970 meeting (Scott, 1980).
Reflecting on that initial meeting, Dr. Russell Jackson, former President of NABSE and superintendent of schools in Phoenix, Arizona, commented on the tremendous pressure, trauma, and anxiety experienced by the conference participants and how the beginning sessions were “devoted to therapeutic types of activities” including time to exchange ideas about their problems and needs and suggestions on how to cope with these problems (Scott, 1980, p. 166). In addition to the job-related pressures shared by superintendents, both Black and White, Black superintendents oftentimes bear the distinctive burden of being perceived incompetent by Whites and “superhuman” by a Black constituency that demands he or she fix the educational system it believes is failing their children and community (Hunter & Donahoo, 2005; Scott, 1980).

The survival and success of black superintendents is greatly dependent on their ability to demonstrate conclusive evidence of professionalism in the discharge of their duties and responsibilities and to effect appropriate linkages with black-directed endeavors to resolve the problems and needs of black Americans in a racist society (Scott, 1980, p. 163).

It is important to acknowledge this duality or “double-consciousness” as part of what many Black Americans experience as a Black person existing within a White dominant culture (Du Bois, 1903).

The Dual Nature of the Black Superintendent

One of Du Bois’ (1903) most-cited explanations of double-consciousness is found in the Souls of Black Folk. He wrote:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world
that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder . . . . He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in the flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face.

While some regard Du Bois' version as a definitive concept describing African-American life, others have argued it tells us more about his state of mind as a Black academic in the Jim Crow South than anything else. Adolph Reed (1997), who criticizes its authenticity and applicability to race, declares that double consciousness sounds suspiciously like the dichotomy between primitive and civilized societies so deeply ingrained in early-20th-century social thought. Researchers who study race issues today often highlight the present-day applicability of this notion of the "divided self" as was commonly articulated throughout Du Bois' writings.

For the Black school superintendent, much of this double-consciousness is a result of sharing and identifying with the professional experiences of their White colleagues, while encountering challenges in the superintendency that are unique to their Black standpoint (Scott, 1980). In Scott's 1990 study that sampled 62 Black school superintendents and their views on Black consciousness and professionalism, he found "near complete agreement" for the following claims, most of which are not talked about in related literature concerning integration, equity, and the education of Black or minority students:
1. The ways of life for Blacks in America are different in major respects from the ways of life for White Americans.

2. There is a Black culture in America, thus, the Black experience must be recognized within the context of the American society.

3. Black Americans cannot advance their status and acceptance in the general society by neglecting their cultural past or by permitting others to demean the importance of their culture.

4. The study of Black history and culture has been ignored or distorted to the point of implying that Black Americans are less worthy than White Americans.

5. Ignorance of and disrespect for Black history and culture breeds low expectations and unhealthy assessments by educators of Black students, families, personalities, and potentialities.

6. Integration is not only racial but cultural; pluralism based on respect for differences is preferable to assimilation and amalgamation.

7. Black educators should ensure that efforts to reclaim, restore, and recognize Black history are respected as priorities that are equal in importance to all other educational priorities (pp. 168-9).

The support of these assertions illustrate a standpoint that necessitates further exploration and representation in the current discourse on school desegregation and school choice policy and how they impact Black students, families, and communities. Black educator perspectives are important in informing efforts to design schools and
educational opportunities that effectively serve racially and ethnically diverse student populations and their communities. "[T]he use of cultural knowledges from the historical biographies of successful African American educational leaders may serve as valuable resources. This omission limits both our ability to frame problems and produce viable strategies that improve public schools" (Murtadha & Watts, 2005). The lived experiences and perspectives shared through the eyes of the Black superintendents in this study will allow these often missed or marginalized perspectives to be voiced, presented, and analyzed through the theoretical frameworks of standpoint theory and critical race theory.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study seeks to document and explore the lived experiences and perspectives of Black school superintendents on desegregation policy and its perceived impact on the education of African American children. It was important to capture the narratives, stories, beliefs, and perceptions of the participants, as articulated in their own words, regarding matters of race-conscious education policies to gain a clearer understanding of a perspective that has been marginalized, if not silenced, in mainstream education discourse. To guide the research, I developed the following four research questions, which ultimately served as a heuristic, rather than a set of concrete questions requiring directly aligned answers in the traditional sense:

1. How do the standpoint and lived experiences of Black school superintendents before, during, and after desegregation influence their perspectives on public school choice and Black student achievement?

2. In what ways can the standpoint, lived experiences, and perspectives of Black superintendents provide insight to Black families concerning school choice and achievement?
3. In what ways do the lived experiences of school desegregation provide insight for how Black educators and families respond to school choice policy and policies designed to improve Black student achievement?

4. How should the next generation of Black educators and community leaders move forward to improve Black student achievement?

These research questions, coupled with the action-oriented goal of identifying community-based strategies to improve Black student achievement and my role as the study’s research instrument, necessitated the employment of a critical, qualitative research methodology and design.

Research Design: A Qualitative Study

Qualitative research explores a human or social problem in a natural setting where the researcher serves as the instrument of data collection and attempts to interpret individual experiences inductively by focusing on participant perspectives and meaning (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 1999; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). It is “pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people” and is conducted by researchers who “are intrigued with the complexity of social interactions as expressed in daily life and with the meanings the participants themselves attribute to these interactions” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 2). Unlike quantitative research, which uses “few variables and many cases,” qualitative inquiry works with “few cases and many variables” (Creswell, 1998, p. 16).
I chose qualitative research for this study because the perceptions of African American school superintendents concerning the implications of desegregation on Black education require further exploration. As Glesne (1999) explained, “To understand the nature of constructed realities, qualitative researchers interact and talk with participants about their perceptions” (p. 5). Because these perceptions are in large part, products of individual construction and interpretation, they cannot be measured or analyzed quantitatively, which is why the qualitative paradigm was most appropriate for this particular study.

Conceptual and Methodological Framework

The very nature of this study is centered on the notion of documenting and exploring the untold story or “counterstory” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000) of the struggle for quality education for African Americans, as uniquely experienced by former school system leaders who are also African American. Based on the paucity of research on Black superintendents in general, and their unique lived experiences in particular, their voices appear to be missing even within education research concerning the issues of race, desegregation, equity, and social justice - areas of discourse where a “voice of color” could prove valuable. This marginalized standpoint, coupled with Black educator perceptions of how desegregation policy has impacted Black students, schools, and communities, can add richness to a discourse that has failed to hearken student and educator voices of color on matters of race and racism in education. Since many traditional methodologies fail to acknowledge the role of race and racism in an attempt to analyze the implications of what are ironically race-conscious education policies, such as
the desegregation of public schools, it was important to utilize a methodology that “offers space to conduct and present research grounded in the experiences and knowledge of people of color” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 23).

**Critical Race Theory and Methodology**

Critical race methodology, which is informed by, and situated within, critical race theory (CRT), serves as a tool to elucidate the rich and complex lives and experiences of people of color. Rooted in legal studies, CRT began as an intellectual movement in the mid 1970s led by a small group of activists and scholars committed to research designed to explore and transform the dynamics of race and racism in U.S. jurisprudence (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The theory developed in response to what were perceived as dismal gains after the civil rights movement of the 1960s and critiques the basic premises of liberalism and racial neutrality (Delgado, 2001; Lynn & Adams, 2002; Roithmayr, 1999). Although CRT addresses many of the same issues as does traditional civil rights scholarship and multicultural studies, it questions the notions of color-blindness, meritocracy, equal protection, and equal opportunity.

As a conceptual framework, critical race theory requires the use of narratives, stories, and chronicles as effective and necessary methods of challenging the status quo and subverting the prevailing mindset of the dominant group (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2005; López, 2003; Parker, Deyhle & Villenas, 1999). The use of storytelling, or as Delgado (2000) sometimes calls it, “counterstorytelling” allows writers and scholars outside the dominant culture to destroy “the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared understandings against a background of which legal and political discourse takes place” (p. 61). Parker and Lynn

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(2002) explain that CRT "can be used as a methodological tool as well as a greater ontological and epistemological understanding of how race and racism affect education and the lives of the racially disenfranchised" (pp. 7-8). More specifically, Solórzano and Ornelas (2002) provide the following five tenets of how critical race methodology can be utilized in the field of education:

1. Foreground race and racism in the curriculum;
2. Challenge the traditional paradigms, methods, texts, and separate discourse on race, gender, and class by showing how these social constructs intersect to impact on students of color;
3. Help us focus on the racialized and gendered experiences of students of color;
4. Offer a liberatory and transformative method when examining racial, gender, and class discrimination; and
5. Utilize the transdisciplinary knowledge and methodological base of ethnic studies, women’s studies, sociology, history, and the law to better understand the various forms of discrimination (p. 219).

Critical race theory and methodology challenge traditional methodologies that minimize the existence and pervasiveness of racism as well as "deficit-informed research that silences and distorts epistemologies of people of color" (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). Thus, the use of this particular methodology is critical to understanding the role of race and politics in desegregation policy and how the experiences and perceptions of African American educators are influenced by their racial standpoint.
Standpoint Theory and Voice-of-Color Thesis

In addition to being informed by critical race theory (CRT), this application of a critical race methodology was also conceptually grounded in standpoint theory, which as a type of critical theory in the feminist tradition, seeks to improve the conditions of the marginalized and oppressed by empowering them through the opportunity to present their own accounts and understanding of the everyday world that may prove more useful to them than representations by the dominant group (Anderson, 2004; Harding, 1991; Smith, 1987). As a researcher and active learner, I sought to share the narratives and perspectives from the participants’ standpoint rather than that of an expert (Creswell, 1998, p. 18), while understanding it is unreasonable to assume that discrimination or oppression experienced by any group is central to all others as race, gender, and other identity categories intersect in complex ways (Crenshaw, 1995).

Within the context of critical race theory, Delgado and Stefancic (2001) introduce the notion of a voice-of-color thesis, which asserts why the experiences and narratives of people of color have inherent value. “Coexisting in somewhat uneasy tension with anti-essentialism, the voice-of-color thesis holds that because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, black, Indian, Asian, and Latino/a writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their white counterparts matters that the white are unlikely to know. Minority status, in other words, brings with it a presumed competence to speak about race and racism” (p. 9).

Thus, conceptually and methodologically, critical race theory and standpoint theory provided the lenses through which this qualitative study was framed and conducted. The nature and purpose of this work and its commitment to presenting the unique standpoints,
voices, epistemologies, (counter)narratives, and perceptions of the study participants within a framework that acknowledges the historical, legal, political, and social contexts of race and racism in American society required the use of a qualitative, critical race methodology. Further discussion outlining the background and tenets of critical race theory as well as its utilization as the analytical and interpretive framework for this study is presented in Chapter 6.

Participants

As previously indicated, critical race methodology makes “experiential knowledge central to the study” and uses “race in research to challenge the dominant scientific norms of objectivity and neutrality” (Solórzano and Ornelas, 2002, p xx). As such, the voices, experiences, and epistemologies of research participants are essential to the proper application and successful implementation of this type of research design. The purpose and goal of this study required the participation of individuals who achieved the superintendency, were self-identified as Black or African American, and could recall personal experiences as K-12 students attending all Black segregated schools. I selected eight retired Black school superintendents as my study sample via purposeful sampling since “the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those within which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research . . .” (Patton, 1990, p. 169).

I chose to use eight participants based on other studies, including Gloria Ladson-Billings’ (1994) study of eight successful teachers of African American students in The

**Participant Selection**

I began generating a list of possible participants using network sampling, or obtaining “knowledge of potential cases from people who know people who meet research interests” (Glesne, 1999, p. 29). I also searched the directories of professional organizations whose membership included superintendents and African American educators, both practicing and retired. I then began to refine this list according to information provided by individuals in the field who indicated whether or not the individual was African American and/or retired. Next, I determined I would need to speak with each potential participant individually to ensure that he or she was African American and did in fact possess personal recollections of life in segregated schools.

This process resulted in a list of 15 individuals to whom I sent a letter inviting them to participate in the study along with an informed consent form. (Copies of these documents are provided in the Appendices). Eleven of the 15 superintendents indicated their willingness to participate, and I selected eight out of the 11 based on subsequent telephone conversations and e-mail correspondence confirming each individual’s availability and ability to meet the following selection criteria.
Criteria 1: Retired Superintendent

I chose to study the experiences and perceptions of superintendents because of the systems perspective and broad range of responsibilities required of the position, which include: (a) administering a comprehensive school system that accomplishes its mission and objectives; (b) understanding, analyzing, and proposing education policy that promotes student learning and achievement; and (c) engaging community participation in support of the process of providing quality education (Scott, 1980). Superintendents are responsible for discerning how proposed policies and programs may affect the system’s schools, students, employees, or school system as a whole. Gaining the perspective of individuals who are skilled at observing and understanding these dynamic relationships would prove valuable toward an informed discussion of how desegregation and school choice affect equity and opportunity in public education.

Criteria 2: Self Identified as Black or African American

Equally important to this study was recording the thoughts and realities of superintendents who are also self-described as Black or African American. I used the terms interchangeably as both terms were embraced and used interchangeably by the study participants. The marginalized voices of Black superintendents would contribute greatly to the literature and discourse surrounding the impacts of school desegregation and choice on Black student achievement, particularly since 54% of all students in districts with Black superintendents are Black (Robinson, Gault, & Lloyd, 2005). Unique to other educators or educational leaders, many African American superintendents have an understanding of what it is like to be an African American student in a society that historically denied African Americans the right to an equal education. I also posited that
Black superintendents would understand and interpret the viewpoint of Black parents and the Black community in a way that is not presented in traditional or mainstream research.

Despite shared racial and/or cultural self-identification, I anticipated a complex group of individuals who represented a diversity of experiences, opinions, and philosophies. Unique personal experiences, coupled with differences in gender, class, age, Black consciousness, geographical location, and professional knowledge, made it impossible and methodologically unsound to assume a shared narrative (Crenshaw, 1995). Although as evidenced by previous research with Black school superintendents, I expected some common themes would likely emerge from the data (Alston, 2005; Robison, Gault, & Lloyd, 2005; Scott; 1990).

**Criteria 3: Personal Recollections of Segregation and Desegregation**

The third criterion for participants was their ability to remember and share their experiences as K-12 students of segregated schools and possibly newly desegregated American public schools. Within the framework of critical race theory and standpoint theory, these lived experiences with segregation and/or desegregation were critical to the validity of this study and took precedence over existing abstract knowledge and theories concerning these issues. Although many researchers have identified the benefits of desegregated schooling and diverse student populations. I concluded that it was important to explore the onus of desegregation that has historically been placed on Black students, families, and communities (Bell, 2004; Morris, 2001). The intended or unintended consequences of lost jobs by Black teachers, administrators, and closing of Black schools were just some of the experiences that must be recounted, as they can potentially serve as
valuable resources in our attempts to understand the viability of desegregation policies today (Morris, 2001; Tillman, 2004).

Participant recollections pre- and post-\textit{Brown} provided the first-person accounts that illustrated the emotional and psychological effects and realities experienced by Black students in either segregated or integrated schools, and how these personal experiences may or may not shape their professional views on resegregation, school choice, equity, culturally relevant schooling, and the education of Black students. These personal accounts were significant to this study because they served as the primary data collected and work toward breaking the silence of the "forgotten voices of Black educators" through stories presented to expand our understanding of these very important education policy issues (Morris, 2001).

\textit{Participant Profile}

In working to gain the perspectives of retired African American superintendents, I elected to focus on those individuals who attended government-sanctioned, racially segregated schools as children. This criterion was of particular interest to me because I wanted to discover if and how their de jure segregated schooling experiences informed the following: (1) their perceptions of the role of race in education as former Black students embedded in a legally segregated public school system and (2) their educational leadership philosophy and work as educators and district leaders who are African American, attended segregated schools, but became educators and superintendents during and after the era of desegregation.

It was fairly easy to identify participants who satisfied this criterion based on the age range of individuals who were African American, who aspired to the superintendency,
and who are now in retirement. It is important to note that prior to 1966, there were no Black superintendents. According to Moody (1971), “the Black man’s realistic goal was to become Assistant Superintendent in Charge of Special Projects, Director of Human Relations, or Administrative Assistant for Minority Affairs” (p. 1). However, between 1966 and 1971, approximately 17 Blacks were appointed as “chief public administrators, usually superintendents” (Moody, 1971, p. 1). The first district to have a Black superintendent was Lincoln Heights, Ohio, which had a population of 8000 people of whom 98% were Black. However, by 1971, the Lincoln Heights district was consolidated into the Princeton City School District and consequently, led by a White superintendent. The Black superintendent accepted a position as assistant superintendent in a neighboring district. (Moody, 1971, p. 4)

Therefore, despite the long history of the superintendency in America, there were no Black superintendents until 1967. According to a report by the National Alliance of Black School Educators and The Education Trust entitled: “Black Superintendents: Progress and Challenges,” as of 2004, there were only 248 districts led by Black superintendents a figure representing only 2% of roughly 14,600 superintendents in the country. Further, the report concluded what Moody had discovered in his seminal study: Black superintendents are mainly assigned to areas with growing urban areas, increasing minority populations, and riddled with financial problems.

Thus, the pool and network of African American superintendents remains fairly small, which posed challenges to the development of an anonymous and confidential sample. To further complicate matters, many within the network of Black superintendents were pioneers in the field and served as the “first African American or person of color” to
serve in certain positions or capacities. In order to mitigate the possibility of revealing the identity of the study participants, I used pseudonyms and removed direct references to the locations of their hometowns, colleges attended, districts served, and other relevant demographic information. I also worked to group their profiles in a way that makes it difficult to distinguish and determine the identity of individual respondents. No information regarding a participant’s identity was published or made public without prior permission from each participant.

The study sample included eight retired African American superintendents who grew up in segregated communities in the Midwest, Mid-Atlantic and Southern regions of the United States. The four females and four males ranged in age from their late 50s to mid 70s. They were born between 1932 and 1947 and graduated high school between 1950 and 1965, prior to the implementation of any desegregation plans required by the Brown II decision. In fact, half of the respondents graduated before Brown even made it to the Supreme Court. As such, all but one participant attended segregated schools throughout her/his entire K-12 years. This participant attended a segregated school from grades K-2, but was one of few Black students who attended elementary and high schools with predominately non-Black populations from grades 3-12.

Of the 8 superintendents, all earned doctoral degrees in education and demonstrated a personal and professional life committed to education. All but one earned her/his undergraduate degrees at segregated or Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), two earned his/her master’s degrees at HBCU’s and all participants earned their doctorates at Predominately White Institutions (PWI). As superintendents, they were
responsible for districts located in various regions of the country representing the Southwest, Midwest, Mid-Atlantic, Northeast, and Southeast.

In addition to educational attainment and position, all shared a passion for the uplift of Black people through education and social justice for all students. Each was a staunch supporter of public education and particularly concerned with the social context of education – the cultural, political, community-based, and societal factors that play a critical role in what happens at the school site. Despite many similarities, the participants in the study represented a diversity of experiences, philosophies, strategies, and expectations for what the role of public education is, what it should be, and whether or not it is “doing what it is intended to do.” Table 3 below provides selective demographic information for each study participant.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Born</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Hometown</th>
<th>Undergraduate</th>
<th>Graduate</th>
<th>Superintend.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baker</td>
<td>1934</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>South, Mid-Atlantic</td>
<td>Mid-Atlantic-Segregated</td>
<td>Mid-Atlantic-HBCU</td>
<td>Mid-Atlantic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark</td>
<td>1934</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>South-Rural</td>
<td>South-HBCU</td>
<td>West-PWI</td>
<td>West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooper</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mid-Atlantic, Northeast</td>
<td>South-Segregated</td>
<td>Northeast-PWI</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewis</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Midwest-Segregated</td>
<td>Midwest-PWI</td>
<td>Midwest-City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marshall</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>South-HBCU</td>
<td>Northeast-PWI</td>
<td>West, Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steele</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>Northeast-HBCU</td>
<td>Midwest-PWI</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wells</td>
<td>1947</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mid-Atlantic</td>
<td>South-HBCU</td>
<td>Midwest-PWI</td>
<td>South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young*</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Midwest-PWI</td>
<td>Midwest-PWI</td>
<td>Northwest, Midwest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This participant lived in a segregated community, but only attended segregated schools in grades K-2.
Data Collection

The primary methods of data collection for this qualitative case study were in-depth interviews and autobiographical/biographical documents, such as curriculum vitas, resumes, published interviews and/or biographical sketches. When secured in advance, these artifacts allowed me to better prepare for interviews based on each participant's personal and professional accounts. Although I initially requested autobiographical sketches from each participant, only one individual provided this information, at which point I decided to solicit vitas and other documents that would not require as much time for the participants to produce.

Interviews were conducted between May 2006 and July 2006. The limited access and availability of individuals who satisfied the participant selection criteria in my hometown required I travel to four different cities to conduct 5 of the 8 interviews. One participant agreed to meet for an interview while visiting my hometown on other business. The length of each interview ranged from 1 hour to 2 ½ hours and was conducted in person at a time and location convenient to and agreed upon by each participant, which included professional offices and conferences rooms, hotel meeting spaces, and participant living rooms.

Prior to each audio-recorded interview, I reviewed the informed consent form with the study participant and explained the purpose and aim of my study. I used a semi-structured interview protocol developed according to my review of related literature, the research questions guiding the study, and existing accounts of African Americans reflecting on their segregated schooling experiences and the Brown decision (Ogletree, 2004; Walker, 2003, 2002). The flexibility of this semi-structured, open-ended interview
format provided room for respondents to engage and expand upon their feelings and emotions throughout the interview process, which was important to this study since “the elaborate responses you hear provide the affective and cognitive underpinnings of your respondents’ perceptions” (Glesne, 1999, p. 93). I took notes during each interview that included descriptions of the participants, setting, compelling stories and statements, in addition to my personal reactions and perceptions that developed throughout the conversation.

Immediately following each interview, I tried to set aside time to write in my journal to record my observations, impressions, thoughts, and frustrations. Although this was not feasible in some instances due to my traveling schedule and back-to-back out-of-town interviews, I would at least record an entry within a day or two when additional questions began to arise regarding some of the accounts, stories, opinions, and contradictions shared by the interviewees. In some instances, the additional time allowed me to gain a more nuanced perspective regarding the data collected and my responses and reactions to them as a researcher.

I also listened to each audio digital recording and decided to transcribe four of the eight interviews on my own. I grappled with the decision to let an “outsider” hear what I regarded as very personal, honest, and complex reflections and narratives concerning race and racism in education provided by African Americans within the context of a conversation with an African American researcher. After reviewing all the recordings and my field notes, I selected four interviews that I eventually felt comfortable relinquishing to a professional transcriber. Ethical considerations, particularly my desire to protect and safeguard the participant narratives for fear that individuals who did not understand their
standpoint could misinterpret and misunderstand their experiences, forced me to reflect deeply on my own standpoint and role as the research instrument for this study.

Role of Researcher

As a self-identified Black or African American woman, the lived experiences and racial realities of African Americans is of import to me because I believe they offer a perspective and worldview that is strikingly different from what is experienced and understood by members of the White dominant culture (Collins, 1990; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). As a student of color, with an interest in critical race theory scholarship, I share a commitment to “equity, social justice, and human liberation,” “moving from research to activism,” and exploring the ways well-established scholarship “distorts the realities of the Other in an effort to maintain power relations that continue to disadvantage those who are excluded from that order” (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005).

My educational experiences were shaped greatly by my being an African American female and played a large role in my desire to investigate this area of study. I expect it also had implications for the style, content, and manner in which the study participants shared and communicated with me during the interview process. In fact, several of the superintendents in the study explained that somebody helped them get where they are today, and so they felt an obligation to support a young African American student in her academic and professional journey. This mutual sense of connection and what Fordham & Ogba (1986) termed “fictive kinship” based presumably on our shared African heritage and interest in the education of African American children contributed greatly to the
authenticity and richness of data collected and subsequently, the manner in which it was analyzed and interpreted.

Data Analysis

"Anxieties about your research will change as you engage in each aspect of the process. Anxieties about how everything will fit together signal that you have begun seriously to consider the meaning of the data. As coding and data analysis progress, you will invariably become anxious about how to organize everything into written form" (Glesne, 1998, p. 41).

Clearly, the most challenging part of this research study was working through my anxiety regarding data analysis. Just as I was deeply committed to gathering and collecting accurate accounts of the superintendent responses and experiences, I became consumed and overwhelmed with the responsibility of making meaning of the data and properly reconstructing the emergent narratives. Throughout the data collection process, I recorded many of the categories, patterns, and themes that manifested themselves among the collection of interview transcripts. As Glesne (1998) explained, "data analysis done simultaneously with data collection enables you to focus and shape the study as it proceeds" (p. 130). My ability to capture analytic thoughts as they occurred was assisted greatly by studying and reflecting on the data as it was being collected (Glesne, 1998). I also followed Marshall and Rossman’s (1999) six phases of analytic procedures, which include organizing the data, generating categories, coding the data, testing the emergent
understandings; searching for alternative explanations; and writing the report, in order to make meaning of the "raw, inexpressive" nature of the data collected (p. 152-153).

Coffey and Atkinson (1993) describe coding as the process of "conceptualizing the data, raising questions, providing provisional answers about the relationships among and within the data, and discovering the data" and "breaking the data apart in analytically relevant ways in order to lead toward further questions about the data" (p. 31). Although I began to use NUDIST software to code my narrative data, I questioned whether this process was able to extrapolate meaning from the narratives in the way that I was able to as a human research instrument working with human subjects. As Marshall and Rossman (1999) cautioned, "identifying salient themes, recurring ideas or language, and patterns of belief that link people and settings together is the most intellectually challenging phase of data analysis and one that can integrate the entire endeavor" (p. 154). Despite the challenges of managing the voluminous amounts of data collected via eight in-depth interviews, coding the data by hand was the only way I felt I could truly document and reflect the nuanced stories and experiences of the superintendents in the study.

Since qualitative data analysis is based on data reduction and interpretation, aimed at identifying categories and themes, I decided to use the means of a taxonomy, or "set of categories organized on the basis of a single semantic relationship" to organize and illustrate the categories and themes that emerged collectively from and among the superintendent narratives (Spradley, 1980, p. 112). Visual representations of these categories are presented in taxonomies within the presentation of study findings to help facilitate an illustrative understanding of the various relationships that exist within and

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among the data. A taxonomic analysis of emergent categories is presented in Chapter 4, while a thematic analysis of emergent understandings is presented in Chapter 5.

I chose to present these findings in two distinct ways in order to (1) reflect the standpoint, voice, and lived experiences of the participants in segregated schools according to the categories that emerged from their interview responses and (2) utilize participant narratives to counter assumptions in the mainstream education discourse, which is essential to the effective application of a critical race methodology. A deeper analysis and interpretation of the findings using a critical race theoretical framework is provided in Chapter 6.

Trustworthiness

To ensure consistency and establish credibility, I worked to triangulate the data collection procedures by using autobiographical/biographical documents, interview audio recordings, my field notes, interview transcripts, related literature, and my reflexive journal. Once all initial in-depth interviews were complete, member checking via e-mail correspondence were conducted to clarify and/or expound upon previously collected participant accounts and responses. Glesne (1999) defined member checking as “sharing interview transcripts, analytical thoughts, and/or drafts of the final report with research participants to make sure you are representing them and their ideals correctly” (p. 32). These checks allow respondents the opportunity to confirm your ability to capture their perspectives, identify potentially problematic sections, and assist the researcher in creating new ideas and interpretations (Glesne, 1999). In this study, member checks were done to give participants the chance to respond to key categories and themes that

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emerged from the collected data. This follow-up process helped to further establish the credibility of the study by ensuring the data collected reflected the meaning intended by the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To minimize my potential bias as the human instrument used to collect data in this study, I employed the use of a reflexive journal. As recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985), this journal should include: “(1) the daily schedule and logistics of the study; (2) a personal diary that provides the opportunity for catharsis, for reflection upon what is happening in terms of one’s own values and interests, and for speculation about growing insights; and (3) a methodological log in which methodological decisions and accompanying rationales are recorded” (p. 327). My reflexive journal also served as a means of establishing trustworthiness by making available “the same kind of data about the human instrument that is often provided about the paper-and-pencil or brass instruments used in conventional studies” as well as a tool designed to persistently confront my role as a research instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 327).

Constructing the (Counter)Narratives

In seeking to document and explore the experiences and perspectives of African American superintendents on matters of desegregation, race, and the education of African Americans, I chose to utilize a critical race methodology to give voice and meaning to the complex issues of race and racism in education that move beyond basic assumptions and traditional objective theories in the desegregation literature. This work also aimed to fulfill the identified need for more studies in education to be conducted using a critical
race framework (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; López, 2003; Tate, 2005).

Deconstructing and reconstructing the superintendent narratives proved a daunting task. The process of selecting which data to use and which to let go was “tricky” – “The trick” being the ability “to discover essences and then to reveal those essences with sufficient context, yet not become mired trying to include everything that might possibly be described” (Wolcott, 1990, p. 35). It was important not to fall into the trap of inserting “seemingly every quote collected in list-like fashion with little interpretation or analysis” (Glesne, 1999, p. 163). As LeCompte and Preissle (1993) warned, if qualitative researchers “give up on interpretation and simply describe what they saw, they fail to do justice to do their data. By leaving readers to draw their own conclusions, researchers risk misinterpretation” (p. 267).

Based on my commitment to capturing the standpoint and voice of the African American superintendents in this study, this was clearly a risk I was not willing to take. I worked to use their own words and “native” labels throughout the presentation of themes and findings as much as possible, while allowing my own voice as researcher to come through when appropriate. Lastly, I sought to develop “carefully reasoned arguments that develop inferences and establish connections beyond the limited scope of a study” which are “legitimate goals toward which all researchers strive” (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 268). It is my hope that giving voice to Black school superintendents who as part of their lived realities have experienced segregated schooling as students, suffered racism as African Americans, and acquired professional wisdom concerning the future of Black education will provide context, awareness, and insight to those parents, teachers,
community leaders, policymakers, and future educational leaders who are committed to improving the learning, achievement, and life chances of all students.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS: LIVED EXPERIENCES IN SEGREGATED SCHOOLS

"The education of African Americans in this country is a story that is not clear. Your community wants all children to achieve, but on the other hand, there are certain barriers—or should I say expectations—that you don't. If you're not careful, you'll succumb to those negative expectations unless you're fortunate enough to have a family or school environment that helps you ignore the people that feel that you can't do."

- Dr. Baker, Former School Superintendent

This chapter presents one version of this study’s findings – the segregated schooling experiences of the participating superintendents and how they perceived these experiences shaped and influenced their achievement as both students and educators. Each superintendent described and shared his or her segregated schooling experience to include memories of strict parents and top-notch teachers who expected nothing less than educational excellence to encouraging neighbors and communities that provided a network of much-needed support within larger racist contexts.

Despite the diversity of standpoints and lived experiences among the participants, many similarities emerged in their descriptions of what it was like growing up Negro in the United States during the 1930s, 40s and 50s. I use the term Negro as it was “the standard term used to refer to African Americans before about 1972, by black and by whites, and connoted no disrespect” (Loewen, 2005, p. ix.). As participant Dr. Lewis who was born in 1939 explained, “I grew up Negro, okay in elementary and middle school. [In
the] 1960s, we changed over to Black. I use them interchangeably. I would be offended by colored or Negro.” Although the use of the term Negro is offensive to many Black or African American individuals in its present day usage, I believe that the use of language in general, and this term, in particular, helps to locate these reflections within an historical and social context that sets an important stage from which to present the data derived from the interviewees.

In this chapter, I begin by setting the context in which the lived experiences of the participating superintendents are situated during their segregated schooling years. This includes two separate worlds – a White society that prohibited the intermingling of the races, and a Black community that provided a supportive and nurturing environment for its children and families in response to the dominant culture’s rejection and subordination of Negroes as a separate and inferior class of people. After establishing the social context of their segregated schooling days, I outline and describe the three key domains, or as I refer to them, threads, that emerged as significant factors contributing to what the respondents perceived as “high quality,” “excellent,” and “fine” educational experiences and subsequent high achievement in their all-Black schools and communities. The chapter concludes with participant perceptions on the role of expectations and caring in education.

Social Context of “Growing up Negro”

Hometown Descriptions

Born in 1934, Dr. Baker grew up in an “interesting little city, in that it was one of the most racist counties in the state.” She laughed as she described this southern county as
having “a lot of debauchery, beer gardens . . . you know there was a certain segment of the population that worked at very menial and physical taxing work and their escapism was in the beer gardens and making off the somebody else’s partner or something!” On the other hand, the county also had “a number of educated Blacks who played bridge and played tennis,” including her father who was college-educated, the son of doctors, and “the head of recreation for a while, until the Whites abolished his job.”

Dr. Baker’s father was fired after leading a group of Negroes in a march to the county seat to protest the unequal and unfair treatment toward Black students. The county was requiring Black students to attend school for 4 months and “pick strawberries or whatever vegetables” for 4 months before returning to school. Her father found this to be unjust, led the protest, and lost his job as a result. After losing his job, he moved to the North Atlantic region of the U.S. and then the Mid-Atlantic, upon which the entire family relocated.

Dr. Clark was also born in 1934 in a small town in the South and moved to another small town in the northern part of the same state once she was about 5 years where she stayed through high school graduation. The community fluctuated between 35,000 to 50,000 residents, but “because it was segregated, of course, it was even smaller than that for us, because you were only involved with the persons of your own community.” She described what she regarded as “separate worlds” for Blacks and Whites at that time.

There were separate worlds. In the segregated kinds of areas, we did not live as far away from White people as maybe in some of the cities where I’ve lived since then. Because we would live here, White people would pass by, going to their place of – their homes, which might have been two blocks away, so there was some kind of
passing and so forth. And, even within those small areas sometimes there would be some community feeling or acknowledgment or, you know, people close to you would - if somebody died or whatever, you would probably get some attention, but other than that, it was separate worlds.

Dr. Clark reflected on how she navigated the realities of racial separation during her formative years, and the role her parents played in helping her to understand and refrain from internalizing that reality.

In that day, you had your own friends, your own activities and things that you did. If your parents were like my parents, they protected you from all of that kind of stuff. You had a good time, you were happy. And so, that didn’t bother you. You just knew it was there. You knew that you couldn’t do certain things. You knew that you had to be careful about certain things and so on. But other than that, it was not something you went around thinking about everyday. You had your own friends and everything and you had a good time, and it was like any other situation. Going to school, football games, and so forth. It was just with your folk, not them.

Dr. Lewis shared the same sense of community that was simply a part of their normal, everyday lives.

I grew up in what was called [The Village]—that was the area around [Bloomfield High School] and because we lived in a segregated [city in Midwest], everything that you needed – the movies, the barbershop, the cleaners—all that was in [The Village]. So you really didn’t have to go outside [the Village] for your needs, and it was just a supportive community.
Dr. Marshall lived in a “very small,” rural community in the Deep South, which he described as a “small village.” He explained, “If you didn’t go to church on Sunday, people would be at your house, wondering what happened to you.” It was not uncommon for neighbors and community members within the Black community to be tight-knit, involved, and concerned for one another’s well being. A “series of events” led him to a life committed to education. He “started out with an interest in law” because he’d “seen so many injustices that had occurred all over this country.” He described farmers losing their land and getting it stolen away from them, as well as the death of Emmett Till who was murdered not far from where he was raised. Further, he talked about the fact that he had to attend a segregated elementary school and a segregated high school and “was bused to another town to go to a consolidated school away from where we were in the little village that I lived in.”

Dr. Baker said she “recognized early on that the only way I could change my condition in life would be to get an education,” which also helped shape her desire to help children and become an educator. Born in 1934, she noted that education was critical to African Americans, and “knew that if I didn’t get an education I’d be working in some job that I would hate.” This was a message sent from her parents, experiences, and people in the community, who “expected that students who performed well would go to college and “make something out of your life.” She laughed, “I mean, everybody did, even the drunks on the corner.”
Going to School

Several of the participants remembered traveling long distances by foot, ferry, and bus to get to their segregated Black schools. Dr. Steele described what it was like growing up in the South in the 1930s and 1940s:

[It] was a very interesting experience because I passed a lot of elementary schools that were for Whites to get to the one Black elementary school way on the other side of town. So either way I went, if I went to [Smith Street], I passed [Parkdale School], which was White. If I went to [Miller Road], I passed [Benton School], which was White. I could stand on my back porch and see [the White high school], but I had to go way across town to [McGovern High] to the Black school. In [city in South], there was no high school for Blacks. Black kids, once they finished elementary school, which some of them went to school in churches or other kinds of buildings, had to walk down to the Mississippi River, get on a rickety ferry and ride on public transportation to get to the one high school for Blacks in [city in South].

Dr. Wells also experienced passing White schools during a long commute to her segregated Black elementary school and high school.

I went to segregated schools all through high school. We actually – it was a county that had predominately Whites in the county – a really spread out county. And there was . . . two Black schools - one for the elementary students and one for the high school students. And so we traveled probably 20 miles daily to get to school and we passed White schools to actually go to the segregated Black school.

Dr. Clark echoed these experiences while growing up in a small Southern community with roughly 36,000 to 50,000 people, which “because it was segregated, of course, it
was even smaller than that for us, because you were only involved with the persons of your own community.” She described the schools as “separate and certainly not equal.”

There were two or three things that I really remembered . . . that we would walk to school, and had a pretty good distance to walk to school, and we’d pass these White kids and they’d be going this way and we’d be going that way, and of course we’d call each other names and stuff like that.

In contrast, Dr. Young was born in 1942 and raised in a large Midwestern city as the oldest of four boys. He completed kindergarten, first, and second grades in an all-Black segregated schools, but things changed once his family moved into a predominately Jewish community.

I had a pretty interesting experience growing up. We lived in several places in [City] and my parents moved to far northwest [City], so we ended up living in a community - we were the first Black family there and went to a high school that was 98 percent Jewish.

However, soon after his family moved into this predominately Jewish community, it became an all Black neighborhood. So despite attending majority Jewish schools from third through twelfth grade, Dr. Young experienced a striking contrast between his school life and home life, which were both very much segregated according to race. He spoke of a four-foot high wall built in the early 1950s that divided the Blacks who were moving further from the city toward the area Whites lived. “So they literally built a 4-foot-high, 6-inch-thick cement wall and it was intended not to let the Blacks come over to the other side,” he explained.

Interviewer: Who built the wall? It was just there?
Dr. Young: White folks, I would assume [laughing]. We didn’t build the wall. But, I mean they just had a kind of a historical review of this wall, which is still up there to this day. And so, you know, I had gone from living on one side of the wall and in a few other parts of [city in Midwest] . . . to moving on the other side of the wall and going to an elementary school that was 98 percent Jewish and a high school that was 98 percent Jewish.

Walls and Other Barriers

I found the image of this wall constructed to separate Blacks from Whites interesting as it appeared to serve as a metaphor for many of unspoken, but understood barriers that were constructed to keep these “separate worlds” separate. Participants recounted numerous examples of places they couldn’t go and things they couldn’t do because they were Negro. Dr. Marshall recalled his teenaged years in the segregated South as “dangerous because the Black community, sometimes, was terrorized by roaming White people. So I remember you would want to make sure that you were home before dark [chuckling].”

Despite the dangers associated with being on the wrong side of town or out at the wrong time of day, the support of Dr. Marshall’s family, teachers, and community helped him to continue to maintain a spirit of expectation and optimism.

Well, see, my parents passed away when I was very young, so I was reared by my older sister and some of my relatives. But with our teachers and with our communities and stuff like that, you never thought that you had limits even though people restricted you. I mean we could not go and swim in the public pool. We had to go to the bayou, where the moccasins were. But they had societal restrictions, but we
didn’t have restrictions in our aspirations in that, it was kind of, ‘Hey, you can be what you want to be. If you work at it, you can do that.’

Dr. Young recalled “tremendously negative experiences” growing up in the Midwest where “there were parts of [city] where Blacks weren’t supposed to be found or seen.” He described how he and his friends would demonstrate their own form of resistance to these societal restrictions when he was about 11 or 12 years old, “And so sometimes we’d all get on our bicycles, 30 of us, and just ride through there and split up and go in all directions. And if the police ever saw you, they’d stop you, you know. Well, we’d do that anyway.”

Several of the participants spoke of various societal restrictions, which limited their ability and access to public places. Dr. Clark remembered not being able to attend the public library during regular hours while in high school because she was Negro. She recalled,

In doing a lot of my research and writing essays and papers and things, . . . we could not use the library, so I was limited. And, interestingly enough, I got to go to the public library once when it was closed. When they closed the public library for the day, then I got a chance to go to do some of my research there, so that sort of stands out for me.

Dr. Young recalled not being able to work most jobs as a high school student. “Unless I cut grass or delivered newspapers, I couldn’t get a job,” he explained. “And my wife at the time, I didn’t know her then, but she couldn’t even volunteer to be a Candy Striper in the hospital where you’re working for free. Blacks weren’t allowed to do that.” Dr. Young also mentioned how in his wife’s high school, students were often counseled into
the less-challenging courses, although that was not the case for him in his predominately Jewish high school.

Dr. Steele spoke about these unspoken norms of racial segregation in the South:

My parents didn’t have to tell me anything. We talked about that, but I knew. I mean I understood segregation and discrimination cause I remember when my brother, who made and designed model airplanes, winning a contest for the best designed plane, but he couldn’t take the prize because the prize was to be able to go to the movie at the White theater!

Another brother of Dr. Steele “made the highest score on the Army General Classification test of anybody that was inducted into the Army through [in South], and he wanted to be a pilot, but they told him who was too big.” He explained, “I mean he was 6’4, but I’m quite sure there were some White boys who were 6’4 who were pilots. But they couldn’t say his test scores weren’t good ‘cause he made a perfect score on the mechanical aptitude test.” The racism he witnessed and experienced firsthand is something that will always be a part of who he is, and he makes no apologies for it.

We have to stop apologizing for being who and what we are. We are who we are, and we are who we are because of the circumstances of our lives. I cannot stop being Dr. Steele who grew up in [city in South] in the 30s and 40s and hearing White politicians talking about how they’re going to keep the race pure. And telling poor White folks, ‘I don’t care how bad off you are, you’re better than a nigger.’ I cannot and I don’t want to - forget those experiences.

Dr. Clark recalled winning a fire prevention essay Contest when she was 15 years old, granting her the opportunity to represent her school at a trip to Washington D.C.:
Now I'd never been out of the [state in South] so here I go to Washington D.C. and I'm like 15 years old. What stood out for me was that the White kid that won had a paid chaperone and escort and so forth to Washington D.C. I get to go all by myself. Of course my folks can't because they don't have any money. So, luckily, when I get to Washington, I'm met by a lady from the YWCA so I had a great experience, but it was an example of—here this little Black girl having to go, scared and everything, to Washington D.C. by herself while the White one did not.

Having support and encouragement played an important role in how participants perceived their ability to succeed personally and professionally. Dr. Steele attributed his being where he is today to the support of his community.

There were people who believed in me. Neighbors. I mean there were people who could not read nor write in my neighborhood, but they believed and they wanted and they would come and say, 'Hey Sis Steele, if you need a little change to help them boys to pay that tuition, I got it. I'll help you with it. I'll lend it to you 'til Brother Steele get paid.' And they were just as proud of our achievement as they were their own, or if they didn't have any.

Dr. Clark enjoyed that same sense of support within her small, southern Black community.

My parents were very strict, very religious. We had definite rules to obey and things to do. And, the sense of community in those days was one where the whole community raised you whether they knew you or not. So, even if a person in the community did not know you and saw you doing something wrong, they didn't feel reluctant to tell you that and your parents would certainly support them.
Despite this reality, the participants identified several factors that contributed to what Anderson (2002) documents as a historical legacy of achievement in Black schools under segregation. It also established an emphasis on the respondents’ value of education, high expectations for achievement, and thus the ability to compete academically and professionally with their White counterparts. In the next section, I discuss the three factors that affected student achievement in segregated schools located within the Black community: (1) the role of parents, (2) the role of schools, and (3) the self-concept of students.

"Knitting the Life Together": Perceived Factors Affecting Achievement in Segregated Schools

Numerous relationships emerged from these narrative accounts based on what appeared to be the role of parents and teachers, and the self-concept of students within the context of a supportive Black community. Participant Dr. Clark discussed the need for children to have support beyond the classroom setting that “knits the life together” and gives them “whatever kind of support they need” at a very young age and all the way through to college. Although these categories may seem quite obvious at first glance, the similitude of the experiences shared by most, if not all, of the respondents collectively painted a portrait that illustrates the segregated Black schooling experience in a manner that challenges a master narrative in education research that perpetuates the assumptions of cultural deprivation, genetic inferiority, and underachievement in its treatment of African American education (King, 2005). These factors impacted everything from their self-concept and professional aspirations to their ability to cope with and overcome
individual and institutional acts of racism. Further analysis shows how these experiences informed their perceptions concerning the role of race in the education of African American students today.

**Thread 1: Role of Parents**

Each of the respondents spoke at length about how their home life played a critical role in the development of their experiences and philosophies concerning education. Specifically, all but one participant (whose parents passed away while he was young) spoke about how their parents' values, childrearing styles, and relationships with their schoolteachers played a large role in their ability to succeed in school. The conditions that seemingly did not have as much of an impact on their ability to learn and academic success, as many would argue today, were the socioeconomic status and/or education level of their parents.

All but two participants described themselves as growing up in very poor to relatively poor households, while two participants grew up in working to middle class homes. Two had parents who did not finish high school, five had at least one parent who did finish school, three had parents who received some college education, and one participant had parents who were college graduates.

Dr. Clark lived in what she described as very poor household in a little Southern town as the elder of two children. Her mother had what she recalled as either an 8th or 9th grade education, and her father had a 6th grade education. She explained that “although we were a very poor family with minimum income, it was always a given that I was going to go onto college.”
Dr. Wells noted that whether or not you considered yourself “middle class” was dependent upon the time and where you lived. Describing her own upbringing in a home where her mother was a college educated teacher and her father a construction contractor, she explained, “In that kind of environment, you were privileged, I guess (laughing). In other environment you’d be poor (laughing).” But regardless of your situation, you were expected to succeed. Dr. Wells remembered her parents instilling “strong values around education. The expectation was that everybody – all of us – would go to college. It was not a question – if? It was a question – where?”

Dr. Cooper also “came out of a household where there was no expectation not to perform.” Although her parents did not attend college, they were high school graduates, and likely would have gone on to college if they had been financially able. As part of her middle-class upbringing, Dr. Cooper was always fond of school, a feeling that was reinforced by her parents.

I liked school, for one thing. I’ve never had any serious difficulty with school. I’ve enjoyed going to school, I enjoyed learning, and I got a lot of support and encouragement from my parents with regard to that. My father always encouraged me to do whatever I wanted to do. He never showed a difference between what he expected me to be able to do and what my brother was able to do. In other words, I didn’t come out of a household where, you know, there were girl careers and boy careers. It was like, do what you want to do. So I give my parents a lot of encouragement in that regard.

In contrast, both of Dr. Steele’s parents were college graduates, and he was born into a family committed to education in some form or another. Although his father was a
Jeanes Supervisor of Schools and his mother served as a teacher who later pursued a career in nursing, they were still as he described, "poor as hell," particularly in relation to their White counterparts.

As 1 of 8 children who all earned bachelor’s degrees, four served in WWII where two were commissioned officers and two were sergeants, one was a school principal, one was a university football coach, and another was a principal turned minister. People used to tease his father regarding the family’s emphasis on education – “We might not have any food in the house, but we had books.”

The role and influence of parents were instrumental to the educational development and life philosophy of the participants. Each described their parents’ no-nonsense approach to excellence in education as a guiding force that shaped their ability to succeed despite a racist and inequitable environment. Although the educational background of parents and families ranged from a sixth grade education to postsecondary and beyond, the demonstration of sacrifice and unwavering support by parents in ensuring their children took their education seriously was the standard. Dr. Wells described the powerful influence her college-educated mother had on her early decision to become an educator:

Probably never knew anything else. My mom was a teacher, I was the oldest of five, so I was the teacher. My mom tells me stories about how as a little girl, I’d play school, I’d line up the chairs, and have the little ones sitting in the chairs, and I’m teaching them and reading to them. She told me I taught them how to read. So, I don’t think there’s anything I ever thought about other than being a teacher, cause I think my mother was a strong role model. So I wanted to be like her.
In contrast, neither of Dr. Lewis’ parents finished school, but as teenage parents of five children, they “had a burning thirst for all five of their children to have college educations.” His father was a postal worker who also worked evenings cleaning a white fraternity houses at a local university. His mother spent most of her years as a stay-at-home mom and later became a custodian at a public library. Although his parents didn’t have a formal education, they always emphasized the importance of education to their five children through word and deed.

His father would bring home used, unwanted books from the fraternity house, which a young Dr. Lewis became immersed in, especially since he wasn’t very social or athletic. He remembered the time his mother made him and his siblings get library cards. “She would come home and say, ‘You all have to get library cards.’ ‘Why, Mom?’ Because that’s what they were telling her, the librarians, and so we’d have to walk a couple of miles to the library.” On occasion, his parents had to make difficult decisions on how they would spend their limited resources.

I remember my mother and father getting into an argument because as poor as we were, she bought a set of encyclopedias. Okay, this is circa 1950. And he was furious, but she said, ‘I don’t want my kids to have to walk to the library every time they want to study something.’

Despite meager resources and difficult decisions, Dr. Lewis’s parents did whatever they could to ensure their children had educational materials, such as books, author cards, and geography puzzles.

You’re not old enough to remember something like Author Cards. They were playing cards but . . . you had to match them up—Washington Irving, James Fenimore
Cooper. That's where I learned the names of authors. We were having a good time playing cards, but my mother had a method to her madness. Puzzles- United States puzzles that you put together. So when I got to college and took geography, the professor put a blank map in front of us, 'Fill in the states.' I was able to do it, going back to what Momma did.

The power of his mother’s words and willingness to sacrifice for her children’s education remains in the forefront of Dr. Lewis’ consciousness concerning education and excellence. He quotes her words as though he’s channeling her presence and clearly, her vision for her children and their ability to sustain themselves was part of her legacy.

She had a dream for her children. She always used to say she didn’t have much education but she had mother wit and she used it to the best of her ability to live through her children . . . To her four girls she said, ‘Go to school. Get an education so you won’t have to depend on any man.’ She didn’t tell Junior Lewis why he should go, but I felt, ‘good enough for the girls, good enough for me.’ My older sister set the standard - National Honor Society, this and that. And I just felt I wanted to be like my older sister. So, it was always about striving. If you came home with four A’s and one B, my mother would talk about the B. And when I would explain to her that the other kids weren’t doing as well she would give me that song and dance, you know, ‘I don’t care about the other kids, you got to do better here.’ So in her own way she never used the word excellence, but in my mind that’s what she was telling us, you have to be excellent.
Although Dr. Lewis’ parents did not finish high school, Dr. Steele’s parents were both college-educated and even worked as educators. Despite their skills and experiences, they were a family of 10 and were “poor as hell” when all eight of the kids were in school.

My father was a Jeanes Supervisor of Schools. My mother taught, but then she stayed home until all of us got up, and then she went back to be a nurse. So, education was very important, very critical to my parents and to the family. We believed in education. In fact, people used to kid us about my dad and us—we might not have any food in the house, but we had books.

As indicated by the childhood experiences and parenting styles of Dr. Lewis and Dr. Steele, literacy was a very critical component to their parent’s message of the importance of education. This was also true for Dr. Clark whose father had a sixth grade education and mother had an eighth or ninth grade education.

My parents were not all that involved. My parents were very strict, very religious. We had definite rules to obey and things to do. They went to school activities, but not on a regular basis like PTA and that kind of thing. But there was a clear understanding between parents and teachers that the support was there. And, one of the other things I remember is that it wasn’t unusual that you would find teachers in your church, in the community, and that kind of thing. So sometimes you would bump into your teacher with your parents and that kind of relationship was there.

Interestingly, Dr. Clark portrayed her parents as being “not all that involved,” but then stated that they had “definite rules to obey and things to do,” “went to school activities,” and established “a clear understanding between [themselves] and teachers that the support was there.” Foster (2005) explained that this type of parental involvement, “by
historical and traditional imperatives ingrained within the African American community, was to be depended upon to set the tone by which students were conditioned for learning in school” (p. 693). In their study of the segregated schooling of Blacks in the Southern U.S. and South Africa, they observed that parents

Taught attitudes at home about how teachers were to be treated and how students were to conduct themselves at school. Moreover, they instilled in students an understanding of the need for education and provided the time for students to do homework, even though they seldom helped directly with homework (p. 32).

She also described the many activities her parents required her to be involved in outside of school, which contributed to her reading and writing development.

She laughed as she recalled frequent churchgoing, Bible reading, and letter writing with and for her family:

Yes, I went to church, I went to church a lot! In fact, a lot of my growth I can attribute to church now that I look back. I was reading when I went to school 'cause my Mom read the Bible everyday or read something everyday. We didn't have a lot of literature, but whatever was there we read. And she would make me write letters to the relatives, you know, like my aunts and my uncles and my grandparents—and I had to write these letters—so I was getting writing experience.

Dr. Clark described her participation as Sunday school secretary and gaining practice in public speaking by preparing for special church functions and occasions. She explained how these experiences equipped her for school:

So a lot of what kids I guess would now wait to have, to be introduced to those activities in a formal sense in school, I was getting that unknowingly at home and
through the community because of the things that we had to do. We didn’t have the newspaper and the richness of literature and all of that, but I was getting whatever they had.

The notion of parent involvement is conceptualized and defined in various ways throughout the collection of narratives. While Dr. Clark did not consider her parent’s high expectations, rigid rules for behavior, and relationship with teachers as parental involvement, Dr. Lewis believed his parent’s mere presence and demonstrated value of education constituted what some may not identify as parental involvement. He attributed his ability to succeed academically and professionally to his mother’s use of her “mother wit” to ensure her children would have a better life than she had. His father was always there for his children. “My dad worked two or three jobs but when it came graduation time, which many times was in the morning, he was always there.” He explained,

It all depends on what you call parent involvement. And that’s what I try to teach in my class. My mother wasn’t one who went to PTA all the time. But everyday, ‘Go to school. Do the best you can. Don’t want to hear about you getting in trouble.’ One time I had a 98 average in history and got a B. and so I went home and told my mother, ‘Come up to school and talk to the teacher.’ She wound up agreeing with the teacher. Teacher said I got a B because I talked too much, which was true, you know. But that’s the kind of support she gave to the school.

He continued by explaining the standpoint of many parents, who are actively involved in their child’s education, but may not be able to attend PTA meetings or physically visit their child’s school on a regular basis.
There is that parental involvement: 'I want you to go to school and do the best you can. I'm here a single mom. I'm working two jobs to keep the food on the table. I don't have time to come up to school. If they call me, I will come.' Otherwise the concept is 'the school will do they best they can for you.' And I have to warn parents, especially who take their kids to [schools outside their community], school won't always do the best it can for you. So there's a different kind of parental involvement.

Dr. Steele recalled his mother's role in setting high standards and expectations for her children, while ensuring they were treated fairly by others. "My mother used to tell us she didn't want anybody lowering the standards for us, but she damn sure didn't want nobody raising the standards on us either."

The fact that all five of Dr. Lewis's siblings received Master's degrees and two earned doctorate degrees is a testament to his mother's value for educational attainment. In fact, 30 years later, Dr. Lewis became superintendent of the very school district where his mother worked as a custodian. "It just shows the power of education," he plainly stated.

These narratives illustrate a diverse group of African American families who came from various socioeconomic conditions (mainly poor and working class), but just as equipped to ensure their children would succeed in school. They gave their children literature and exposed them to materials that helped them to obtain the education they held in such high regard. Although they were Black, had meager resources, and were children of parents who were not always high school or college graduates, they were not culturally deprived, living a culture of poverty, or part of a deficit model. They used their
limited resources to overcome and advance the next generation. Teachers also reinforced these values.

Thread 2: Role of Teachers

Participant responses describing the qualifications, role, and influence of their Black teachers in segregated schools are very similar to the historical accounts found in the related literature. All respondents valued the role of the Black teacher and expressed regret for the loss of what they perceived to be an extremely important variable in the education and achievement of Black students. As Fairclough (2004) observed in his article entitled, *The Costs of Brown: Black Teachers and School Integration*, “The notion that integration destroyed something uniquely valuable to African Americans in the South has been powerfully influenced by memories of and about black teachers” (p. 2). In the article, he reported the sentiments of two former educators who attended segregated schools during the Jim Crow era:

‘I didn't feel I was getting an inferior education,’ recalled the former teacher Louise Metoyer Bouise, who attended public schools in New Orleans during the 1920s and 1930s. ‘In fact, I am sure I had very good teachers.’ Even in the crude, two-room schoolhouse that she attended in rural North Carolina, insisted Mildred Oakley Page, another retired teacher, ‘anyone who wanted to learn could learn.’ (p. 2).

The reflections of the superintendents in this study were strikingly similar. Dr. Steele remembered his school as “a 3-story building” that “had the best teachers you could find.” He added, “those teachers knew and believed in our educability and that we were going to be somebody.” Although Dr. Clark’s school in the South was “not a very large
elementary school” and “was not multi-graded,” she recalled that students were expected to achieve according to their ability:

For example if you were doing better than the second graders in math, then they wouldn’t keep you at second grade, they’d send you on up to fourth grade or sixth or wherever you could compete, so that gave me a lot of flexibility in that you didn’t have gifted programs as they have now, but you got a chance to- in an old fashioned way to have a gifted education because they would plug you in where they thought you could do well. So, I remember that.

When asked if she felt she received an adequate education and whether or not she had the things she needed for her education, Dr. Clark responded, “Now I know that I did not. I didn’t at that time think about it because I didn’t know anything different.” She elaborated on the notion of not knowing what you could or should have had:

When you don’t know what’s out there that you could have, then you don’t know that it could have been different. But certainly, we did not have the science labs and everything that those schools would have. We didn’t have the equipment. One of the reasons I don’t type today is because we didn’t have typewriters and typing and so forth, and White schools had. No excuse, I could have done it between now and then, but I mean it – that was the initial part of it.

Dr. Wells, who also attended segregated schools from elementary through high school and graduated in 1965, had a different experience. She believed she received a “top-rate elementary, middle, and high school education.” Although the county where she lived “had predominately Whites” and was “really spread out,” she explained that the White
schools were not necessarily better “because the Black school was a newer facility.” She recalled,

When desegregation occurred, ironically, the newest school in the county was the school that was closed, which was the Black school. And in addition to the school building itself, they had built a very modern vocational arts building on that site, it had only been open for a few years when they closed the school. So it didn’t matter that the facilities were newer, the fact of the matter was . . . that school was going to close I guess because White kids were not going to go to the school, and they dispersed the Black students. This was not during my time, but my sisters and brothers all graduated from the desegregated schools. I graduated from the segregated high school.

Dr. Cooper explained that during her years, “wherever you were, you were basically in a segregated school system” and although her mother was raised in the Northeast, “she went to a segregated school because you went to your community school, and there were very few cities in this country where you had any kind of meaningful integration.”

However, as a child and teenager, Dr. Cooper went to school in the Mid-Atlantic “where it was legalized segregation.” She noted,

In my opinion, it was not an inferior education. All of the teachers that I recall were credentialed in the areas that they taught, and I know at one time there were people who went to high school and had maybe normal certificates or something, but none of my teachers—all of my teachers were credentialed.
She also attributed her academic success and ability to succeed in college to the “stability” of her teachers coupled with their extensive experience in subject matter and instruction.

Many of those teachers had been there for years and knew their content. Teachers must know what they’re teaching. The other thing is I think they had the combination of content and pedagogy. These people knew how to teach. You can know your content but you’ve got to know how to teach as well.

Dr. Clark spoke of two particular teachers and their ability to teach fundamental skills that she believes prepared her to succeed academically and socially in high school and beyond. She remembered both her high school English and Social Studies teachers as “excellent advocates, motivators, and leaders” who made an impact on her life.

My high school English teacher as I remember was the best English teacher I have ever had in any school whether at the high school level or college level, and it’s because she taught me so well and insisted on good English, good writing skills, basic speaking skills, that I did well in all of those areas. And, even today, I recall how she would do things, how she insisted on excellence in certain areas. So I had no trouble particularly in those areas in college or graduate work or any of it with the command of English. So, she made a real impact.

The other one was my Social Studies teacher, and I think she made a real impact on social guidance and help and making sure that you did the right thing, because one of the things about going to Black schools, particularly in the South, was that there were no counselors so if anybody was going to counsel you it was because another teacher took you under wings and sort of made sure that you did the right thing.
In reflecting on her segregated schooling experience, and more specifically, the equality and experience of her teachers, Dr. Baker remembered having “good teachers all the time.” She explained,

See there were no other opportunities so you had good teachers in a number of states. If you wanted to go to graduate school they’d paid for you to go out of state cause you couldn’t go to [your home state university]. So some of our teachers came from NYU and Columbia. I remember an English teacher coming from Columbia. I mean really excellent, in fact, she was role model for me, you know. Polished, sophisticated, I didn’t quite make all that, but, really smart, really cared about education . . . a number of the teachers were wonderful influences.

Dr. Lewis also recalled his segregated schools as being “good” and explained that is was because of the quality of teachers, which as Dr. Baker mentioned, received first-rate educations at some of the best universities in the country. He described his teachers as the “talented tenth.”

When I grew up and looked at some of their resumes I used to wonder, ‘How did these Black teachers get to go to The Ohio State University, to Illinois University, etc. for their Master’s degrees?’ But I later found that . . . because they couldn’t go to [the university in their home state], the state . . . would pay for them to go to other schools. So they were able to go to top-notch schools and have [their home state] pay for it because [their home state] didn’t want them in their schools. But they were excellent teachers.

When I probed further to ask understand why he believed these teachers were “excellent,” he explained that in order for them to become teachers, they had to attend
one of [city in Midwest]'s two teachers colleges. One was for Whites, and the other for
Blacks. "To get into [the Black] teachers college, you had to be in the top 10 percent of
your class, so when they went in they were the cream of the cream . . . and they cared, you
know they cared." I then asked, "How did they show they cared?" He responded, "By
taking time with you in and out of school. The wisdom they shared. You would see them
at church many times, lived in the neighborhood many times. The extra help they gave
you. The encouragement." He later gave a specific example:

I remember in the 9th grade second semester, you used to have to take your report
card around – first period A, second period A, third period A, fourth period A, went
to my algebra class of fifth period, she gave me a C. I just cried. And she said, 'I can’t
give you what you didn’t earn, but if you want to learn algebra, I’ll teach it to you.'
That’s what I’m talking about - that caring. The next quarter–A, A, A, A, B. Final
quarter–A, A, A, A. That someone who cared enough to say, ‘Okay you don’t
know it now, but I’ll work with you, and I’ll teach you.’

Dr. Lewis’s characterization of the Black teachers who taught in his segregated
schools captured many facets of what participants described as important to being a
“good teacher.” They demonstrated wisdom and experience, were visible and involved in
within the local Black church and community, they expected excellence and possessed
high expectations for their students, and were willing to provide additional support even
beyond the regular school day. Although Dr. Clark was unsure about the formal
education and professional qualifications of the teachers in her segregated elementary
school, she believed that those possible deficiencies were likely outweighed by their care
and commitment to their students.
As far as the teachers are concerned, I don’t know whether those [White] teachers were better than ours. They possibly were in that they did not - they [Black schools] were not as careful about credentialing and making sure that people were teaching in their fields and so forth, as they possibly were in others. But our teachers were very caring and demanding people and so it probably made up for some things that you might have gotten otherwise.

Fairclough (2004) discovered the same sentiment from former students of segregated schools who “have testified to the commitment and skill that those men and women brought to the classroom in the era of Jim Crow” (p. 3). They remembered segregation as encouraging “a special sense of dedication in black teachers that helped compensate for the material deficiencies of the schools” (p. 3). In addition to their commitment to their profession and their students, two participants described the appearance of their teachers, which also influenced the educational environment they created (Walker, 1996). As noted earlier, Dr. Baker remembered one teacher as being “polished” and “sophisticated.” Similarly, Dr. Clark recalled two female elementary school teachers who stood out for her as “sharp, Black, good-looking teachers that you felt like, you know, you wanted to be like them.”

One was a music teacher and she was just striking and commanding in both her appearance and her performance. And the other was just a regular teacher, but she also was equally demanding. And you just looked at these two and thought, ‘Oh, I’d love to be like them when I grow up!’ So that kind of impact, I think, happens for a number of young girls when they’re coming up and going through school. So that was what elementary was like for me.
This notion of the “commanding” and “demanding” teacher also emerged as a common thread among many respondents. The emphasis by teachers on behavior and discipline was indicated repeatedly, and usually tempered with a discussion of how this demonstrated a teacher’s “commitment” to and “caring” for students. Many of them spoke of how their teachers would expect the best and accept nothing less, or as Dr. Baker described it, they “did not take any foolishness off you.” Dr. Steele explained the importance of the positive reinforcement and efficacy demonstrated by Black teachers to their Black students within the segregated classroom setting. “You had teachers who said, ‘you’re going to be something, boy. You’re going to learn before you get out this room.’”

This conceptualization of leadership referred to as “interpersonal caring” by Walker and Archung (2003) and its “collaborative dynamic to student empowerment and achievement in schools within the African American community” is “historical in nature and collaborative in its context and scope (Foster, 2005). Further, this leadership framework dates back “from the earliest period of formal education of newly freed slaves to the segregated schools of the South (Foster, 2005). Walker and Archung (2003) define interpersonal caring as “a form of meeting the needs that teachers and principals perceived the students to have” (p. 33). They explained:

In classes, students respected the fact that teachers, ‘didn’t play’ even when they did not like a particular teacher. They saw the educator’s high expectations as an indication that the school children were ‘cared about.’ In other words, if a teacher cared about them, that teacher would expect them to learn. Outside of class, they appreciated the time teachers took to talk with them individually and in small groups. These conversations were opportunities for them to learn from teachers in ways that
extended beyond academic content. That teachers took the time to do this with them was considered a form of caring (p. 33).

Dr. Cooper discussed how teachers who taught in segregated schooling environments “had a great deal of authority at that time” and would do whatever was necessary to ensure their students would perform to a high standard. She also believed they possessed a degree of resolve and respect that may not be enjoyed by present-day teachers.

Some folks would allege that they had more authority to demand high performance. Maybe to some extent that may be true because, you know, you were going to be there, if you got kept until midnight, you were going to stay there and do the work. Where now, maybe somebody would come up there and declare a law, you know, take you to court or something... You know, there weren’t as many options, and teaching was looked upon as a rather noble profession. I think teachers felt that they were respected and admired and trusted, so they brought to that job a level of feeling of I think commitment and appreciation that some teachers now say they don’t think they have.

Dr. Lewis observed that prior to the implementation of desegregation policies within the school district he later observed as superintendent in a neighboring district, [Blacks] were confined to [the city school district] because in the county, they had no need for you. Today, teachers can go anywhere. So many of them, because [the city school district] is going through a hard time, ... seek out the county districts. And, so, to a certain degree you have in the public schools now those who couldn’t get hired elsewhere.
He noted this decline in the quality of teachers in what are now urban, majority Black school districts was also reflected in the postsecondary education offered in the same community.

The institution that I attended, which was a fine institution, is now open enrollment so whosoever will let them come. They are not educated to the same degree as when I went there. And because of mobility, we live all over the place . . . so people drive in, they do they’re teaching, they drive out, and they don’t come back in the city again.

He concluded by stated that “the sense of community” that he experienced growing up in his segregated community known as [The Village] is now lost. As he described it, [The Village] met all your needs and “was just a supportive community.”

Thread 3: Self-Concept of Students

In addition to the community support system that was available to the participants as young, Black students living in segregated communities and attending segregated schools, their parents and teachers played a significant role in their value of education and in turn, their educational and professional success. Just as importantly, their parents, teachers, and community members also influenced the self-concept, values, and aspirations of their younger counterparts through institutional caring, interpersonal caring, and high expectations.

When asked what it meant to be Black as a child growing up in a segregated environment, Dr. Baker responded:

That you’re smart. That you can do anything you want to do. And I must have been dumb enough to believe it. And when you’re family is telling you that, your school is telling you, your church is telling you, hey. They must have it right!
In reference to using the term “Black” and what it was like to be “Black” as a child during segregation, Dr. Lewis made a distinction concerning the use of the term. As a child in the 1940s and 1950s, Dr. Lewis explained that Negro was the term of choice, but that changed to “Black” during the 1960s. Although he uses Black and African American interchangeably, he explained that being described as colored or Negro would offend him. According to Dr. Lewis, Black means something much different today. “When we wanted to throw the greatest insult at you as a child, we would call you Black.” But now, he associates Blackness with pride and “elegance.”

Dr. Clark also discussed her comfort with identifying herself as Black. “I guess there’s a pride in being Black that I enjoy.” She observed that this pride likely comes from the values instilled by her parents and her exposure to “knowledge about achieving Black people,” whom she looked up to as a young child.

I probably felt better about the Black national anthem than I did the [U.S. national anthem] — I learned it. I still know it. I can sing it. So, those were things that were just there first and foremost so that it gave you a sense of pride and strong self-concept. A strong self-concept was important to countering society’s assumptions that Blacks were unequal and inferior to Whites, particularly in regards to academic ability. A common response that emerged among participants was the importance of the ability to compete with Whites and succeed. They often spoke of the fact that they did not require any remediation once they left their all Black segregated schools for postsecondary institutions and for those who attended graduate school at predominately White institutions, discovered or reaffirmed that they were just as smart or smarter than their White counterparts.
Dr. Clark described her experience as a freshman college student attending an HBCU outside of her home state in the South.

When I got to college there were kids there from – probably most of them were from segregated kinds of things—but there were kids there from others kind of settings as well, from [city in Northeast] and places like that. I never felt that I was behind any of them. A number of kids had to take remedial math and remedial English. I never had to take any of that. So I always felt like I was okay and could compete, and I went on and finished college with honors as well. So my self-concept has always been in pretty good shape (laughing) because my folks I guess sort of made sure that it was. I mean you always were to be a very proud person to never feel that you were less than. I mean that was just sort of pounded in. You were never to see yourself as less than anybody else. And you were always taught that education was really the answer to a number of things. If you really wanted to do well in life, you needed to have a good, strong education.

Dr. Clark’s self-concept and academic ability was reaffirmed when she attended graduate school at a predominately White institution on the West Coast:

One of the things that I noticed is that these folks that come from all of these high faluting colleges and so forth, they’re not too smart. I mean they’re not any smarter than anyone else, and it was not just me. It’s something that I have noticed, that many of the graduates of historically Black schools who do well, do well in any environment. So it’s not a real difference. And whether it’s something that they overcompensate, that’s possibly true, because they certainly, I don’t think have
benefited from having the same level of resources and support. But I think there’s some level of overcompensation there that possibly makes up for it.

Despite how others may have limited her perceived ability based on her race, Dr. Wells said she “never felt inferior” and “always felt that I was as smart and capable as any White person.” She admits, however, that “there have been times where things have happened - today they happen - that could shake that confidence if you actually didn’t have a strong foundation on which to build.”

In her present profession, being “in many situations where I’m the only African American or the only African American female” she observed that when she poses or question or contributes to the group dialogue, “people either look at you like what you said didn’t many any sense or they didn’t understand what you said, and so you self-confidence can be shaken.” Dr. Wells continued:

And then somebody comes back, one of them will come back and say the same – the very same thing – and wordsmith it a little bit, and all of a sudden the rest of the Whites are latching on. It becomes a discussion point at that point, and you sit and you say, ‘What’s wrong? I thought I just said the same thing?’ And then you begin to wonder, ‘Am I not articulate? Did I not know how to express my own ideas?’ So the self-doubt comes in there. But then, I have this foundation, this background that - to say, they really don’t know any more than I know, and I’m not going to allow my self-concept to be shattered and to be intimidated by that.

After speaking with her daughter, who attended a historical Black college followed by a year of study a prestigious, predominately White institution, Dr. Wells discovered that her daughter is experiencing the same challenges to her ability because she is Black.
She called me one day and said, ‘You know, Mom. I’m in this class, and I’m the only 
African American in the class, and I’ll make comments and, you know, they’re 
having a discussion, and I’ll say something and nobody says anything.’ And she said, 
‘I sit there to think: Am I stupid? Did I say something stupid? Why is that no one is 
responding?’ And she said, ‘Then a White person will say the same thing I said, and 
all of a sudden the teacher is on it, and the kids are discussing it.’ And she said, ‘I’m 
sitting there thinking, I don’t know what’s going on.’

Dr. Wells stated that she responded to her daughter by sharing her own experiences and 
reinforcing the fact that she is intelligent and that the reaction of the class and teachers is 
nothing less than racism.

I said, ‘You know you’re smart. You made. I’m sure, a very intelligent and relevant 
point. It’s not about you. It’s about racism - pervasive racism that has followed 
generations from my sister’s experience when she was not selected as the 
valedictorian, experience I have faced as a Black female CEO executive, and it’s 
experience you’re facing now in a White society. It’s racism.’

Dr. Wells shared another example of what she described as an instance of “subtle racism” 
that she experienced as a graduate student studying counselor education at a 
predominately White institution:

I was the only African American in that class, and the professor was passing out the 
test papers, and he was applauding the highest score and was reading the answers to 
the questions as a demonstration of the kinds of responses he wanted. He had no idea 
it was my paper, because it was a large class. And so it was like—shock (laughing)
when he called out the name on the paper (more laughter). And I thought, ‘Justice! This is justice!’ (laughing). He was red as a beet! (more laughing)

She recounted her classmates as being just as “stunned” because:

I’m sure their image of whose paper this was—it was never the lone Black person in this class. It never dawned on them that that would have been the paper that he was speaking about it. You know, incidents like those are examples of subtle racism. And I suspect that my experiences have been far more that type of subtle racism than it’s really been the overt, where somebody’s calling you a racial name, or spitting in your face, or doing those things. But I think those acts of subtle racism can be as dangerous—more dangerous—in some instances because they can get at who you are—the heart of who you are.

In regard to racism, and in seeming response to its ability to get at “the heart of who you are,” when asked about racism and sexism, Dr. Baker stated matter-of-factly, “Oh, you don’t worry about that.” She expounded:

That’s somebody else’s problem. Frankly, I believe that ethnicity and gender are other people’s problem. You know who you are. You know your skills, and you let them get past it. If you have to say something you do. But that’s not your problem, that’s your reality. You can’t change it no matter what you would want. You might want to, but don’t even deal with it. And we’ve got to feel good about ourselves. This is all I have. I’m Black, I’m a woman, and it will never change.

This strategy for coping with racism by understanding that it’s “not your problem” but is “your reality,” and Dr. Young echoed the importance of refusing to internalize it. He said
his parents made him and siblings “think above color” and taught them “not to carry a chip on your shoulder because it wasn’t going to do you any good.” He continued:

All it would do is make you angry and mean and upset and all it’s going to do is hurt you. They probably got theirs; you have to get yours. So if you spend your time with negative entropy, that’s not a word they used, it’s a word I use, then you’re going to have some negative, unnecessary experiences. And instead of moving on and—but you know, in those times it was difficult.

Dr. Steele said the message he teaches his students and his own children is “to do the best you can do, and be the best you can be; and don’t ever forget that you’re Black, but it ain’t no handicap.”

See, look. The day I will be ashamed of being Black is when I do something foolish and disgrace everybody that looks like me. Then I don’t want to be Black ‘cause I don’t want to bring that disgrace. But they ain’t going to let me be White, so I want to live the best life that I can live [so] everybody who has made all the sacrifices that folks that look like me made, can be proud, and won’t have to hide their head and drop their head in shame. That’s what I want. And that’s the way I try to live.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented one version of the study’s findings, which focused on the participant’s descriptions and recollections of their segregated schooling experiences. This included the social context in which their experiences were situated and what they perceived to be the key factors that influenced their ability to learn and achieve despite
their location in conditions that were deemed “inherently separate and unequal” by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Within the context of segregated schooling, the role of parents and teachers, and the self-concept of students emerged as key factors that influenced what they described as fine, high quality educational experiences that ensured their ability to compete and succeed in a desegregated world. To use the words of participant Dr. Clark, these key factors, or *threads*, were essential in developing a system of support that “knit the life together” and gave students the encouragement and direction they needed from and through various individuals, activities, and resources. Fairclough (2004) captured this notion of “knitting the life together” nicely in his depiction of segregated Black schools as “places where order prevailed, where teachers commanded respect, and where parents supported the teachers. Teachers, pupils, and parents formed an organic community that treated schooling as a collective responsibility” (p. 3).

In the next chapter, I present another version of the study’s findings, which shifts the focus from the participants’ standpoint and lived experiences in segregated schools to their perceptions concerning desegregation policy and its impact on Black children, families, and communities.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS: REFLECTIONS AND PERSPECTIVES ON DESEGREGATION

This chapter presents a collection of interview responses, narratives, and consequent themes that emerged based on participant responses concerning desegregation policy and its perceived impact on Black education. Despite the diversity of standpoints and lived experiences represented among the participating superintendents, their segregated schooling experiences and mixed feelings concerning the government-mandated mixing of schools underscores the complexity surrounding the discussion of whether or not desegregation policies helped or harmed the schooling and subsequent educational achievement of Black children. Interview data revealed, what appeared to be, challenges to widely held assumptions in the mainstream literature concerning the benefits of desegregation policy for Black children, families, and communities.

Although nearly all respondents clearly indicated they would never want to return to the days of government-sanctioned, “separate but unequal” schools, they were uncertain about their feelings on desegregation and its implications for what they remembered to be a rich legacy of pride and excellence in Black education. The academic and professional credentials and achievements of each participant, coupled with fond memories of all-Black schools, expert teachers, and rich academic experiences, countered the mainstream narrative that quietly questions the quality, value, and strengths of Black schooling.
These narratives, analyzed collectively, revealed the first theme articulated pointedly by participant Dr. Steele: “There is nothing wrong with something being all Black.”

The narratives further challenged the prevailing notion that school desegregation and the *Brown* decision served as the saving grace for Black students, families, and communities. Examples of White resistance, individual and institutional accounts of racism in desegregated settings, the significant loss of jobs and demotions of Black educators, and the dismantling of the Black community are just some of the reasons why Dr. Baker expressed her “mixed feelings” about desegregation. From this concern and others like it emerged the second theme presented in this chapter. As she reluctantly admitted, “Sometimes you feel like the problems began with desegregation.”

Finally, the very notions of the “dismantling of desegregation” or *resegregation* are both reiterated and disputed based on participant contentions that the schools were never in fact desegregated, let alone integrated. White flight, massive resistance, intact busing, and segregated classrooms within mixed schools limited, if not prohibited, school-wide desegregation. Thus, the final and arguably most complex, theme is based on the conclusion of Dr. Cooper who said, “We’ve never truly integrated.”

In exploring and examining these superintendent narratives individually and collectively, these three statements crystallized three distinct perceptions that were strikingly different from the mainstream literature concerning diversity, resegregation, and the “quiet reversal of *Brown*” (Orfield & Eaton, 1996).

Within each identified theme, narrative data collected from the responses of Black superintendents who attended segregated schools, taught in desegregated schools, administered and supervised desegregation programs, and led school districts that were
under court-ordered and voluntary desegregation plans is presented to paint what Dr. Baker described as the "unclear picture" of desegregation's impact on Black education. It is this "mixed legacy" of desegregated schools that establishes the basis on which we can begin to interrogate the mainstream discourse concerning the impact of desegregation on Black student achievement.

Theme 1: "There is Nothing Wrong with Something Being All Black"

The Commission on Research in Black Education (2006) observed that the "current state of Black education represents an historical reversal that pales in comparison to the long tradition of educational and cultural excellence that generations of African people established in the normal course of our human experience" (p. xxiii). In fact, all but one interviewee fondly recalled this tradition of excellence in Black education. (The interviewee who didn't share this recollection only attended segregated schools from kindergarten through grade two, but recounted positive stories of colleagues and friends who went to segregated Black schools). When I asked the superintendents about the all-Black elementary and secondary schools they attended, they spoke well of their teachers as highly educated and professional, demanding yet caring, and possessing high standards and expectations for good behavior and academic achievement for their students. Dr. Steele recalled,

I had the best teachers you could find. And those teachers knew and believed in our educability and that we were going to be somebody. And that went through high school and my experience at . . . an historically Black college . . . that you were going
to be something. Nobody made you feel as if they were doing you a favor by letting you be there.

This observation was offered in response to the unspoken assumption that some present-day advocates for desegregation hold on to the notion that a school that is all Black is inherently bad, deficient, or lacking. Although these beliefs are not openly stated, the tacit understanding appears to be that racially isolated Black schools should not exist because their failure is inevitable, unlike that of racially isolated White schools, which need desegregation to benefit from exposure to “diversity.” Dr. Steele takes issue with this assumption:

Let me say this to you very candidly. There is nothing wrong with something being all Black. But people will have you think there’s something wrong. I did a study on the historically Black colleges and universities, and . . . you know, this country and this world would be in a hell of a fix if we didn’t have some of the people that have been produced by those HBCU’s, but you wouldn’t ever think that they produced anything or anybody.

A substantial portion of the narrative data describing the segregated school experience focused on the role, quality, and influence of the Black teacher. Black students had teachers who exemplified the “willingness to be involved in the community, their dedication and commitment to the academic achievement of Black children, and their willingness to support one another through various forms of mentoring” (Tillman, 2004). Participant responses emphasized the high quality credentials, experiences, and education of teachers in the participants’ segregated school environments, many of which earned these top-rate educations at out of state institutions because they were legally
prohibited from attending colleges or universities in their home states because they were Negro. As stated in the last chapter, Dr. Lewis recalled his teachers as being the “talented tenth” and as he grew older, wondering how these Black teachers were able to well regarded, predominately White colleges and universities for their graduate studies. He explained that “they were excellent teachers,” many of whom attended the local teachers college for Blacks, which required they be in the top 10 percent of their high school graduating class. Dr. Baker shared this same phenomenon in her region of the country. Ironically, Black teachers were able to receive high quality educations at out-of-state institutions since they were denied admissions to their in-state institutions because of their race.

Interestingly, when Dr. Cooper began discussing recalling her lived experiences in segregated schools, she immediately responded to the commonly held, yet unstated, assumption that Black schools during segregation were inferior to White schools in the quality of education they provided. Upon stating that she attended a segregated high school, she followed up by saying, “but in my opinion, it was not an inferior education.” She remembered that all of her teachers were credentialed in the areas they taught, and had positive memories concerning the content and quality of the instructional program.

We had course offerings—for instance, I had geometry in fifth and sixth grade. Recall that in high school, I had a teacher who had spent 10 years in Russia on a special project and he brought such interesting insight to that area. So I felt that—my curriculum, for example, we had a full curriculum in elementary and in high school. Dr. Cooper’s description of her highly qualified teachers who offered a challenging academic curriculum counters the more common characterizations of the "inferior
education” in all Black schools during segregation. She went on to explain she believed her K-12 education prepared her for her postsecondary studies.

I feel that my early education was very positive. In fact, I guess I base it on the fact that I never had any formative problems in college. When I entered college, [they] had entrance examinations in the basic subjects, and were you not to score at an acceptable level, you had to take some noncredit preliminary courses, prerequisite courses before you were admitted into the full program, 4-year program. I didn’t take any of those. And to my knowledge, nobody who went from my high school to that college ever had to take them.

Dr. Wells also believed her segregated schooling experiences, which included a form of ability tracking, equipped her with a well rounded and challenging academic curriculum that included access to special educational programs and opportunities to attend college tours.

I thought I received a top-rate education in elementary, middle school, and high school. Certainly it was a tracked system so I was in the college track and graduated as valedictorian of the class and had opportunities to do summer experiences at colleges. I remember going to [a Black college in the South] and spending a year studying in a science program that was offered by the National Science Foundation one summer, and then there was another summer experience, I can’t remember exactly what it was, so. We did college tours and visits so I felt that I received, even though we were in a segregated environment, I received a very fine education.
However, Dr. Wells did recall many of the same inequities that exist within a desegregated environment within the context of the segregated schools she attended.

Contrary to what people believe, even in the segregated schools, there was a caste system . . . sort of the haves and the have-nots, and you could see the discrepancy in treatment of kids. You know, I happened to be in the end of the tracked class . . . my mother taught in the school, so you saw that you were given advantages that perhaps some of the other students were not given. People tended to have lower expectations [because there were kids who were not in the track I was in who were as capable, I thought, as smart, as bright, but they were the victims of low expectations of adults and so they didn’t have the same opportunities . . . based on class—economic class.

In contrast, Dr. Marshall recalled that in his small Southern community, although he and his classmates “were poor in our particular situation,” their segregated environment “was such that your expectations were high and your aspirations were not hampered or dampened.” He explained,

Oh, it was great. It was great. It was a K-8 school and you had some very strict teachers who would expect you to learn and would require you to learn and if you didn’t, they would punish you (chuckling) . . . And so to me, there were some advantages in being in an environment that was nurturing, where there are high expectations, and where you’re not compared with someone else who may come from a different situation and possibly have different means . . . but that was not something to prevent you from achieving, just because you were in that particular situation. And no one kind of blamed the situation on whether or not a person could succeed or not.
Nor did Dr. Clark witness different expectations levels for different students according to ability during her high school years in a very small, rural, segregated community in the South.

I don’t remember in high school that we had kids that were sorted out, like gifted or regular or special ed or so forth. Everyone was expected to achieve although I realized as a student that some kids were not as able as others, but we were all expected to achieve and to push each other and to pull each other and to help. And even the slow kids as I remember now, were not treated like slow kids who were not expected to do well. They could do as well as others I know, but they were not expected to do less than. So, that kind of feeling I thought was good. It was something that I would certainly like to see happen.

She also believed there were some features of segregation that she couldn’t “pinpoint,” but “seem to have worked for us.” She described teachers who were close to their students, and who “took a greater interest and made sure that we achieved.” This included high expectations both academically and behaviorally. She continued, “The fact that they would not hesitate to caution us about our discipline . . . I mean, they just didn’t let us get out of the straight and narrow path.”

Other participants reiterated this attention to discipline. Dr. Marshall reflected on a lady named Ms. Pierce. “She was I guess—she was barely 5 feet tall, but boy, she could wreak all havoc with your life.” Dr. Baker described her English teacher who attended Columbia University as “really smart” and one who “really cared about education, but did not take any foolishness off of you.” She continued,
In fact, she was a role model for me, you know. Polished, sophisticated... And she’s still living. I’ve got to pay her a visit, she probably is in her 80s if not 90, but a number of the teachers were wonderful influences.

This image of the “polished, sophisticated” teacher as role model was reinforced by Dr. Clark’s recollections of her elementary schools teachers who she described as “Sharp, Black good-looking teachers that you felt like... you wanted to be like them.” Although they were commanding and demanding, she regarded them as role models, particularly for young Black girls.

The Black teacher’s influence as a role model who valued education, possessed high expectations for their students, and cared deeply for them and their ability to succeed in an unjust world had a huge impact on the superintendents in this study. “Black teachers in the segregated kind of situation. That aspect of it I think was very good,” explained Dr. Clark. “Somehow you wish you could transplant that to the other environments, because I don’t think it is as strong today – and probably not as strong for a lot of reasons because society has changed a great deal.”

Theme 2: “Sometimes You Feel Like the Problems Started with Desegregation”

Another emergent theme was the notion that the implementation of desegregation programs in local school districts, colleges, and universities is was the beginning of problem for Black education. At a systems level, these problems included the displacement, demotion, and unemployment of Black teachers and administrators - many of whom lost their jobs to Whites with fewer qualifications. At a school site level, it translated into the overrepresentation of Black students in low-ability tracks, special
education programs, and school disciplines statistics. Most significantly and ironically, on an individual level, the problems include the perception of a diminished self-concept among Black students, which is the very problem the *Brown* decision sought to remedy.

These resulting challenges ran counter to the hopes, dreams, and expectations for what is commonly referred to as “the promise of Brown.” Dr. Steele recalled, “For a lot of people it was going to be the hope and the change – from unequal segregation and from unequal opportunities and resources,” but that just wasn’t the case.

You see, I think where people made their mistake is that people thought the Black folks were bringing the suit so they could sit by White kids. That wasn’t it. It was to equalize the resources. To make sure that Black kids’ school year didn’t go around the planting and harvesting season of sugar cane or cotton. Where White kids had 9 months of school, Black kids had 6 or 7 months of school. Or they had buildings that had lights and had books, and you didn’t get the books that White kids had their names in. And when they got through using them they were sent over there, and those were your new books. But people had the notion that people were suing so they could sit by Whites folks, cause if they sat by White folks, they could learn. But we had some of the best teachers, people who believed in you and they didn’t try to make you feel as if you were inferior or they were doing you a favor.

For example, Dr. Marshall acknowledged that “having the right to go to school wherever you want to” and “the right to have options in your education” were important, but noted that *Brown*’s lack of “teeth” and “the kind of penalties and things that would have been necessary to deal with [segregation]” compromised the law’s ability to make significant change. Dr. Cooper was in her first year of teaching when the *Brown* decision
came down, but she explained, "it was a decade or so before any substantive implementation of it occurred, particularly in the South." She recalled teaching in a totally segregated school system and becoming an assistant principal before having any non-Black teachers assigned to her school site. They began desegregating the faculty the summer before school started, at which point the student body was desegregated. Dr. Cooper explained,

They exchanged teachers from one school to another, and then slowly students began to come in. But again, they started first usually through your model schools or your, you know, your alternative programs. You tended to get a better response in terms of true integration at the elementary level, better than the middle and high. And of course you could speculate that folks began to get concerned that that's when maybe the sexes would start showing some interest in each other, and there were people really fearful of that. So [White students] might go to an elementary school and then they would go to private school when they got to secondary.

Although respondents described Brown as "an important landmark" and "a major step in showing up dirty linen in this country" because the schools were separate, but unequal, they also grappled with the negative consequences Brown had on Black students, families, and communities. Dr. Baker described her struggle with the implications of Brown for Black education,

I've got mixed feelings about Brown. Sometimes you feel like the problem started with desegregation. I think some of us thought desegregation was going to give us something that it didn’t give us and . . . there were certain positions you didn’t get because you weren’t White, or even in classes and all, they were taking the better
teachers – Black teachers – and putting them in the formerly White schools. That was a real transition. Some of it negative.

Dr. Lewis shared similar mixed feelings concerning how the consequences of desegregation plans and programs. He spoke of the benefits and drawbacks of attending school in a desegregated environment.

There’s a plus and a negative. I never went to school with a White child until I got to [the newly desegregated teachers college], okay. So it gave me a view of another world. And it also solidified in my mind - I could compete. Because we had an 8th grade teacher who would always say, the White kids are doing x - studying, and here you are doing y - fooling around. In my mind, I think she said that to spur us on. I’m hoping that’s why she said. So for me it was good to get in a wider society and see that they are not superhuman beings. If I do my studying and so forth I can do just as well. First time I was taught by a White teacher was in college. Some who treated us well, some who did not.

On the other hand, he expressed concerned for how desegregation influenced the perceptions of Black parents and their assumption that White schools were better than Black schools.

The negative I’ve seen has been a result of the [Midwestern City] Metropolitan Desegregation Plan. The parents who were active and concerned for their children, they saw the county schools as a haven for them - for their kids to get a better education. So it kind of took the cream off the top in my judgment from those who went to the [Midwestern City] Public Schools. And they assumed their students would be treated better which did not always happen to be the case.

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These concerns highlight some of the multi-layered consequences, or what Tillman (2005) described as "(un)intended consequences" of the Brown decision on African American education. Study participants identified some of these as problems that developed as a result of school desegregation.

Dismantling of the Black Community

Although some recollections of segregated Black schools may be viewed through rose-colored glasses (Orfield, 1996), one documented post-Brown outcome is the disproportionate number of jobs lost by Black educators (Morris, 2001; Walker, 2003; Tillman, 2004). Tillman (2004) refers to this displacement of Black educators as the "(un)intended consequences" of Brown. "The wholesale firing of Black educators threatened the economic, social, and cultural structure of the Black community, and ultimately the social, emotional, and academic success of Black children" (p. 280). Many Black teachers, principals, and to a lesser extent, school superintendents were either demoted or fired once schools were required to integrate. This had a particularly significant impact on the Black community since a large number of its middle-class members served in the field of education (Fairclough, 2004; Foster, 1997; Walker, 2001; Tillman, 2004). Walker (2003) described it as the "decimation of Black leadership in the wake of desegregation" (p. 57).

Dr. Baker was attending an all Black teachers' college during the Brown decision and during this time, learned of the case that prohibited racial segregation in the public schools within her particularly community. This case left her and her classmates wondering how this decision would impact their futures as aspiring teachers.
[The Black teachers college] was well regarded nationally, you know, you could almost go anywhere and get a job and do well. But there was a White college here... So we wondered what would that be? Then there was the Black school district and the White school district. And, how would the Black district be treated? Who would surface at the top? And you know who surfaced – the Whites were in charge. And they tried to develop some balance. But again, they just put the two colleges together and, you know, our students were participating in sit-ins down in [Southern state] and even in [a city in Mid-Atlantic]. Again, we knew we were getting a first class education so there was not a worry about how we would fare.

In terms of job availability, the Brown decision forced the existing “surplus of teachers” to find teaching positions outside of their local community or city, unless you wanted to teach outside of your field. Dr. Baker explained that she was didn’t want to teach outside of her field because she “didn’t know enough to teach special ed kids” and “thought they deserved better than that.”

Dr. Lewis explained the phenomenon that occurred when desegregation plans became implemented at both the K-12 and higher education levels. He was unable to attend the Black Teachers College in his hometown because it was closed once the city decided to integrate.

That’s the way it happens. When integration comes, whatever was Black, because there were two of them, that gets closed. So [the teachers college for Blacks] was closed. Many of the professors who taught at [the teachers college for Blacks] had to then go back into the high schools. The president of [the teachers college for Blacks], Dr. Johnson, who was an extremely knowledgeable young lady, or president, was

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given a central office do-nothing position and then someone with a Master’s degree, a [White] high school principal, was named president of [the newly desegregated teachers college].

Another challenge that faced Black educators was the closing of Black schools in counties. In one instance, an entire school district mobilized Black teachers traveling to those communities in order to provide an education to Black students who no longer had schools to attend due to White resistance. Dr. Cooper remembered fellow teachers who did what they could to ensure those students were not denied an education.

There were teachers in my school and in my school district who did go there in the summers and worked with those Black students who had been deprived of an education. I was at that time going to summer school for graduate work, and I was never able to go there, but there were those of us who were told that, ‘Well, if you can’t go, can you provide some resources, monetary resources to help offset the cost of the teachers who are going,’ and I did that, but I never went there myself. But that’s when I became aware of just how resistant they were.

Dr. Baker indicated the profession has not recovered from this significant loss of opportunities for Black educators. The disproportionately small number of Black teachers and principals in relation to the number of Black public school students is arguably one of the most devastating consequences of desegregation on Black education (Jones-Wilson, 1990; Walker, 2003; Tillman, 2004; Dempsey & Noblit, 1993). Although data exist on the number of Black teachers and principals who were demoted, fired, or forced to resign during this era, literature on Black superintendents before Brown is scarce and did not develop until the 1970s (Tillman, 2004). Ethridge (1979) reported the complete
absence of a Black superintendent in 1954 and fewer than 12 Blacks in the position of assistant superintendent. Dr. Baker echoed this concern.

Frankly, there is a decline in the number of African Americans in administration. Decline in the number in the superintendency. Now they’re finding so much other stuff to do. And, you know, with some of this for profit education that’s occurring and snapping up some of our good people . . . I think it’s a real problem . . . We’ve got to find a way to train more Black teachers. Because some of our children, particularly in urban areas or anywhere, they’re not going to see a teacher that looks like them during their whole career. And while, you know, we do a good of training lawyers and scientists, but we got to train some teachers.

In addition to the community level problems of lost jobs for teachers and parent perceptions that White schools would provide better education for their students than their neighborhood schools, there was also question as to whether the desegregation efforts even helped to improve the education of Black students. According to Dr. Lewis, based on the evaluation of the desegregation plan in the community that he attended, served as Executive Director of State and Federal Programs (which included desegregation initiatives), and served as superintendent, “the Black youngsters who went to the county schools did no better than the Black youngsters who remained in the [city schools].” He continued,

The only group that did better was those who attended the magnet schools in the [city school district] and magnet schools got more. And they also had criteria for screening in or screening out. Another problem I had with the desegregation program was county school districts got either 1 ½ or twice the ADA [average daily attendance] for

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every Black youngster they accepted. If [the city school district] were getting $5000 for a student, then the county would get either $7500 or $10,000 to accept that student. The problem was, they then could spend that money on anything they wanted. So what happened? New buildings went up. Teacher salaries went up. But it didn’t specifically go to the Black youngsters.

The justification used for letting the dollars follow the child who attended the county schools versus the city schools was part of what Dr. Lewis described as “a sweetener” or incentive for county schools to accept Black students. He explained, “There was a suit, and they were getting ready to go to trial, and the judge was trying to sweeten the pot. You can voluntarily accept with these niceties or we can go to trial and hope for the best.” Furthermore, White flight compounded the problem because prosperous communities suffered financially when Whites left and took their businesses with them. Dr. Lewis gave the example of an all Black school district that suffered financially once it lost its tax base.

So [the city] has the highest tax rate in the state because it doesn’t have much taxable property, [and] the higher your tax base, the lower your property tax can be. That was another gift from the desegregation plan. The county school districts were able to keep their taxes low, because they were using the money from the desegregation plan, and the community was not aware of it because most of them were opposed to the desegregation plan and busing these 13,000 Black youngsters to the county until the desegregation money started to go away. Then the county school districts had nowhere to go but the public to raise the taxes. Public says, ‘You’ve been getting by
for the last 10 years, you know, what's the big deal now? Well the desegregation fund that could be used for anything, that funding was gone.

Respondents shared several concerns about the overrepresentation of Black children in special education programs under desegregation orders. For example, Dr. Cooper was responsible for operationalizing court-ordered desegregation when she was superintendent of a large city district. She explained the dilemma:

There were aspects where they were out of compliance. One was that they were supposed to have at least 25 percent of classroom teachers, who were African-American, and they didn’t have—they had like 21, 22 or something. I was able to get that piece in compliance . . . . [The state was] itself is way out of kilter. I think that there would maybe have been about 20 percent of the students were in special ed and I think about 17 percent of the population in [the district] had been in special ed, and in looking at it I discovered several things. One, that I felt that there was something somewhat faulty about the evaluation process that was used to classify students as special ed, that we needed to be just a little surer that this student was truly special ed or whether the student was in need of special services. There was a difference.

Dr. Cooper explained that, at the time, she just “didn’t believe that many of the students were really special ed. They performed poorly, but not because of any physical or mental disability, but just because they hadn’t always been taught.” Dr. Clark provided another example when she noted her concern for the current overrepresentation of Black students in special education programs in desegregated schools.

I don’t believe all of them belong there. But for a variety of reasons, mostly because they can’t read, and their inability to read often leads them to become discipline
problems and the combination of the two quickly leads them into getting into trouble in their schools and ultimately in detention and facilities . . . so you just, it's a pathway to trouble as far as I'm concerned . . . I think that that number has continued to increase and particularly for African American male students where they tend to represent a disproportionate number of those students that are moving into special education situations. I am not against special education for those who truly have that need and certainly would benefit from those resources. But I think their parents don't always understand what it means to have this designation and when and when not they should be a part of it.

Dr. Lewis discussed the importance of educating parents on how to ensure their children get the type and quality of education to which they are entitled.

You have to be a watchdog. You just can't send [your children] out there and assume [the schools are] going to do best for your children simply because it's a White school district. And we started getting a number of quote withdrawn students back to the district. Well, what had happened – the principal would say I can either suspend your child or you can voluntarily withdraw him. So they would withdraw [the child] and bring [her/him] back to the city.

This is another example of how meaningful integration was thwarted by the expulsion and removal of Black students from predominately White schools. Although some students experienced segregation by being forced to leave their school entirely, others experienced isolation within their own classroom settings. Dr. Wells shared her observations of this practice in the predominately White, affluent school district, in which she was the superintendent, noting,
I’d walk through their classes and I would see things that were very disturbing to me: the White kids on the rug reading stories and doing animation and discussing, and the Black kids back in the back of the room with an adult tutor going over phonics. And I said to a principal one day, ‘What do you see wrong with this situation, this story, and what we see in this class?’ And the principal couldn’t see it. And I said, ‘There are three Black kids in this class. Where are they? Look at them and look at– and one little boy.’ I guess he had been misbehaving. They’re images that stick with you because you know they’re so wrong, and this was one of them.

She described another classroom observation of a kindergarten or first grade teacher was reading a story to all the White students who were seated on a rug and acting out parts of the story. There were only three Black students in the class and one was “sitting in the corner and the teacher had his back to – she made him sit facing the wall” and “she had him in the corner doing something rote” although she believed “that little boy wanted to be at the rug.” Another Black student was with a tutor doing catch up work, and she couldn’t recall what was happening with the third student. Dr. Wells’ became visibly upset while recounting this “disturbing” scenario and went on to explain her interaction with the school principal:

And I said to the principal that even though these kids are probably coming to this class with fewer skills than those other kids, what’s happening at this rug with this reading of the story and all was really what they want and should be a part of as well. So you find - and if you say something to the teacher about that - the teacher didn’t see anything wrong. You know, she thought that she was doing the right thing. ‘Well
they need to develop their skills, they don’t have - they aren’t reading yet.’ And they have a hard time seeing that there’s something wrong with it.

Dr. Wells also recalled when she was principal of “a very affluent elementary school in a very affluent community” where there was “a bimodal distribution, and the Black kids were in the kids in special education.” At the time, she became very concerned with the label of students as special education, despite their ability to test out of the program. She recalled a conversation she had with teachers during the end-of-year review of the children in special education. The teachers were “rediagnosing [the children] to stay in special ed.” When Dr. Wells expressed her concern, the special education teachers said, ‘Well, if they go to the regular classes . . . they won’t have the support that they will have.’ So they’re leaving sixth grade here at the elementary school, and they’re going to go to middle school with special education designations because you think that that’s the only way that they can get support? You know, what are you doing? You’re labeling kids as special ed when they don’t need to be labeled! They have tested out of labeling. And then when you raise those questions, [the special education teachers] are thinking that they are doing a good thing.

Again, she articulated the notion that the teachers “are thinking that they are doing a good thing” when in fact, she believed they were contributing to the problem of underachievement through “labeling” and low expectations. Dr. Wells emphasized the importance of challenging these subtle and sometimes unconscious acts of racism and discrimination that create barriers for Black children:

And so you have to raise the question, ‘If your kid was in this situation, would you be making the same argument?’ Keep him in special ed? Keep him with the label? Or
would you be working with the teachers who are going to be receiving this student around the things that they need to do to make sure he or she is continuously supported so that they can do well in the regular classroom?

Those are the examples, and if people aren’t vigilant about them, if you’re not questioning them, if you’re not looking at the nuances behind those decisions, you get total resegregation within these so-called integrated classrooms many years after segregation should have ended. It’s those kinds of things that I’m seeing now. Tracking, who’s in the low track? Vocational schools being set up. Who goes to the vocational schools? And now with . . . court-ordered desegregation, many of those court-ordered edicts have ended and you find that most of the schools have just resegregated.

The perceived and perhaps actualized disconnect between the standpoints and perspectives of Black teachers and White teachers concerning their Black students has been a topic that begs for further exploration within the discourse concerning the education of children of color. Varied theories and opinions exist as to why Black children continued to be labeled as special education, overrepresented as discipline and behavioral problems, and thus, overrepresented in alternative education programs and ultimately as high school dropouts.

Dr. Marshall discussed his concern with ability tracking and aptitude tests, “because I don’t know of anyone that can judge the ability of another person, and I’ve been doing this—and I’ve been in this a long time.” He continued, “I don’t think that there is any pure evidence that tracking is any good or that it really is—I just don’t think it’s worth a
damn. But people tend to do it to sort it, rather than to have a school where the whole philosophy is centered around if you work hard you will achieve.”

Like Dr. Wells, he became particularly concerned with ensuring how children would be treated in a desegregated environment and “how we were going to hopefully prevent students from becoming resegregated in a desegregated environment.” For Dr. Marshall, that possibility “was worse then being segregated.” He continued,

Within the segregated environment, it seems that there was a bit more nurturing going on . . . more ways where students would be inspired to achieve, rather than being relegated to some back room, or down in the basement, or becoming an untouchable within that environment with low expectations. And when people have low expectations, they blame the victim, you see, rather than assume responsibility for their learning. And that’s one of the things that bugs me, and I always felt that good teaching, a good curriculum, good learning situation, barring all other factors—socioeconomic conditions, race, gender, whatever—that was the most important factor to influence student achievement. And I still believe that, and I think there’s ample evidence to suggest that that is the key.

The irony here is that the basis of the case for school desegregation as put forth in Brown v. Board of Education, was the notion that separate schools for Black and White children, psychologically damaged the self concept of Black children by stigmatizing them as inferior in the eyes of the law. However, low expectations and resistance to fulfilling the spirit behind the law of desegregation, resulted in Black students being forced to bear the burden of desegregation while attempting to receive in education and what was oftentimes a hostile school environment.
Dr. Wells recalled how the newly desegregated school environment experienced by her younger siblings “was actually worse in terms of their social-emotional development.” Her younger sister, who is closest to her in age, was the first in her family to attend a newly desegregated high school. She was able to graduate a year early because she earned quite a few credits and had the highest average in her class. Dr. Wells explained the predicament:

She had the highest grade in her class, but it was the high school principal . . . who was determined that she was not going to be the valedictorian. The valedictorian was not going to be a Black female in the first or second year of the desegregation. So the superintendent, who was sort of not from that community, had learned what was going on at the high school and . . . he was challenging it with the principal. But in the end, the principal decided that there would be no valedictorian and no salutatorians, and that there would be six honor students and my sister would be among the six. But the ones who were chosen to deliver the addresses—the student addresses . . . were two Whites, not my sister.

Fortunately, the superintendent, who was also a White male like the principal, did not support the principal’s decision and spoke with Dr. Wells’ parents to protest the decision before the school board. Despite their efforts, the school did not recognize a valedictorian or salutatorian that year and simply decided to identify the six honor students. As a result, the superintendent the director of guidance resigned because they couldn’t gain the support of the school board and didn’t want to be part of a system that responded the way it did. But the practice persisted, explained Dr. Wells:
And at that particular school, they waited until all of my siblings had graduated from that particular school before they reinstituted salutatorian and valedictorian. . . . [I]t was a small school, it wasn’t that large—they thought we were the only, I guess, challenge to the White establishment. . . . so my sister harbored that sort of resentment, the bitterness, and we all remember it very vividly that she was denied that opportunity simply because she was Black. There was no other reason.

Theme 3: "We’ve Never Truly Integrated"

One of the most compelling, yet complex, themes that emerged from the narrative data concerning school desegregation was the interviewees’ use and repeated references of the term resegregation. At the same time, each made statements indicating that integration had never really occurred. It is important to note the distinctions between desegregation and integration. Based on his experience operating a desegregation center for 17 years and working with school districts across the country on their desegregation plans, Dr. Steele shared his four-dimensional framework for moving from segregation to integration and warned that “people have to stop using integration and desegregation as synonyms. There is a world of difference between mixing bodies and going to a state of integration.” He explained that although “the laws really in essence may have been changed on the books,” the practice and applications of these laws have not been realized.

The first dimension that you have to deal with is access, and that’s what Brown dealt with—was giving people access to the schools, okay. But then there’s another step—I call that the body mixing—people just sitting by folks. But then the next step is looking at the process, looking at the corporate culture of the institution. Also,
another piece of that access thing is when you look at the micro notion of access rather than just going to the building and stuff, but look at the classes, look at who’s in special ed, who’s in advanced college placement. There’s a perception that people have that, well, if you’re Black then you can’t learn. So you have to look at that whole process, look at the corporate climate, . . . look at the policies and procedures. See people want to run desegregated schools using the same policies and procedures that they used to run the segregated school.

He then outlined the fourth dimension of the model of segregation to integration, which is transfer. More specifically the ability to “transfer those things that will give you equal pay, privilege, and prestige.” Dr. Steele explained that, “Desegregated institutions are where you got the bodies mixed. Integrated is where there is a different corporate culture.” Unfortunately, he added that once people “mix the bodies” they declare, ‘Oh we’ve got an integrated institution.” In sum, “you need all four of those dimensions before you can talk about a truly integrated thing. You have a lot of desegregated institutions, but you don’t have any integrated institutions.”

Dr. Cooper’s responses support this notion that many schools may have desegregated, but not integrated.

We’ve never truly integrated, so at best, we did the kind of structural desegregation. In other words, we mixed children, and you went into some schools, and even though they were in the same school, you would still see honors classes that looked one way and regular classes that looked different [sic]. So I think the commitment has never been there truly to true integration. I think some states; some school districts have handled it better than others. Having worked in [a school district in the South], I was
rather impressed, rather surprisingly impressed with some of the policy decisions that that school board made in a genuine interest to facilitate genuine integration. They were aware that there was the inclination for people who felt forced to go to school with people unlike themselves would find ways of being in the building, but never in the same classes.

The reality of mixed schools that housed segregated classrooms was also evident in Dr. Lewis' discussion of the desegregation plan implemented in the district he worked in, which was based on a lawsuit filed by a local parent.

The suit came about because the White schools . . . were undersubscribed on the south side; the Black schools, because of containment, were oversubscribed, so what they did to keep the White schools open – they bused kids [between two cities], but they did what they call intact busing, which means when you get to the White school, you go to your own separate classroom, and you are segregated there. You have a separate recess where you're segregated there. You have a separate lunch where you're segregated there. Then you get on your bus and come back to [your own city]. A second lawsuit was then filed as a result of what the school board did to continue school segregation. Dr. Lewis explained,

Most people didn’t understand the county school districts . . . paid the city to accept all their Black students. When I was at [Fitzgerald] it was at a time when [school district] did not have the yellow buses, okay. But every morning . . . I would see these ragged little buses with these Black kids on it riding up, and I was thinking, 'Where are they coming from?' It wasn’t until years later – they were coming from the county school districts that were paying to bus them into [the city high school]. So,
[Singleton], which in 1960 was like 90% White in 10 years had turned to 100% Black.

This reality of “segregated busing” was articulated by social psychologist Dr. Kenneth Clark in 2000 during a presentation he gave entitled “Beyond Brown v. Board of Education: Housing and Education in the Year 2000.” Clark stated,

We have tried, and are trying busing, which we hoped would help us increase human sensitivity beyond color. I knew that busing was not going to work in itself. I knew that, to help busing, we didn’t need busing. We needed society, we needed schools, communities, we needed other human beings to know that you can’t segregate children in buses and expect that this would help segregated schools. Every time I saw buses, I saw them or interpreted them, as segregated busing; because what was happening was that the black children were being put in the buses and sent somewhere.

He later stated, “It is difficult to understand that these attempts, busing, affirmative action, or devices, or words, or approaches, are used to disguise the continuation of American racism, racial segregation.” Unfortunately, this persistence of American racism also manifested itself in the unwillingness of many White communities to fund or support costs associated with desegregation. However, they were willing to pay to keep Black children out of White schools.

According to Dr. Lewis, in [the city he worked in], it was not uncommon for county school districts to pay city schools “to accept their Black youngsters so that they wouldn’t have to teach them.” This transfer of Black students to the city further segregated the school system making the district a constitutional violator. When told to integrate, there
weren’t enough White kids left in the city schools to demonstrate meaningful integration. Therefore, the state was also in violation of the constitution and ordered to pay for the desegregation plan, which “in the beginning years, the federal government had to take funds out of the treasury because the [State] legislature wouldn’t appropriate the money.” Despite these extreme measures, today [the school district] is “in my judgment . . . back where we were in say, 1964,” stated Dr. Lewis.

Dr. Young believes this particular trend exists beyond any one particular community as is evident in various districts and communities across the country.

Well, . . . you know there’s still some places in America where the court rulings in the last, say 20, 30 years have created integration, and now people are saying, ‘Ah, but that costs too much money and maybe the results aren’t there, and we’d rather be in our own Black schools and our own White schools,’ and just trying to go back.

When asked about his thoughts concerning his local school district’s move to return to the neighborhood school pattern, which is based on segregated housing patterns, Dr. Lewis replied, “It’s, you know [chuckling] the powers that be. The folks that control the thing, that’s the way they want it. That’s the way they want it.”

The documented examples of White resistance and institutional and individual racism illustrate the ways that the racial tension and the climate of racial intolerance have impacted the experiences of Black students post Brown and quite possibly, for generations to come. The current cases pending before the U.S. Supreme Court concerning race-conscious school assignment policies in Seattle, Washington and Jefferson County, Kentucky provide a timely reminder of the controversial nature of race-based policies in American education. Furthermore, the emphasis on “diversity” as
opposed to acknowledging the historical context of racism and challenging it in its present form has arguably made it even more difficult to address and ultimately combat the problems associated with race and racism in education. Dr. Steele took issue with the emphasis on “diversity”:

Now that’s another term. People like to talk about diversity ‘cause they don’t have to talk about segregation—past segregation and discrimination. That’s a very neutral, non-threatening term. ‘Oh, we’re committed to diversity!’ Because we can do that and never talk about the fact that the institution is in the state that it’s in because we had policies and procedures that kept Black folks out. They can talk about it and never talk about when Blacks couldn’t get into [the local university] or any other university. But if you talk about desegregation moving to integration, then you’ve got to own up to all the policies and procedures that you have that made that state of segregation.

Acknowledging the various contexts that developed and sustained these “policies and procedures” that “made that state of segregation” is important to understanding the state of Black education today. While reflecting on desegregation plans today, Dr. Baker remembered the time she was tasked to “see if desegregation was working” in a large Southern city and “if there were still vestiges! Vestiges! And yes, there were still vestiges of discrimination.” She explained the nature of many of these “vestiges”:

They built the schools in the White community more elaborately than the ones in the Black community. Now they would say, we went to the [Black] community for them to tell us what they wanted, but those Black people over there didn’t know the whole range of things they could have . . . And then the Whites knew what was available or
what schools should look like. And then on the other hand, there’s some Blacks who believed that we just shouldn’t have the best, you know, that we can make do. So it’s not a clear picture. Then, there [are] still too many Blacks who are suspended for discipline infractions. There’s still too many poor teachers put in majority Black schools. The vestiges are still there, my dear.

Dismantling the Vestiges of Desegregation

Ironically, the factors participants perceive to have existed as variables supporting and promoting the achievement of Black children during segregation (role of parents, role of teachers, and self-concept of students) are the same variables that the participants interpreted as becoming relatively dismantled by desegregation. The scattering of and decrease in employment opportunities for Black teachers and administrators; overrepresentation of Black students in special education, alternative education, and high school dropout statistics; and the diminished and oftentimes damaged self-concept of the Black child are just some of the “vestiges” that exist as a result of desegregation.

This section attempts to address the research questions concerned with how the standpoint, experiences, and perspectives of the superintendents in this study provide insight to Black families, educators, and communities concerning the education and achievement of Black students. It begins with participating superintendent responses and perceptions concerning what they describe as the sorting and stratification of students according to race and class in America’s public education system and how this system must recognize and adjust to our changing global economy. This discussion of racial and social stratification in schools and school systems provides a larger context in which
participants share their thoughts on the role of Black parents, teachers, students, educational leaders, and communities in an effort to dismantle the vestiges of segregation and desegregation.

_Racial and Social Stratification in America’s Schools_

A large concern that emerged from participants was the stratification of students in schools according to race and class. They seemed to feel that less was expected of students of color, students of a lower socioeconomic status, and children from single-parent family homes, which perpetuated what Dr. Cooper described as a “caste system.” She expressed her concern about the direction the country is going in terms of its attitude toward its increasingly diverse population and stated:

As our country has become more and more diverse, I’m seeing the schools almost being used as tools to craft a caste system, because if you are trapped into an inferior education, you’re going to be trapped into a lifestyle and a condition of livelihood that’s going to be substandard as compared to somebody else. And that doesn’t take a lot of imagination. You can just look and see what’s going on. In terms of how schools are managed, they’re managed for efficiency. They want to know how much we can get from this operation as opposed to how much does it take to make sure that we educate children well.

Dr. Cooper believes that in America, there is a “real deep-seated” desire to “ensure the stratification of society, so that you will always have the rich, and that the poor will always be among us.” She argued that this is possible because “you can control the lives of the uneducated.” Or as Dr. Marshall put it, “you can’t be ignorant and free.” He also described this country’s obsession with “dealing with racial issues and categorizing
people" as "boring," "ineffective," and "costly." However, Dr. Cooper predicted that these are issues that are unlikely to go away.

Race is always going to be a factor in this country, and everywhere else, for that matter. I’m finding, however, class and economic conditions running a close second. Where you have poor people, whatever their race or ethnicity, there is now a hardening, if you will, of attitude toward them . . . So I’m seeing the wealthy getting wealthier, and I’m seeing a level of poverty resurfacing. That is such a sharp contrast . . . that it concerns me quite a bit.

Although he shares this concern, particularly in light of America’s need to compete in a global economy, Dr. Steele insisted that we must stop regarding the American public education system as a failure, because it has done what it was designed to do: “sort and sift and put people in boxes.” He expounded on this notion:

It is not a failure. It is very successful. It did what it was intended to do. That was to sort and sift and put people in boxes. But what has happened? There’s a new world. You don’t need strong backs and weak minds anymore . . . Now, you’re competing on a global scale so you need people who are educated . . . So if we could ever get people in this country to stop talking about – the American education system is a failure, we’d be one step further toward doing something different, because it’s been very successful.

Dr. Steele also argued that this system that “sorts and sifts” children must be replaced by a system that believes “every kid has the potential to be the best and greatest human being in this world” and actually rewards people who exercise the will and drive to use
their “brain power” and creativity. He observed, “People have reasons why people can’t
learn, won’t learn. But they never try to find reasons why they can.”

Restoring the Black Child, Family, and Community

“My parents were able to . . . instill in us through example and through opportunities,
through praise and recognition that we could do what we wanted to do, if we put the
effort to it. And that there would be people you’d run into, and incidents and
situations that you would face that could shatter your confidence in yourself, but you
ended up having to not allow that to happen. Work hard. Do your very best. Don’t
accept less than what’s exceptional for yourself. Stand up for what you believe in and
what is right. But still in all of that, never let go of your moral values, of the goodness
of who you are. If you live in that kind of environment - a lot of church values, faith
values – that becomes who you are . . . It’s that kind of strong family background that
grounds you for the rest of your life.” - Dr. Wells, Former Superintendent

The Black Parent: Agency and Involvement

Participants reiterated the need for Black parents to understand their agency and take
an active role in the education of their children. In response to my question of what
parents with little or no time should do, Dr. Lewis abruptly posed the question, “Whose
child is it?” and gave the following account:

My dad worked two or three jobs, but when it came to graduation time, which many
times was in the morning, he was always there. If it was a big program, he was
always there. And I know some of them don’t have jobs where you can just take off.

Nothing is more precious than your children, and they grow up so fast.

But he did acknowledge that, “if you’re not educated, sometime you fear the schools.”

Dr. Young identified the importance of “understanding how the system works” and being
able to use that system to the advantage of your child and his or her education. He spoke
specifically about the No Child Left Behind legislation and argued:

Parents have to be educated about what the law says and what’s coming to them, so
that [they] can . . . feel comfortable calling the principal up and say, ‘I want to come

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in and talk to you. I’m having trouble with my child in this teacher’s classroom, and I don’t know whether it’s the teacher or not, but I need you to help me figure this out. And if this placement doesn’t work, I’d like you to consider other placement’ . . . Go to the PTA meetings. Get involved in the parent leadership in the school so you can help shape these things, because we direct our principals. You have to do more now than just cookie sales.

Although Dr. Lewis challenged the traditional notion of parental involvement as simply participating in the PTA or showing up at the school, he emphasized the importance of parents understanding that “the school won’t always do the best it can for you.” He focused his critique on the “county” or suburban schools in his community, which Black parents assumed were better “because they think White is better.” He explained that this notion that White is inherently better is not only a false assumption but is “devastating” for children because “it’s a deficit model.” Dr. Cooper also cautioned against Black parents leaving “it totally to the school.” She observed:

Some folks will send their child to school, and the school’s supposed to do it all. My advice to the parents is to make sure you know what’s going on at school, and make sure that you are a cooperating partner with the school, not a sideline critic.

Dr. Steele also spoke to the need for Black parents to establish their presence at their child’s school and advised them to:

Go up [to the school] and make sure that you kid is getting the best shot he can get. But also make sure to tell that kid that you will kick his a— if he don’t do right and learn. That’s what you do . . . [The schools] don’t want you there, but you got to go.
My wife and I went to the schools, but our kids knew... we will fight the devil for you if you’re right, but if your stuff is raggedy, you belong to us.

Dr. Wells agreed for the need for parents “to take interest and stay on top of the school and the child” [emphasis added]. Regarding students who are struggling academically or behaviorally, she believed “the parent has to question why the achievement is not what it is... and hold the schools accountable,” and argued that Black parents in general, don’t hold schools accountable enough.

Sometimes they’re intimidated by the school, and therefore, they’ll back away or they’ll come up with nonproductive behaviors that the school many times have incited, and... no discussion gets done around the kid. It’s usually a very combative situation... Black parents... have to show the interest. They have to go to school and question what’s going on, then problem solve around what the parent and the school can do collaboratively to ensure the child’s success.

She believes “they have to demonstrate for their children that education is very important and that they have high expectations for their children to take advantage of what the school is offering,” which is reminiscent of the types of relationships shared among parents, teachers, and students in the participant accounts of their schooling experiences.

Dr. Wells concluded, “You hold your kids accountable for going to school and studying and doing what has to be done. And then you hold the school accountable for its role as well, and yourself for what you as a parent should do.”
The Black Teacher: Pushing, Pulling, and Polishing the Diamond

As presented in this chapter’s opening quotation, Dr. Baker observed that “although [the Black] community wants all children to achieve,” there are “expectations that you don’t.” She said that both White and Black people “who having achieved little or having not observed a lot of achievement on the part of their people, friends, and others . . . unfortunately and unwittingly discourage.” In her view, some of these individuals happen to be teachers who Dr. Baker feels “don’t have the level of commitment and don’t recognize that they are the role models.” She said they don’t understand their significance, and that as a teacher,

You carry the promise of the group, particularly if you have the responsibility for teaching African American youngsters. You still have that responsibility to help them see that education is the major vehicle for upward mobility, and that anybody can make it.

Dr. Lewis spoke of the need for teachers to be good at their trade. He said that knowing their content was first and foremost. What he also deemed important was ‘knowing how to work with Black youngsters who may be assertive, who can be con artists if you let them, but who are very good at heart’ and that this type of skill and professional development ‘takes time.’ And that the way you get the urban school experience is ‘by being in it, and by being taught by some folk who know about the urban school experience.’

He also expressed dismay over the deficit model of thinking demonstrated by educators today and stated the importance of teachers “having high standards for all” and “meeting [students] where they are, but taking them to the standard, as opposed to:
These poor children. They’ve suffered so I will expect less of them.” He said teachers must be responsible for “preventing [students who have been told so many times they can’t do it] from actualizing learned helplessness” and “helping to break the cycle of self-fulfilling prophecy.” Dr. Marshall spoke extensively about the dangers of deficit thinking when it comes to educating children.

I don’t believe in the deficit model of educating children who have limited backgrounds and exposures. You don’t use the deficit model for that. Deficit models never take them anywhere, because you’re always trying to correct something broken about that child. So what happens? Well, they never take a foreign language, or they never take music, or... they are in remedial reading... and they have these worksheets, and you know, that kind of thing.

This deficit model of educating children struck a personal chord with Dr. Lewis who remembered being his family being “looked down on in the neighborhood” because they were poor, and the specific instance of a teacher, who was Black, who never recognized his potential as a “ragged 13-year-old boy.” He recalled the story:

When I was a principal, I went to... the 100-year celebration of my high school. And when I went into the hotel into the dining room, I hard this voice say, ‘[Dr. Lewis], come here.’ And without turning around, I knew immediately that was the person who had taught me in 8th grade. And she said, ‘[Dr. Lewis], I never would have dreamed that one day you would be one of our best principals.’ And I smiled and said thank you. But I thought in my mind, ‘You didn’t see what I had in [pointed to head] or what I had in [pointed to heart], all you saw was a ragged 13-year-old-boy that you thought wasn’t going to be anything.’
His recollection is a vivid illustration of how the expectations of a teacher can affect both the academic and social-emotional development of child, and ultimately have a profound impact on his or her self-concept and ability, even as an adult. As Dr. Lewis said, “part of what I’m talking about, Sonya, is seeing the diamond in the rough, and taking that diamond and polishing it.” Dr. Clark described this process of identifying and developing the potential of Black students as a skill that teachers, White or Black, must be able to demonstrate when working with Black children. She believes that “a number of our kids carry hidden talents that, if they’re not person there who can push and pull and bring those things out, [those talents] go either hidden or misdirected.” She added:

Unless you know some of this and are able to sort of pull it around and pull I out, the kid just stays there, stuck in that spot. And that’s what I’m saying about, I guess the Black teachers, the good ones I had. They were able to uncover, and pull out, and push up . . . these kinds of things, so the hidden talents didn’t stay hidden.

Part of this process of “uncovering hidden talents,” and “polishing the diamond” requires nourishing the self-concept of Black students through stories and affirmations that run counter to the notions of inferiority, dysfunction, and pathology associated with Blackness and Black people. In regard to Black males in particular, Dr. Marshall noted that they are “very vulnerable in American society, and how we work them to improve their image has to be in ways that’s nurturing in order to discipline them.” He spoke from the standpoint of the Black male student, who many times do not have role models in the schools: “I mean, if you don’t care about me, then you really can’t tell me anything, but if you care, then you can discipline me, you see?”
Dr. Marshall feels the lack of Black male teachers contributes to what he perceives as a growing problem for the education of young Black males. He explained,

I don't think that the average Black male would aspire to something that a White person is doing as quickly, because I don't think that they think that this person understands where they're from. But if they see a young Black male achieving something, they sense that . . . [they can do it too].

He also talked about the notion of “authentic” caring on behalf of teachers, and whether or not their students feel they have “walked in their shoes” as an important part of connecting with Black students. He explained, “I sincerely believe that if you want to guide people along, and if you want to demand anything from them, [they] have to know that [you] care.” Part of this nurturing and caring should be presented in the form of a counternarrative that Dr. Lewis said, “reminds [Black students] of their richness.” He declared, “You’ve got to give Black kids the counternarrative: “You are great. You can be all you can be.”

*The Black Student: Coping in the Desegregated World*

Dr. Clark spoke of “coping skills” or the need for African American students to understand how to respond and handle the realities of racism and discrimination. She said that although “it probably is not talked about as much, because the tendency is to think that [racism]’s behind us,” it’s important for Black children and young people to be aware of the potential challenges and barriers they may face because they are Black. She reflected on the ways her parents prepared her and her siblings for life in the desegregated, and oftentimes, racially unjust, world.
Our parents gave us coping skills . . . They didn’t spell them out as coping skills, but now I can see that’s what it was. These are things you have to know and what you have to do to get through. And I think that that would be good for our kids to have today.

She explained that these coping skills and individuals “who can help them to cope” are particularly important for Black children in today’s education system who have to respond to “a counseling system that is ineffective and not meeting [their] needs” and “the fact that [they] are not getting the courses that [they] will need for the future.” Dr. Clark elaborated on how the lack of educational guidance and direction provided to Black students in today’s schools hinders their academic future:

The number of kids who don’t get into algebra just because they didn’t go up and ask is appalling, and they don’t have the understanding at that age . . . that where you get positioned there not only determines the math, but it determines everything else—how you will be grouped with all the way through for your courses. So we need folks who can help them to cope, and we need to have them learn about not reacting . . . I think about the number of instances where I’ve encountered outright prejudice in my life that I could have really gotten mad and so forth, but I would have hurt myself and missed an opportunity. But somehow, being able to cope, you got over that, and you could move forward. And I’m just not sure that our kids have sufficient coping skills.

Dr. Clark noted that these coping skills will likely need to be taught, developed, and demonstrated beyond the school site by Black people for Black students through civic groups, churches, and community organizations and are important to the larger picture of contesting unjust systems of racism and discrimination. She explained, “To the degree
that we can get more [Black] people coping and making it through, then we get more
[Black] folks on the other end who can then impact the systems throughout and make a
life difference.” Dr. Clark recounted conversations with her godson, who is a successful
engineer, but still needs the occasional encouragement to “help him to cope.”

He talks [laughing] to me about how his work or . . . how these other White guys deal
with him, don’t want to accept him as quality or whatever. And so, I have to talk to
him, ‘Come on . . . you don’t want to just walk out because then that leaves a vacancy
that they can fill and something they can say like, ‘He couldn’t take it.’” So I think
our kids have to know when to do and when not to do to make it through.

Dr. Lewis discussed the need for Black children to be able to “play the game” and
observed that they have not been prepared to play the game, “because they think the
battle is over.” He spoke of his adult son as an example:

Had a lot of White friends. He got down to [college]-Let me say this, [his high
school] was like 80% Black, 20% White, lot of White friends. Got down to [college]
as a student. He said, Dad, ‘Some of those same guys who were my friends – White –
in high school, they don’t even speak to me now’ Well they needed him in high
school because they were in the minority. You get down to [college] - they’re
majority. That’s why . . . I’m still cautious, you know.

However, Dr. Young cautioned Black students not to get hung up on the barriers they
may face because of their race and racism. He warned:

If you just carry [being Black] around, then they’re going to give you a hard time.
They’re not going to like you. I tell a lot of the kids that the opportunities exist for
you that didn’t exist for us, but you have to be prepared, and if you’re prepared, there
are some beautiful opportunities out here for you. If you’re not prepared, it’s worse than it’s ever been.

*The Black Community: Race, Politics, and Education*

Part of the challenge of addressing many of the educational issues facing Black children is the reluctance for both Blacks and Whites to openly discuss the race, racism, and racial politics as they relate to education. According to Dr. Steele,

Every time you try to point out something to people that has to do with race, they want to say you’re playing the race card. You’re not playing the race card. You’re telling people facts. The people playing the race card are the folks that don’t have expectations for the kids. That’s the race card.

Dr. Steele explained that the way to confront and challenge these subtle yet racist attitudes is by “letting people know that they’re little racists.” He added,

You can not be afraid to stand up and say what you believe and have some backbone to stand for something . . . Black folks can’t play it safe, ‘cause you ain’t never safe.

You might as well do what you got to do and say what you got to say.

Part of “saying what you got to say,” according to several study participants, must be done politically, through community advocacy and activism. Dr. Lewis believes Black communities need to “secure board of education members who think like [they] do,” because “if you control the board, you control the policy.” He explained that many times, “people misunderstand the power of the superintendent” and “assume the superintendent has all the power,” which is not the case.

In his particular community, the Black community stopped voting for school board members as a result of mistrust that developed when a private, out-of-state consulting
team was selected to overhaul the predominately Black school district and as a result, closed 16 schools without community input. However, after the school closings, and what Dr. Lewis perceived as the consulting team’s intent to dismantle “this bureaucracy . . . run by Black folks,” he believes the local Black community will continue to refuse the passing of a tax increase for the school district until “[they] feel their debt has been paid through ousting these people.” Dr. Clark also acknowledged the importance of who serves on the school board and stated, “Whenever you have a change in board mix, things change in your district.”

She also spoke about the need for a community vision for education – a vision that articulates why education is important to the community, includes strong parent participation, and ultimately “promotes having a better board of education, . . . better principals and teachers, and all the others to go along with it.” This need for community advocacy and support is particular critical for those children who may not have parents who are actively involved in their education, or lives, for that matter. As Dr. Baker explained:

The kids don’t choose not to have a parent who could participate. You know, parents, single parent, you try to get that parent involved him or herself, but then you try to get an advocate for the kid. And that’s where your community work - Boys and Girls Club, whatever kind of community operations, churches - somebody is an advocate.

However, Dr. Marshall believes that these community organizations are not doing enough to support children and schools.

We have the families breaking down. We have the churches not doing the kinds of things that they are supposed to be doing. We have the social agencies not doing the
things that they are supposed to be doing. So the schools are pretty much the last standing organization that's trying to deal with these kinds of things. And I think that if we give this thing up, then really it's just going to be chaotic, because to me, you just don't have the other agencies working in tandem . . . so you're dumping everything on the schools.

The Black Educational Leader: Looking to the Future

The increased responsibility and burden that is being placed on schools is particularly pronounced in poor, urban districts, which will likely have implications for the next generation of Black school superintendents. Dr. Baker said that aspiring Black educational leaders must "know what it is they're facing and try to correct some of it." She explained that much of these remnants of prior racism and discrimination have resulted in a lack of trust or mistrust of school systems on behalf of Black students, families, and communities.

See, sometimes parents haven't benefited, and now, that makes the parents hostile to the school. So you've got to work on parents as well as children now. If the school system hadn't worked for them, what makes you believe that they think it's going to work for their children? So you've got to change all of that.

Unfortunately, this pressure to "change" or fix the past wrongs and injustices of a school system is part of the burden that lies with all new superintendents, but particularly heavy for those who happen to be Black. In addition to their job-related pressures, Black superintendents oftentimes bear the distinctive burden of being perceived incompetent by Whites and "superhuman" by a Black constituency that demands they fix the system they believe is failing their children and community (Hunter & Donahoo, 2005; Scott, 1980).
This is the "messiah or scapegoat" phenomenon that Hugh Scott (1980) attributed to Black school system leaders in his book, which expounded on this duality of expectations that are placed on the Black superintendent.

In regard to the low expectations or perceptions of incompetence held by Whites for Black leaders, Dr. Steele warns future Black educational leaders to remember that although some Whites may regard them as an exception to the broader assumption of Black ineptitude, they should not accept this inauthentic distinction.

The worst mistake a Black person can make is to believe it when White folks tell them you're different. You're only different as long as you got some utility for them. And some of these Black folks get to believing that they're different, and get to believing that these White folks are going to treat them different, and they ain't the same. You're just the same. White folks have a way of always letting you know, 'He is the best Black whatever I saw.' So what they're saying is as long as I compare you to Black folks, you're alright, but [not] if I have to compare you to White folks.

Dr. Lewis spoke about his own experiences with Whites who would attempt to regard him as different or better than the broader Black population. He was also leery of this designation as the "exception" to all Blacks and regrets his inability to be cautious of White people. He said he resents being told,

'If all Blacks were like you, it would be great,' you know. 'You're the exception.'

Well, I just present the image that they want, you know. And I’ve learned how to play the game. So I’ve learned by watching others, taking notes – mental notes – and using what I’ve learned to better myself and my people.
This ability to “play the game” is an important part of surviving and succeeding as a Black educational leader. It includes being careful around Whites, which requires a constant consciousness of race, racism, and subsequently, different rules for different players according to race. Based on his personal and professional experiences as a Black superintendent in a district with limited diversity and that was “going through a transition where there had been serious racial intolerance, diversity intolerance,” Dr. Marshall said it was important for him not to reveal his plans and direction because “then people could automatically create all kinds of blockages to prevent you from doing what you wanted to do.” He further explained,

I honestly believe that Black superintendents, many of them . . . didn’t have the same power base as White superintendents to make certain kinds of decisions. I really believe that, because they didn’t have the ability to hire . . . I can’t give you evidence, but it seems that some of the Blacks I knew in the superintendency didn’t have the authority to hire and control their situation as some of the my White friends.

He concluded that many Black superintendents simply tolerated this limited control and authority because “they’re just glad to be there.” Thus, a lack of mentorship and support for Black superintendents diminished their effectiveness and ability to further their vision for their districts. Dr. Marshall believed that despite these limitations on his ability to lead, he made tremendous improvements to the district he led during his tenure, but never really received the credit he believes he deserved. “Had I been a White guy, sheesh, I’d have been a hero.”

However, the other side of the dual nature of the Black superintendent requires a moral activist and social justice style of leadership that works to change of a system that
is institutionally and interpersonally racist and unjust. Dr. Young said that in spite of the discrimination you face as an African American, it is important to promote equity and inclusion for other groups once you attain a position of authority. He discussed his tenure as superintendent in districts with various racial and ethnic constituencies and the importance of hiring and promoting individuals who reflected the culture and diversity of that particular community.

I mean, we weren’t treated very well as African Americans, so if we get into positions of leadership, which we don’t often do or always do, then treat people the way you’d prefer to have been treated, not the way you were treated to pay them back . . . I had excellent relationships with [Arabs, Chaldeans, Hmong, Bangladesh, Hispanics], met with them quarterly, and made a difference for them. Whether it’s hiring their people or putting people in positions of responsibility when I can find them. And you can find them if you want to, if you really want to make a difference.

As Dr. Clark explained her “sense of pride and strong self-concept” as an African American translated into her work as an educator by shaping her focus on expectations for all children.

No one could tell me that these kids could not achieve certain things because I believed it strongly that they could, and insisted that they be treated as though they could achieve . . . . I think that because I could represent myself as a model of something that people could see that is possible. That feels good.

Although Dr. Clark was able to succeed as a result of her segregated schooling experience, she expressed concern for how some people’s frustration with the unfulfilled
promise of Brown or desegregation fatigue may take us back to a time that, despite some positive aspects, was unfair and unjust.

I don’t want us to go back to separate but equal ‘cause I don’t think it was ever separate but equal. And although I came out of that kind of environment from my early education, I have been part of all of those different groups, and I think there’s more out there for us to push for and benefit from that we don’t have the resources and whatever to go back to separate but equal, and we would not ever get the equal. We’d be separate, but we wouldn’t get the equal. So, I want to still be part of a group that pushes for everything we need, but I don’t want to be part of [separate but equal].

As an African American or Black educator in the position of superintendent, Dr. Clark stated that “you want to be sensitive, kind, loving, and you want to be fair. And you want to be uplifting to these people in all these various situations, so you want to be understanding.” Then she emphasized, “But at the same time, you want to provide the justice to everyone that you have longed for all these years.” According to Dr. Baker, part of this justice is equal educational access and outcomes for all children, particularly with those who have not enjoyed these opportunities in the past.

If you educate Black children and disadvantaged children and those with special needs better, you educate all children better . . . . You’re just on the road to educating everybody better, but you’ve got to give special attention to those who have not benefited from your programs as well as others.

In addition to ensuring equity for society’s most vulnerable students, Dr. Baker advised the aspiring Black educational leader be able to partner, collaborate, “add value,” and be
politically savvy in order to negotiate her or his ability to contribute to society and help people.

You find out what’s needed, and you add it. You’ve got to be nimble; you’ve got to be smart. You’ve got to add value. The person at the top has to make the contacts with groups and individuals that can enhance or tell your story, and then you’ve got to indicate some willingness to share information and also to partner, you know as long as it doesn’t damage you and you’re giving up intellectual property. But that’s being political too – I won’t deny that. But you’ve got to be able to recognize the prevailing winds and who’s calling the shots, and you do it for kids, and hey, I shouldn’t say this but sometimes you have to suck up a little bit to get what you want (laughing). No matter what you do, keep it in your mind – are you able to make a contribution? Are you doing something to help people?

This emphasis on helping people and children, especially those without a voice or an advocate, was an important part of why the study participants became educators and informed their work as superintendents. As Dr. Cooper said, “I guess I’m just a person who would rather make a difference for people who need me most. I think many of the students would do well without me, so if I’m going to spend my time and energies, I’d like it to be for the folks who need it.” Dr. Wells echoed the need to “fight for the kids,” even in areas beyond the direct scope of formal education.

You have to be the advocate for them in all areas. You have to show that it’s not a problem just with education. It’s also a problem with all the other organizations that support children. I found the health system, the welfare system, the housing system,
the job system, that the superintendent has to be there advocating that those systems be more supportive of the needs of kids as well.

In addition to providing additional educational opportunities and ensuring improved educational outcomes for all children; building strategic alliances with community stakeholders to advance education; and serving as an advocate for those who children, families, and communities who need it most; the Black educational leader must also be in the business of giving kids “the stuff of dreams.” Dr. Baker explained how this hope and inspiration can only be achieved and sustained through team building and succession planning:

Education gives kids the stuff of dreams, and so, as an education leader . . . you’ve got to motivate the team. You’ve got to build the team of those folks who work with you closely, help them understand they’ve got to build teams. They’ve got to inspire. Because in this field, you’re never through learning . . . And I think that too many of us don’t think about bringing the next generation forward and even giving them our seats. So somehow, African Americans or everybody – we need to reclaim our commitment of all the years gone by. Everybody needs to do it – for White kids, for Hispanics, for all kids.

Conclusion

This chapter presented three key themes that emerged from participant responses and narratives concerning desegregation policy and its perceived impact on the education of Black children. Fond memories of all Black schools countered the notion that there is something inherently wrong with schools being all Black. The decimation of Black
schools and job loss for Black educators, discriminatory practices within desegregated schools, and the social and psychological damage experienced by Black students in newly desegregated environments were identified as some of the reasons respondents shared mixed feelings about school desegregation policy. There was also concern as to the problem of resegregation, which many feared was worse than segregation, because it resulted in racial isolation without the supportive, nurturing environment that existed in many of the all Black schools prior to the implementation of Brown, particularly since as some contend, the schools never truly integrated in the first place.

Finally, this chapter presented participant suggestions for restoring the strength once found in and among the Black student, family, and community. It also included their insights for the next generation of Black educational leaders and the type of political and community activism the Black community must engage in to effectively transform the education of and achievement of Black students.

In the next chapter, I provide an analysis of selected narrative data presented in this study using critical race theory (CRT) as an interpretive framework. Specifically, a racial realist perspective will be utilized focusing on the CRT tenets of counterstorytelling, critique of liberalism, whiteness as property, interest convergence, and the permanence of racism. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of how a CRT analysis of the perceived implications of desegregation policy and its historical implications for Black education can guide an effort to conceptualize and move toward a political race discourse in education.
CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS: CRITICAL RACE THEORY AS AN INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORK

"In 1954, as a social psychologist teaching my students at a college in the city of New York, which was considered one of the most liberal institutions of higher education in our nation, I believed, or did not know; or did not take into account, that segregation, of which segregated schools were merely one of the manifestations, was a large center of American racism. I believed that segregated schools could be eliminated . . . I did not understand that the maintenance of segregated housing was not only an excuse for the persisting pattern of segregated schools and segregation in general, but that segregated housing was itself a form of deeply embedded, highly resistant racism.” – Dr. Kenneth Clark, 2000, “Beyond Brown v. Board of Education: Housing and Education in the Year 2000”

Ironically, much of the discourse concerning school desegregation has failed to account for what Dr. Kenneth Clark described as “the deeply embedded, highly resistant racism” that served as the catalyst for the manifestation of racial segregation in all areas of American life, including schools. Supporters of desegregation and race-conscious education policies argue that these efforts are critically important to fulfilling Brown’s promise of equal educational opportunities for all children (Kozol, 1991; Orfield & Eaton, 1996; Wells, 2004). They speak to the positive benefits of integrated schools and how diverse school environments contribute to the educational experiences of children of all races (Kozol, 1991; Orfield & Eaton, 1996; Wells, 2004). However, many of these arguments are made by White scholars who not only possess a racial standpoint that is
different from those of the superintendents interviewed in this study, but also enjoy the privilege of being able to speak about the virtues of school desegregation without having experienced what the participants described in this study as "vestiges of desegregation."

Furthermore, as Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) noted in their pivotal work that introduced critical race theory to the field of education, the "savage inequalities" that Kozol graphically illustrated in his 1991 book of the same name "are a logical and predictable result of a racialized society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized" (p.47). This commentary not only sheds further light on the salience of racism in education, but also, as I will argue, demonstrates how varying racial standpoints (Ladson-Billings and Tate are Black, Kozol is White) must play a critical role in how individuals interpret the role of race and racism in education. Thus, this chapter attempts to situate the discourse of desegregation policy within a critical race framework that utilizes the key tenets of critical race theory as a lens for analyzing and interpreting how the Black superintendent standpoints, lived experiences, and perspectives documented in this study can inform the way we consider race and racism and its relationship to race-conscious education policy.

Centering Race and Racism in the Discourse of Desegregation

As stated in this chapter's introductory quote from social psychologist and expert witness in the Brown case, Dr. Kenneth Clark, the role of race and "highly resistant racism" were and continue to be underestimated in the discourse concerning school desegregation and related race-conscious laws, policies, and practices that affect the education of our nation's children. Ironically, in the early 1900s, both Carter G. Woodson
and W. E. B. Du Bois “presented cogent arguments for considering race as the central construct for understanding inequality” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 50). Their respective works on the “mis-education of the Negro” and the unique sense of “double consciousness” experienced by African Americans are significant examples of how their examinations of the relationships between race and inequality made significant contributions to our understanding of race and racism in American society. In the spirit of their work and that of scholars who have built upon the groundwork laid by Woodson and Du Bois, I elected to use critical race theory (CRT) as an analytical and interpretive framework that centers race and racism within the current discourse of desegregation policy, which is important because it can help inform our understanding of why previous and current efforts toward school integration have remained unfulfilled.

DeCuir & Dixson (2004) identified the following five basic tenets of critical race theory: counterstorytelling, the critique of liberalism, Whiteness as property, interest convergence, and the permanence of racism, which are presented in Table 4.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRT Tenet</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Source</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counterstorytelling</td>
<td>A method of telling a story that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths especially ones held by the majority</td>
<td>Matsuda (1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique of liberalism</td>
<td>Critique of three basic notions embraced by liberal legal ideology: colorblindness, neutrality of the law, and incremental change</td>
<td>Crenshaw (1988)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whiteness as property</td>
<td>Due to the history of race and racism in the U.S. and the role U.S. jurisprudence has played in reifying conceptions of race, the notion of Whiteness can be considered a property interest</td>
<td>Harris (1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest convergence</td>
<td>Significant progress for Blacks is achieved only when the goals of Blacks are consistent with the needs of Whites</td>
<td>Bell (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanence of racism</td>
<td>Racism, both conscious and unconscious, is a permanent component of American life</td>
<td>Bell (1992)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These five tenets are important to understanding CRT as a theoretical and analytical framework for interpretation and discussion. In their presentation of these five central tenets, DeCuir & Dixson (2004) noted that since the introduction of CRT to the field of education in 1995 by Ladson-Billings and Tate, educational researchers have focused primarily on counterstorytelling and the permanence of racism, and encouraged the engagement of all five CRT tenets, which they believed could prove beneficial and instructive to education research. Therefore, in this chapter, I attempt to use all five tenets as a model for determining whether or not the foundations upon which a critical race perspective is constructed in any way support the findings of this study.

It is important to note, that since its inception in the mid-1970s, the scope of CRT has expanded significantly as a framework for exploring and interrogating issues of race. It has moved beyond the Black-White binary, which has historically understood “race” to mean “Black or African American,” particularly as a response to the 1960s civil rights era, and recognizes that “each disfavored group in this country has been racialized in its own individual way and according to the needs of the majority group at particular times in its history” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 69). As such, areas of study that have emerged out of the critical race movement include: Critical White Studies, LatCrit, QueerCrit, Asian Critical Thought, and Critical Race Feminism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2001).

**Counterstorytelling and the Voice-of-Color Thesis**

The standpoints and perspectives of the Black school superintendents who participated in this study are important for informing critically important educational leadership and policy issues, particularly as they intersect with discussions on race and
social justice. They demonstrate how counterstorytelling and the voice-of-color thesis are important to critical race scholarship because, as Delgado and Stefancic (2001) explain, “minority status . . . brings with it a presumed competence to speak about race and racism” (p. 9). Thus, the application of CRT in education research serves as “an important tool for dismantling prevailing notions of educational fairness and neutrality in educational policy, practice, and research” (Villenas, Deyhle, & Parker, 1999, p. 33).

Counterstorytelling, coupled with CRT’s emphasis on historical and legal context, is fundamental to constructing, revealing, and sharing these truths and realities, which are missing from traditional educational research.

CRT is also significant methodologically in its commitment to giving voice to the marginalized experiences of educators and students of color by using the “explanatory power in this approach” to document professional and schooling experiences not reflected in the related literature (Lynn & Adams, 2002). Through the use of CRT, researchers are provided a framework that reveals:

[T]he persistent and oppressive nature of the normativity of Whiteness, the co-option and distortion of oppositional discourses, and the ways in which policies that are offered as remedies to underachievement and educational disparity may not be in the best interests of marginalized groups, but rather serve the elite (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 30).

In this study, the method of counterstorytelling revealed rich narratives, reflections, and shared experiences that painted a very different picture of segregated schools. Participants recalled their schools as places where they received “very fine educations”
had "highly, qualified teachers" who were part of the "talented tenth" and prepared them to cope, succeed, and excel in the desegregated world.

Furthermore, these participant responses and stories, when examined collectively, showed that although these narratives are not commonly voiced and heard in the mainstream literature, they are not uncommon. In fact, there were many more similarities among the eight interview responses than one may have expected considering their various socioeconomic backgrounds, and the geographical regions and time periods in which they were born, raised, educated, and worked. Every participant spoke of the significant role their families played in equipping them with a strong self-concept and sense of confidence and fostering their value for education. Although there were great similarities among respondent descriptions of the role of parents in their segregated schooling experiences, the data revealed different ways of describing and interpreting the notion of "parental involvement."

For example, Dr. Clark described her parents as being "not all that involved" because they didn’t frequent her school, while Dr. Lewis described his parents as being very involved, even when they didn’t visit the school unless it was absolutely necessary. Despite the differences in what they believed to be parental involvement, their stories shared the message that, although they were raised by parents with limited education and meager resources, it did not limit their ability to learn and succeed educationally and professionally. This narrative counters the notion that poor Black children from low socioeconomic conditions should not be expected to achieve as well as their more advantaged, White, counterparts.
Superintendent reflections of their teachers were also very similar. They described their Black teachers as "sharp," "polished," and "sophisticated" and noted their ability to be demanding, yet caring, and remembered teachers having high expectations for behavior as well as academic achievement. This depiction of the highly qualified, competent, and committed teacher challenged the notion that Black teachers during the era of segregation were untrained and ill-prepared to provide a quality education to their students. Although one respondent was uncertain as to whether or not her teachers were credentialed, all the others who attended segregated schools through high school specifically mentioned the training, content knowledge, and top-notch formal education their teachers possessed.

As far as the self-concept of the participants as students in Black schools during segregation, it was described as strong among nearly all eight respondents. Only one respondent didn’t speak directly to the issue of his self-concept as a student. In general, they attributed their strong sense of self-confidence and pride in being Black as something that was established by their parents and nurtured by their teachers and members of their community. Although history tells us that the era of Jim Crow and the laws which sanctioned "separate but equal" had, and in many instances, continues to have, a deleterious effect on the psyche of Black people, the counterstories documented in this study reveal ways in which the Black family and community developed and sustained a network of support for its children and prepared them to withstand the harsh realities of racism and oppression in the desegregated world. When asked what it meant to be a Black child growing up in a segregated environment, Dr. Baker replied, "That you’re smart. That you can do anything you want to do. And I must have been dumb
enough to believe it” since this was the message being sent from her family and reinforced by her school, church, and community.

In the previous chapter, I presented a second iteration of the study’s findings, shifting the focus from the participants’ standpoint and lived experiences in segregated schools to their perceptions concerning desegregation policy and its impact on Black children, families, and communities. Among the numerous counterstories told by each superintendent, I identified the following themes, which happened to run counter to what much of the literature has to say about school desegregation. I chose to express these themes and give voice to the participants by using their exact words.

1. “There is nothing wrong with something being all Black.”
2. “Sometimes I feel like the problems began with desegregation.”
3. “We’ve never truly integrated.”

I found the emergence of these themes to be fascinating because they contradicted much of the popular mainstream literature I read about desegregation, further substantiating the need for counterstorytelling and the value of the “voice of color.” The traditional assumptions, that all Black schools are likely to be challenged in their ability to serve students, that the perceived benefits of desegregation would be a saving grace for the historically marginalized Black student population, and that schools are now resegregating after enjoying a period of integration, were interrogated and challenged by the thematic analysis of these findings.

In describing the power of the process of counterstorytelling for their study participants who were two of few Black students in a predominately White school, DeCuir and Dixson (2004) explained, “by telling their own stories in their own words,
their counter-narratives allow them to contradict the Othering process, and thus, challenge the privileged discourses that are found at elite, predominately White independent schools” (p. 27). In this study, the superintendents’ engagement in counterstorytelling provided them the chance to reflect on their lived experiences in segregated schools; how these experiences informed their thought about school desegregation; and whether or not their beliefs about desegregation were different from those who may not share their racial standpoint. As Ladson-Billings and Tate predicted in their seminal 1995 article, “without authentic voices of people of color (as teachers, parents, administrators, students, and community members) it is doubtful that we can say or know anything useful about education in their communities” (p. 58).

Critique of Liberalism: Debunking the Myths of Colorblindness, Meritocracy, and Neutrality of the Law

One of the key features of CRT is its dissatisfaction with liberalism’s conceptualization of America’s problems of race and racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). This critique of the liberal framework challenges the notions of the “color-blind constitution,” meritocracy, and the neutrality of constitutional law. Although there are varying degrees to which critical race scholars embrace or denounce the efforts of civil rights litigation and liberal concepts, particularly the mainstay of rights, this analysis is limited to a discussion of the study’s findings as they relate to the myths of colorblindness, meritocracy, and neutrality of the law. In Justice John Harlan’s dissent in Plessy v. Ferguson (1896), he stated:

The white race deems itself to be the dominant race in this country. And so it is, in prestige, in achievements, in education, in wealth, and in power . . . . But in view of
the constitution, in the eye of the law, there is in this country no superior, dominant, ruling class of citizens. There is no caste. Our constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens. In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law. The humblest is the peer of the most powerful (163 U.S. 537).

Although this conception of a color-blind constitution may be a laudable goal, notions of colorblindness, as well as neutrality of the law, are liberal ideological concepts that fail to acknowledge and consider the pervasiveness of American racism and its role in perpetuating and recreating systems of oppression and subordination along the color line (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). As such, CRT scholars believe that "aggressive, color-conscious efforts" are need to make true change and alleviate the suffering caused by racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001 p. 22).

Study findings provided several examples that underscore the importance of accounting for the societal role race plays in understanding why colorblindness may work in theory, but not in practice. Participant accounts at a personal level include Dr. Steele’s recollection of his brother winning a model airplane contest, but being unable to reap the reward of his accomplishment, because the prize was a ticket to a White movie theater that he was prohibited from attending because he was Black. Another brother of Dr. Steele “made the highest score on the Army General Classification test of anybody inducted into the Army” through his particular camp, but was deprived of the chance to become a pilot because he “was too big.” Dr. Wells remembered the devastating ordeal her sister experienced when she earned the honor of being first in her class in her newly desegregated high school, but was denied the opportunity to be recognized as
valedictorian, as Dr. Wells put it, “simply because she was Black. There was no other reason.”

Unfortunately, these occurrences not only reflect participant accounts during their segregated schooling days, but also reflect their experiences as aspiring educators and school superintendents. For example, Dr. Young described his extensive job search of 100 superintendent positions with no offers until he accepted a White confidante’s advice to cut his Afro and wear different clothing so he would not be so intimidating to White interviewers. Dr. Clark recalled becoming a finalist for a superintendent position, and being told that although she was the most qualified for the job, it was clear that the "community was not ready for a Black person” to fill it.

These stories and several others like it illustrate how the myth of colorblindness operates hand in hand with the false concept of meritocracy. In his primer on CRT, Taylor (1998) stated, “By relying on merit criteria or standards, the dominant group can justify its exclusion of [Blacks] to positions of power, believing in its own neutrality” (p. 123. Thus, despite the abilities, skills, achievements earned or made by Blacks, oftentimes they are not fairly recognized or rewarded because they are Black. This further limits their ability to enjoy what is rightfully owed to them, opportunities and recognition that would be observed under a true merit system. As Taylor (1998) stated, “CRT asserts that such standards are chosen, they are not inevitable, and they should be openly debated and reformed in ways that no longer benefit privileged Whites alone” (p. 123).

The colorblind ideology also normalizes “Whiteness,” while it constructs people of color as Other, making it very difficult to examine the positioning and utilization of White privilege and how it becomes regarded as the societal standard or the norm.
(Williams, 1997). According to DeCuir & Dixson (2004), the colorblind discourse has also been embraced as a way “to justify ignoring and dismantling race-based policies that were designed to address societal inequity,” which we are now witnessing with the pending U.S. Supreme Court decision concerning the constitutionality of race-based school assignment policies in Seattle, Washington and Kentucky.

Regarding the notion of the neutrality of constitutional law, Derrick Bell (2004) described an example of how this “neutrality” can be deemed false when undermined by acts of racism as demonstrated by the failure of school officials to observe orders to desegregate their schools:

In St. Louis and elsewhere, school officials used the school desegregation controversy to increase their legitimacy as the proper policy-making body for public education—an accomplishment furthered by the fact that civil rights lawyers like myself did not include orders calling for the replacement of school board members in our petitions for relief, even though they and their predecessors in office were responsible for the discriminatory policies and the delaying tactics we attacked in the courts. We knew they were responsible, but felt both that they would obey court orders and that relief seeking their removal would be impossible to obtain. (p. 124).

Dr. Lewis cited examples of this failure to observe laws that would discontinue school segregation, which included predominately White county school districts paying predominately Black city school districts to accept their Black students and the practice of “segregated busing.” In a keynote address entitled, “Brown v. Board of Education Housing and Education in the Year 2000,” social psychologist, Dr. Kenneth Clark, interpreted this custom of racially separating children in buses as an impediment to his
hope that busing "would help us increase human sensitivity beyond color" (Institute on Race & Poverty, Forum Report, April 22, 1995). Unfortunately, the nations' ability to move "beyond color" may be an unrealistic and inappropriate goal based on the pervasiveness and permanence of racism, which is closely linked to the historical relationship between race and property in America.

**Whiteness as Property**

In her 1995 article, "Whiteness as Property," legal scholar Cheryl Harris examined the connections between race and property in America and how this intertwined relationship has evolved from "historical forms of domination" to replicate "subordination in the present." Harris (1995) explained that in James Madison's view, property "embraces every thing to which a man may attach a value and have a right," in which case Madison was referring to all of a person's legal rights. She further expounded:

Whiteness defined the legal status of a person as slave or free. White identity conferred tangible and economically valuable benefits, and it was jealously guarded as a valued possession, allowed only to those who met a strict standard of proof. Whiteness—the right to white identity as embraced by the law—is property if by "property" one means all of a person's legal rights (p. 280).

In reference to the act of "passing," which was the practice of fair-skinned Blacks with "White" features denying their Black identity to be presented and received as White; Harris (1995) indicated that this practice, which her grandmother engaged in, persisted because of the economic benefits associated with being White. It also illustrated the
“valorization of whiteness as a treasured property in a society structured on racial caste” (p. 277). She explained:

Becoming white meant gaining access to a whole set of public and private privileges that materially and permanently guaranteed basic subsistence needs, and therefore, survival. Becoming white increased the possibility of controlling critical aspects of one’s life rather than being the object of other’s domination . . . . In ways so embedded that it is rarely apparent, the set of assumptions, privileges, and benefits that accompany the state of being white have become a valuable asset—one that whites sought to protect and those who passed sought to attain, by fraud if necessary (p. 277).

Participant responses revealed several instances that supported this notion of Whiteness serving as a property right in its ability to provide an individual with the power to control his or her life. Or, in other words, how the absence of this property right limits a person’s ability to control his or her life. References to the poor conditions that must exist in a school district before a Black superintendent is considered for employment is a prime example of this manifestation of limited opportunity and control. And in Dr. Marshall’s view, the limitations persist even after an African American assumes the superintendency. He observed, “I honestly believe that Black superintendents didn’t have the same power base as White superintendents.”

*Limitations on Black Life*

Some of the most common and frequent examples of participants not being able to control their own lives were reflected in their segregated schooling experiences. It began with the very act of getting up and going to school every morning, which in many cases
required passing White elementary and/or high schools to get to the oftentimes distant school for Blacks. Dr. Steele vividly recalled, by name, each of the White elementary schools he had to pass to get to school each morning and the "rickety ferry and ride on public transportation to get to the one high school for Blacks." Dr. Wells had to travel 20 miles daily to get to school, and Dr. Clark remembered having "a pretty good distance to walk to school" and passing White kids who would be traveling in one direction, while the Black kids traveled in the other to get to their respective schools.

Interestingly, this issue of extended commutes to school for Black children was originally introduced to the Massachusetts Supreme Court in 1849 in *Roberts v. City of Boston*, where the father of 5-year-old Sarah Roberts, who was Black, attempted to have her enrolled in one of the closer schools designated for Whites. However, Justice Shaw of the Massachusetts Court argued that "the standard of equality implied not that all men and women were legally clothed with the same civil and political powers, but that all were merely entitled to equal consideration and protection for their maintenance and security" and asserted that "school segregation was for the good of both races" (Alexander & Alexander, 2001, p. 499-500).

Despite the passage of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868 and the notion that "separate schools were inherently unequal" in the *Brown* decision, the hope and promise associated with the passage of these laws have been limited by their interpretation and ambiguity regarding what Harris (1995) described as "this entangled relationship between race and property" (p. 277). She concluded, "American law has recognized a property interest in whiteness that, although unacknowledged, now forms the background against which legal disputes are framed,
argued, and adjudicated” (p. 277). Based on the study finding’s, this notion of Whiteness as property transcends American jurisprudence and was also discussed by participants in terms of narratives that illustrated privilege for Whites and racial discrimination toward Blacks in their everyday work as educational professionals. In Derrick Bell’s article entitled, “Property Rights in Whiteness,” he explained a key purpose of racial discrimination is “to facilitate the exploitation of black labor, to deny us access to benefits and opportunities that would otherwise be available, and to blame all the manifestations of exclusion-bred despair on the asserted inferiority of the victims” (p. 71).

Participating superintendents shared examples of denied benefits and opportunities, particularly as they left their segregated communities and became a part of the desegregated world where they were limited in their ability to find jobs or enjoy the same authority their White counterparts had in the similar positions. In suggesting that she sometimes felt “like the problems started with desegregation,” Dr. Baker said, “I think some of us thought desegregation was going to give us something that it didn’t give us and . . . there were certain positions you didn’t get because you weren’t White.” And even once they got the positions, Black educators were often restricted in their ability to share and implement their vision for fear of being prevented from doing what they wanted to do. According to Dr. Marshall, “Black superintendents, many of them . . . didn’t have the same power base as White superintendents to make certain kinds of decisions,” such as “the authority to hire and control their situation as some of my White friends [did].”
White is Right

In addition to limitations on Black life, the notion of Whiteness as a property right reinforces the idea that White is better or that "White is right." This normativity of Whiteness possess the "ability to seem perspectiveless, or transparent" while all other "nonwhite" groups are "defined in terms of or in opposition to Whiteness—that which they are not" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 78, 80).

In his revolutionary work, The Miseducation of the Negro (1916), Carter G. Woodson suggested:

The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other people (p. xiii).

One of the interesting things that emerged among the participant responses was the value they placed on their schooling because it provided them with the "ability to compete with Whites." For example, Dr. Wells used Whiteness as the standard for intelligence and competence when she declared, "I always felt that I was as smart and capable as any White person." Dr. Clark commented that one of the first things she realized when she attended a predominately White institution was that "[Whites are] not smarter than anyone else." Similarly, Dr. Lewis regarded one of the benefits of desegregation was not merely being around White people, but having the chance "to get in a wider society and see that they are no superhuman beings." This conceptualization of Whiteness as the standard by which all others should be measured was captured in Dr. Steele’s comment
that “the day I will be ashamed of being Black is when I do something foolish and
disgrace everybody that looks like me. Then I don’t want to be Black ‘cause I don’t want
to bring that disgrace. But they ain’t going to let me be White.”

In examining the role of Whiteness as property, and its normativity as the standard by
which Others are measured, it is important to acknowledge the powerful role of
Whiteness, both historically and in the present. That examination must include how
Whiteness as a property right works to perpetuate systemic discrimination and
subordination within our educational institutions. As Harris (1995) explained:

Whiteness as property has carried and produced a heavy legacy . . . It has blinded
society to the systems of domination that work against so many by retaining an
unvarying focus on vestiges of systemic racialized privilege which subordinates those
perceived as a particularized few—the Others. It has thwarted not only conceptions of
racial justice but also conceptions of property which embrace more equitable
possibilities (p. 290).

Unfortunately, barriers to these equitable possibilities are also created and sustained by
what CRT scholars describe as the principle of interest convergence.


text

Interest Convergence

Pioneered by Derrick Bell, interest convergence, also referred to by CRT scholars as
material determinism, is the thesis that “the majority group tolerates advances for racial
justice only when it suits its interest to do so” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 149). Bell
(2004) identifies the Brown decision as a classic example of interest convergence at
Hopes for Racial Reform (2004), he questioned the motivation behind Brown and
described it not as a manifestation of the nation's desire to provide equal educational opportunities for Black students, but an anticommunist, foreign policy decision that was essential to improving America's image as a nation that purported the virtues of freedom, equality, and democracy for all its citizens. Despite what may be the perceived intent behind the Brown decision, the slow going "deliberate speed" by which the process of desegregation took place, when it did take place, was also limited by attempts to resegregate children within the desegregated schools. As Bell (2004) indicated:

Faced with the necessity of complying with school desegregation plans, school officials adopted plans that merged interest-convergence components with the willingness to sacrifice the interests of black parents and children by, in effect, maintaining important aspects of segregation within racially balanced schools (p. 123-4).

Study findings demonstrated several examples of this maintenance of segregation, or what Eyler, Cook, and Work's (1996) defined as resegregation, the "process by which students are separated into racially or ethnically isolated groups within desegregated schools." In Dr. Cooper's claim that "We've never truly integrated," she justified her observation by the fact that,

We mixed children . . . and even though they were in the same school, you would still see honors classes that looked one way and regular classes that looked differently. So I think the commitment has never been there truly to true integration.

She did mention, however, a school board for which she worked that made a genuine effort to facilitate integration, which impressed her because "they were aware that there
was the inclination for people who felt forced to go to school with people unlike themselves would find ways of being in the building, but never in the same classes."

More extreme examples of the utilization of interest convergence strategies illustrated how state, local, and school district officials implemented desegregation efforts only to the degree that Whites benefited through continued racial separation and/or additional funds and resources for White schools and students. In addition to recalling the prevalence of mixed schools that housed segregated classrooms within his local school district, Dr. Lewis recounted the tactics school officials employed to ensure the undersubscribed White schools were not closed as a result of the district's desegregation plan.

The Black schools, because of containment, were oversubscribed, so... they did what they call intact busing, which means when you get to the White school, you go to your own separate classroom, and you are segregated there. You have a separate recess where you're segregated there. You have a separate lunch where you're segregated there. Then you get on your bus and come back to [own neighborhood].

Although these isolated instances of maintaining the status quo may seem inconsequential to some, as Dr. Kenneth Clark noted, "It is difficult to understand that these attempts, busing, affirmative action, or devices, or words, or approaches, are used to disguise the continuation of American racism." Thus, the acts of resegregation within "desegregated" schools and intact busing can be interpreted as manifestations of deep-seated racism, which are able to persist under the noble banner of desegregation so long as the rights and desires of Blacks (ability to attend desegregated schools) align with the interests of Whites (ability to have White children not interact with Blacks).
This convergence of interests also supported the maintenance of desegregation plans, which ironically provided more money for schools, but either never reached the historically disadvantaged Black students they were designed to help, or was used to keep those very students out of the White schools. According to Dr. Lewis, the only individuals who benefited from his local district's desegregation plan were the students who were able to attend magnet schools, which received more funding, although they had an admissions process that allowed them to screen out applicants. Another issue he had with the desegregation plan was the inequitable funding formula applied to county [predominately White] districts versus city [predominately Black] districts.

County school districts got either one and a half or twice the ADA [average daily attendance] for every Black youngster accepted. If [city schools] were getting $5000 for a student, then the county would get either $7500 or $10,000 to accept that student. The problem was, [the school] then could spend that money on anything they wanted. So what happened? New buildings went up. Teacher salaries went up. But it didn't specifically go to the Black youngsters.

According to Dr. Lewis, it was also common for county school districts, which were predominately White, to pay city schools, which were predominately Black, "to accept their Black youngsters so they wouldn't have to teach them." In addition to this maneuvering at the local school district level, this particular Midwestern state chose to violate the constitution rather than to fund the federal mandate to desegregate its schools. Dr. Lewis explained, "In the beginning years, the federal government had to take funds out of the treasury because the [State] Legislature wouldn't appropriate the money."
This refusal by democratically elected officials to comply with laws designed to provide educational opportunities for all children, regardless of race, begs the question of whether or not desegregation is an appropriate goal for Black children, families, and communities, particularly when its benefits to historically marginalized students is questionable. According to Bell (1995),

The educational benefits that have resulted from the mandatory assignment of black and white children to the same schools are also debatable. If benefits did exist, they have begun to dissipate as whites flee in alarming numbers from school districts ordered to implement mandatory resassignment plans (p. 26).

Bell (2004) noted that “when districts finally admitted more than a token number of black students to previously white schools, the action usually resulted in closing black schools, dismissing black teachers, and demoting (and often degrading) black principals,” an observation that was also supported by superintendent narratives. (p. 124) Dr. Lewis stated matter-of-factly, “That’s the way it happens. When integration comes, whatever was Black . . . that gets closed.” He added:

Many of the professors who taught at [the teachers college for Blacks] had to then go back into the high schools. The president of [the teachers college for Blacks], Dr. Johnson . . . was given a central office do-nothing position and then someone with a Master’s degree, a [White] high school principal, was named president of [the newly desegregated teachers college].

This story not only illustrates the principle of interest convergence, but also how Whiteness was exercised as a property right for the individual who became president of the desegregated Teachers College. This account also debunks the myth of meritocracy
since the Black college administrator who was demoted to a central office position earned a doctorate, while the White high school principal only had a Master’s degree.

Dr. Baker remembered wondering what would happen once the Black and White school districts in her community would desegregate, “How would the Black district be treated? Who would surface at the top? And you know who surfaced – the Whites were in charge.” She also expressed her concern over whether or not with profession can recover from the significant loss of Black educators.

Frankly, there is a decline in the number of African Americans in administration. 

Decline in the number in the superintendency . . . We’ve got to find a way to train more Black teachers. Because some of our children, particularly in urban areas or anywhere, they’re not going to see a teacher that looks like them during their whole career.

Unfortunately, this considerable decline in Black teachers and administrators became what Tillman (2004) described as the “(un)intended consequence” of the Brown decision.

Speaking as a former civil rights attorney, Bell (2004) concluded,

[We] made some effort to stem the loss of black teachers and principals through litigation, but I am afraid our main emphasis was on desegregating the schools. In all too many cases, black faculty and administrators, along with the children they served, were secondary to our priority; desegregating the schools (p. 124-5).

Regarding the employment status of Blacks post desegregation, another area where we see the phenomenon of interest convergence at work is in the terms and conditions necessary before Blacks were considered for and hired for superintendent positions.

Moody’s (1971) seminal study on Black superintendents found that African American
were mainly assigned to areas with growing urban areas, increasing minority populations, and riddled with financial problems. Unfortunately, Dawkins (2004) reported similar more than three decades later, which was also confirmed by data collected in this study. According to Dr. Young, in 1981,

Unless you were going to an all Black school district, nobody offered you a job then. Nobody would offer you a job if you were not going to an all Black community where the economic base is gone, money is tough. You just, you know, there were not jobs for us. None.

Dr. Lewis observed, “Usually they don’t allow you to be a Black superintendent until the district is in disarray.” He discovered this seeming prerequisite firsthand in the school system he led where “infrastructure had just disintegrated” and “the board was fighting among itself.” In fact, he added, “there are some school districts . . . you know you need not apply.” He noted that all but one of the African American superintendents who lead districts in his particular state are responsible for systems that are majority Black. Dr. Steele summed it up best when he posed the question, “How many Black superintendents do you know who have been named superintendents of wealthy, thriving school districts?”

**Permanence of Racism**

*For my mom, it was a very sort of tense, awkward situation in the beginning. But I remember her talking about the two or three White teachers at the desegregated school the first year who befriended her. And I guess those, you know, are the people who believe in racial equality and integration. One of them became a good friend of hers. The principal, she said, didn’t speak to her, you know, sort of an older, rural, White man that had little to do with her. She taught kindergarten and first grade. She said, “It’s really interesting, you know, little kids don’t see color or differences except what I suppose they learn from parents.”*
And there was a situation where she said it was a little boy, who was in kindergarten, and it was the end of the school day, and he was waiting for his mother to pick him up... She said he came up to her and he was holding her hand and, you know, touching her and all. He said, "Just two of us here, you and me, and you a nigger." And so she said, "He didn't even understand what the word meant," cause he's hugging her while he's saying it (laughing). And so she said she knew at that point, the word was one he had learned from his parents, and it had no meaning for him beyond that.

So I asked her, "Did you say anything to anybody?" And she said, "No." It was just a revelation to her [about] how racism gets... happens in homes and families, and kids become victims of it even when they really don't know what the meaning is behind it. He clearly didn't know what a nigger was. He just knew the word (laughing). He's hugging her, and rubbing her, and talking about (laughing) "Yes, just two of us here, and you a nigger." (more laughter).

—Dr. Wells recounting her mother's experience as a Black teacher in a newly desegregated White elementary school.

According to one of CRT's founding fathers, Derrick Bell (1992), "racism is a permanent component of American life" (p. 13). Although some critics of CRT argue that this pessimistic view of race relations in American limits CRT's ability to offer viable solutions in solving America's race problems, it is important to acknowledge and understand this premise to effectively adopt a "racial realist" of our nation's systems and structure. Racial realists believe "racism is a means by which society allocates privilege and status" and that "racial hierarchies determine who gets tangible benefits, including the best jobs, the best schools, and invitations to parties in people's homes" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 17). Thus, racial realism asserts the discourse of racism should not be limited to "blatant acts of hate" or "broad generalizations about another group based on the color of their skin," (López, 2004, p. 69-70), but rather the ways in racism is systemically connected to the "distribution of jobs, power, prestige, and wealth" (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xiv).
Although study findings included numerous examples of individual acts of racism, stereotyping and discrimination, narrative data and emergent themes also revealed participant perceptions regarding the ways in which “racist hierarchical structures govern all political, economic, and social domains” (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 27) According to DeCuir and Dixson, “Such structures allocate the privileging of Whites and the subsequent Othering of people of color in all arenas, including education” (p. 27). Dr. Cooper commented, “Race is always going to be a factor in this country.” She argued that public schools are being used as “tools to craft a caste system” divided according to racial and socioeconomic lines, and described this as America’s “deep-seated” desire “to ensure the stratification of society."

According to Dr. Young, this social stratification along racial lines is no coincidence, based on his experience and observation of the realities in the schools. He explained, Class is a big part of it, but we’re not India, where it’s a caste system. We’re in America, and a lot of that is simply driven by race. And it’s man’s inhumanity towards man in its full magnificence. We always need to feel better than somebody, it seems, whether we do it through the caste system, in a place like India, or we do it through race and ethnicity . . . over here. I mean, it’s the same thing, you know, different ways of expressing the same thing.

Dr. Steele asserted that the America’s public school system is the perfect example of a sorting machine that is successful at doing what it was created to do, “sort and sift and put people in boxes.” However, he explains that the system must be transformed from one that relies on “strong backs and weak minds” to one that prepares students to use their intellect and creativity to compete on a global scale. Lopez (2003) argued that as
educational leaders, we have a duty to “transform schools from being sorting mechanisms in the larger global market—where people of color, women, and the disenfranchised are prepared to fit a particular role in society” (p. 71).

But how do people of color, women, and the disenfranchised resist these hierarchical systems and structures in public education that support and recreate the existing social order? Although Dr. Marshall described America’s “dealing with racial issues and categorizing people” as “boring,” “ineffective,” and “costly,” it is still very much an actuality for this nation’s Black population. Recognizing that pervasive racism is part of a Black person’s reality requires coping skills, which also emerged among the study’s findings. Participants spoke about the need for Black children to know and understand how to deal with the realities of racism. Dr. Clark remembered her parents teaching her “things you have to know and what you have to do to get through” as a Black person in a White-dominated world. She also emphasized the importance of Black kids attaining these coping skills today and having individuals “who can help them to cope . . . and learn about not reacting.” As Dr. Baker concluded, racism is “somebody else’s problem,” but it’s “your reality.” She explained, “You can’t change it no matter what you would want.”
CHAPTER 7

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS: TOWARD A

POLITICAL RACE DISCOURSE IN EDUCATION

“Our society is in desperate need of rejuvenating itself, in need of resistance, of positive and constructive social policies. Our schools, our neighborhoods, our society as a whole must be mobilized. We cannot be apologetic about freeing ourselves from this damage which is being done to our children and to the very fabric of our society.”

- Dr. Kenneth Clark, 1995, Keynote Address, Brown v. Board of Education: Housing and Education in the Year 2000

School desegregation continues to be a complex issue in the field of education, and my curiosity surrounding the Brown decision and efforts to create racial balance in schools led me to a dissertation study that has also served as a personal journey. My attempt to critically reflect on how desegregation policies impacted my schooling and personal development compelled me to discover how those before me experienced schooling in the era of segregation. I began to ask my father, grandmother, aunts, friends, and members of my local community, who attended segregated Black schools, to describe their classrooms, teachers, and community prior to desegregation. I became fascinated and intrigued with the fondness of their memories and how strikingly different their experiences seemed to be from those of so many Black children today.
My interest in these stories and perspectives served as the genesis for this research, and was influenced greatly by my standpoint as a Black woman and mother of two young boys, one of whom has just begun to navigate the public education system. Unfortunately, this very system has been criticized for its inability to provide a quality education to its students, especially African American children, and although desegregation and school choice policies have been heralded as ways to improve Black student achievement, the evidence is still debatable and lacking.

In this chapter, I reflect on my own standpoint and role as a researcher, why I chose to study this topic, and what I learned from it. I begin with a review of the purpose and design of the study followed by a summary of key assumptions, findings, and understandings. Next, I present the implications of my findings, which include suggested contributions to theory and practice, as well as policy and future research. Finally, I conclude this study with a personal reflection on how the rich narratives from the past have shaped my hope for the future.

Assumptions, Findings, and New Understandings

This research developed as a result of my interest in desegregation policy, school choice, and Black student achievement. As the researcher and human instrument used to collect data in this study, I carried with me my standpoint as a Black woman, my experiences as a Black student, and my assumptions about the implications of school desegregation on Black students, families, and communities. Coupled with my review of related research and literature, three key assumptions directed the creation of my research questions, and ultimately, the findings reported in this study.
Value in the Standpoint and Lived Experiences of Black Superintendents

The findings of this study were presented according to participant standpoints and lived experiences in segregated schools and their reflections and perspectives on the implications of desegregation policy. My decision to conduct a qualitative study utilizing standpoint theory as a framework was based on my assumption that standpoints, whether based on race, class, gender, or even profession, have inherent value, and can support, enhance, or disrupt our understanding of “the everyday world” (Smith, 1987). Although I do not presume that certain groups of individuals can or should be essentialized according to their shared race, class, gender, or profession, I do believe that collective experiences of privilege, oppression, celebration, and suffering are important to increasing our awareness and understanding of how differently the world may appear depending on where you stand.

My assumption in the value of standpoints and lived experiences were supported by my findings, which suggest the need to interrogate mainstream notions that may not be grounded in the experiences of the very people about which the research claims to examine. For example, individuals who never attended segregated Black schools produce much of the literature that speaks to the inferior education offered in these schools prior to desegregation. I don’t dispute the authenticity of these observations, as I never attended a segregated Black school myself. However, the findings of this particular study countered the widely accepted notions of the inferiority of all Black schools, lack of qualifications of Black teachers during segregation, and the low self-concept of Black students who were not allowed to attend all White schools.
In fact, participant reflections of their lived experiences in segregated schools supported existing historical accounts and frameworks for African American education and educational leadership (Anderson, 1988; Foster, 2005; Hale-Benson, 1986; Irvine, 1990; King, 2005; Lomotey, 1990; Murtadha & Watts, 2005; Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000; Ratterey, 1990; Scott, 1980; Shujaa, 1994; Walker, 1996; Walker 2003; Walker 2005), such as the notions of institutional and interpersonal caring (Walker & Archung, 2003), the communal nature of learning (Gadsden, 1994), and culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Lee, 1994). The findings also challenged the prevailing notion that the Brown decision and resulting school desegregation plans are an effective way to promote racial justice and ensure all students have access to a quality education.

Relationship between Racial Standpoint and Views on Race-Conscious Policies

My second assumption was that there would be a strong correlation between an individual’s racial standpoint and their opinions on race-conscious policies. I based this presumption on my review of literature that revealed a seeming disconnect between supporters and critics of school desegregation and choice plans. For example, the hope and optimism that many Black Americans embraced in reaction to the Brown decision has faded, only to be replaced by “mixed feelings” that acknowledge both the progress that has been made through the courts, as well as the political and community resistance that continues to defer the dream of racial equality and integration.

The perceived benefits and consequences of desegregation have fueled a debate among scholars that appears to be divided along the lines of political philosophies, research traditions, and racial standpoints. Generally speaking, several White scholars...
with an orientation toward civil and equal rights have been strong advocates for integration and diversity (Kozol, 2005; Orfield & Eaton, 1996; Wells, 2002,) while Black, critical theorists and historians have begun to examine more closely the case for desegregation and its implications for Black children, families, and communities (Ladson-Billings, 1999, 2000, 2006; Shujaa, 1994, 1996; Tillman, 2004; Walker, 1996, 2003, 2005).

Although both groups claim to support efforts toward social justice and racial equality, the frameworks they utilize to examine and interpret the effects of desegregation policy, as well as their preferred strategies for pursuing this quest for racial justice and equality, are strikingly different. What accounts for this distinct difference of opinion on matters of race-conscious education policy among individuals who appear to have the same end goal in mind? How were these opinions formed and authenticated? And most importantly, which group is right? These are just some of the burning questions that emerged for me throughout the development of this research, and would be interesting questions to explore in future studies.

Reflections and Perspectives on Desegregation Policy: The Counternarrative

The third and final assumption I held during the conception of this study was the notion that the data gathered and analyzed from the participating superintendents would result in a collection of narratives that could potentially expand our understanding of why the promise of Brown remains unfulfilled. Further, I believed that race and racism would play a role within these stories, which is why I selected critical race theory as a methodological and interpretive framework for the study.
Study findings supported this assumption and furthered the case for the need to center race and racism in the discourse of desegregation and other race-conscious education policies. More specifically, three themes emerged as counternarratives to the commonly held assumptions that Black schools must be diversified, that desegregation was a solution to many of the challenges facing Black students, and that after enjoying a period of integration, schools are now resegregated. In contrast, and in the words of the participating superintendents, I identified three statements that crystallized three distinct perceptions that were striking in their contrast to the mainstream desegregation literature: (1) "There is nothing wrong with something being all Black," (2) Sometimes you feel like the problems began with desegregation," and (3) "We've never truly integrated."

New Understandings

Although Orfield (1996) argued that "the memory of good Black schools is not entirely inaccurate, but ... obscures the substantial educational gains of Blacks in the desegregation era," it is important to interrogate whether or not these perceived gains outweigh the costs suffered by Black students, families, and communities (p. 84). The findings of this study seem to disrupt Orfield’s perception of “substantial educational gains” in light of the subsequent closure of Black schools; loss of Black educators; and overrepresentation of Black students in low-ability tracks, special education programs, and behavioral schools. Ironically, the suffering of the very sense of inferiority and diminished self-concept among Black students the Brown decision sought to remedy, are significant considerations that must be made during any discussion concerning the possible benefits of desegregation.
While some may argue that desegregation efforts that do not result in integration may seem like a step back to “separate but equal,” Bell (1995) observed that “some Black educators, however, see major educational benefits in schools where Black children, parents, and teachers can utilize the real cultural strengths of the Black community to overcome the many barriers to educational achievement” (p. 26). Thus, the arguably unintended downsides of desegregation policy, coupled with the Black community’s obligation to bear the burden of integrating oftentimes hostile all-White schools, illustrates the duplicitous nature of school desegregation policy as it relates to Black students, families, and communities. Bell (2004) recalled an old Black woman, who when asked her opinion concerning the country’s public schools sadly replied, “We got what we fought for, but we lost what we had” (p. 125).

Review of the Methodology

As indicated earlier, the aim of this qualitative study was to document and explore the lived experiences of Black school superintendents concerning desegregation policy, public school choice, and its perceived impact on the education of Black children. The questions that served as a heuristic to guide the research were: (1) How do the standpoint and lived experiences of Black school superintendents before, during, and after desegregation influence their perspectives on Black student achievement?; (2) In what ways can the standpoint, lived experiences, and perspectives of Black superintendents provide insight to Black families concerning school choice and achievement?; (3) In what ways do the lived experiences of school desegregation provide insight for how Black educators and families respond to school choice policy and policies designed to improve
Black student achievement?; and (4) How should the next generation of Black educators and community leaders move forward to improve Black student achievement?

 Interviews, Counterstories, and the Reflexive Journal

 It was important both conceptually and methodologically to ground this study with participant reflections on segregated schooling and desegregation policy. Despite the extensive literature that exists concerning the virtues and challenges of desegregation efforts for Black students, the narratives and shared realities of Black educators who have personally and professionally experienced the significant strides and unfulfilled promises of desegregation are absent. For this reason, I used network and purposeful sampling to select eight participants who had retired from the superintendency, were self-identified as Black or African American, and could recall personal experiences as K-12 students attending all Black segregated schools and desegregation as either students or educators. I captured their stories and responses through audio-recorded, in-person, semi-structured interviews that lasted between 1 to 2 and one-half hours, and analyzed this data using standpoint theory and critical race theory.

 Despite my nervousness in preparing to meet and interview the selected participants, based on their expertise, reputations, and extensive accomplishments, I immediately felt comfortable and connected to all but one interviewee, as soon as the conversation began. I struggled a bit with one interview, where the individual seemed somewhat skeptical or unsure of my intent and the direction of my research, but in every other case, I was put at ease by the participant's eagerness to share their personal stories and thoughts in such a relaxed and informal manner. When I thanked each respondent for her or his willingness to participate in the study, several commented that they always tried to take the
opportunity to help and support the next generation of African Americans, just as someone had helped them get where they are today.

My esteem for these superintendents and appreciation for their time and honesty contributed greatly to my desire to ensure their stories and perceptions were portrayed accurately and respectfully. I grappled with the discomfort of allowing someone who didn’t identify with the Black standpoint transcribe the audio recordings, and ended up transcribing four of the interviews that I found to be especially personal and honest regarding matters of race and racism myself. The richness of the responses and narratives collected resulted in more than 150 pages of transcribed data, which led to many side trips and interesting distractions. Nevertheless, critical race theory provided a methodology and framework that helped me to collect and examine the data systematically.

I utilized critical race methodology to give voice and meaning to the complex issues of race and racism in education and identify counterstories that moved beyond the traditional assumptions and objective truths commonly found in the desegregation literature. In spite of the increasing reach of CRT in education, important discussions centered on race and racism in education are still missing from the fields of educational leadership, administration, and policy (López, 2003; Rusch, 2004). Therefore, I sought to give voice to Black school superintendents by constructing narratives and counternarratives that aimed to provide context, awareness, and insight to stakeholders who are interested in better understanding the implications of desegregation policy for Black students, and all students who have and continue to be discriminated against as a
result of racism. I also maintained a reflexive journal to minimize my potential bias and persistently confront my role as the research instrument.

Limitations of Methodology

While collecting and analyzing my data, I discovered rather quickly that my guiding questions were much too broad. I believe this was because I underestimated the depth and richness of the responses, reflections, and narratives that would be amassed from the eight study participants regarding their segregated schooling experiences and thoughts on desegregation alone. My proposed research purpose and questions included exploring a link between the issues of desegregation and school choice. As the interviews progressed, I found that the interviewee’s responses to questions about choice and desegregation were varied and short on depth. I often wondered if my interview protocol included the right questions. As I reviewed the data and struggled to answer the question on choice and desegregation, I came to the conclusion that the assumptions that guided my third research question were flawed or premature.

Although there are several books and studies that explore the various intersections between school choice, racial segregation, resegregation, and Black student achievement (Bell, 2004; Bush, 2004; Chavous, 2004; Du Bois, 1935; Fuller, Elmore & Orfield, 1996; King, 2004; Mickelson, 2005; Rofes & Stulberg, 2005; Scott, 2005; Shujaa, 1996; Wells, 1993; Wells, Holme, Lopez, & Cooper, 2003), I felt it was important to focus this work on the rich narratives and perspectives of the participating Black superintendents as they related to school segregation and desegregation before attempting to analyze how these experiences informed their thoughts on school choice.
Implications

"The hierarchy of power that is most effective in separating potential allies in the United States is race . . . Race reveals the distributional inequities within our various social institutions . . . but race can be more than a diagnostic tool. Relegated to the margins of society, communities of color can find there a ‘free space’ from which they can critique established hierarchies and creatively imagine a new way” (Guinier & Torres, 2002, p. 130).

This study contributes to the existing knowledge base concerning Black education and desegregation plans and policies by utilizing “voices of color” to document and explore the counterstories of former Black superintendents who attended segregated schools and witnessed firsthand the complex legacy of school desegregation. It also gives voice to the missing perspective of the Black school superintendent, which offers significant insight into the salience of racism in education, and their thoughts on how Black parents, educators, and communities can mobilize to support the academic achievement and life chances of Black students, which in turn benefits all children. The findings revealed how the use of storytelling and race-based methodologies can enhance the way we frame and understand Black education within the context of race and racism, equipping both educational researchers and leaders with the tools needed to better understand and serve the next generation of Black students.

The research also reveals how racial standpoints and lived experiences shape individual perspectives concerning desegregation, thus demonstrating the need to center race and racism within the discourse of desegregation and other race-conscious education policies. The findings from this study are open to multiple interpretations that lead to varying implications, depending on the standpoint of the reader. To support my personal and professional commitment to carry out the moral activist role of critical race
scholarship (Ladson-Billings & Donner, 2005), I am focusing on implications for theory, practice, policy and future research.

Implications for Theory

Analyzing and interpreting the study findings through a critical race theoretical framework provided significant insight into how the role of race and racism limit the ability of desegregation policy to be used a tool for racial justice. As recommended by DeCuir and Dixson (2004), I elected to focus on aspects of critical race theory in this research that have not been utilized as extensively as counterstorytelling and the permanence of racism in the field of education. By employing all five tenets of CRT in my data analysis, I was able to identify and better understand why the promise of *Brown* remains unfulfilled, particularly when I engaged in a closer examination of the relationship between desegregation policy and the principle of interest convergence.

Although interest convergence may seem like a viable political strategy for oppressed groups who desire to further their interests by aligning them with those of the dominant group, its potential is limited by the reality that “the interests of the majority group tolerates advances for racial justice only when it suits its interest to do so” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). It would, however, be interesting to theorize how interest convergence components could inform the manner in which communities of color propose and initiate efforts designed to ensure equitable educational access and outcomes for their students. For example, the development and support of independent Black institutions or ethnocentric charter schools could possibly gain support from policymakers and politicians from the dominant group who promote a school choice agenda. But at the same time, communities of color must accept the reality that according to the principle of
interest convergence, their needs and desires are contingent upon the interests of those who control institutional systems of power and privilege.

Since racism is pervasive and likely permanent, Whiteness remains a property right, and color-blindness, neutrality of the law, and meritocracy remain distant realities, it is important and necessary to center and utilize race as a way to resist the notions of power and privilege that are unwittingly and wittingly used to damage the self-concept of Black students, suppress the expectations of their abilities, and further the assumption that Blackness is inherently deficient, lacking, or incapable. Based on these realities, coupled with the salience of racism in educational systems and institutions, I recommend the move toward theorizing a political race discourse in education. This step challenges and furthers critical race studies by emphasizing the need to turn theory into practice in a way that serves the very communities that CRT is intended to uplift and empower.

In their book, *Miner’s Canary: Enlisting Race to Transform Democracy* (2004), legal scholars Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres introduce the concept of *political race*, which they define as a framework that looks “to the places where race, politics, culture and economics intersect. Political race is not something you are; it’s something you do” (p. 107). Although they settled on the term political race, which they acknowledged as “subject to ambiguity,” it represents the concept they initially coined as *political blackness*. They explain, “while we moved to the more inclusive nomenclature of political race, blackness—and the experience of black people—is nevertheless at the heart of our argument” (p. 14).

In building upon this conceptualization of political race, a political race project is an attempt to transform the discourse about race by identifying power relationships in light
of America’s history as it relates to race and politics (Guinier & Torres, 2002). As a “multi-step progression from race consciousness through social justice critique to democratic experimentation,” a political race project: (1) recognizes, as an asset, the potential solidarity and connection that those who have been raced often experience, (2) articulates a broader social justice agenda that includes discovering “how the construction and uses of race have historically operated to prevent authentic and strategic linkages between communities that have more in common that is normally supposed,” and (3) demonstrates a willingness to experiment with new democratic practices (p. 95-6).

Based on the findings of this study, and what appears to be (to use Derrick Bell’s words) an “elusive quest for racial justice” in education, I believe a political race discourse that helps to conceptualize a grass-roots political race project would help communities of color identify strategies that would reclaim agency to parents, restore advocacy for students, and represent the activism that is required and expected of critical race scholarship. Conceptualizing and operationalizing this notion of political race in education can create opportunities for parents, schools, and communities who feel powerless and disenfranchised, to engage in conversations designed to identify and develop strategies that will improve educational access and outcomes for their children.

Guinier and Torres (2002) argue for “a more populist response to hierarchies of power” and suggest individuals representing communities of color lead this agenda for social justice. More specifically, they advocate the following:

A coalition that explicitly starts first with race and then moves to class and gender while never losing sight of race. For a progressive cross-racial coalition to emerge, whites need to engage with race, and blacks need to engage with a more inclusive
vision of social justice. Both types of engagement require a different understanding of the meaning of race and its relationships to power (p. 31).

They assert that the powerless can resist domination and oppression through “collective acts of resistance” and “through struggle can create symbols and narratives that justify and support the vitality of their efforts. One way to resist power-over is to lay its narrative bare” (p. 141).

Implications for Practice

The notion of resisting power-over by laying its narrative bare is a powerful concept that I believe should be applied in the practice of preparing and developing educational leaders. As López (2003) stated,

"We have a duty to transform schools from being sorting mechanisms in the larger global market. . . However, we cannot adequately prepare future leaders to achieve these goals if we avoid exposing them to issues of race, racism, and racial politics and demonstrate to them how these issues still permeate the educational landscape (Parker & Shapiro)." (p. 71)

The use of counternarratives and voices of color in educational leadership courses and programs can create new opportunities to facilitate and foster discussions of race, culture, and politics in education. Several of the findings in this study provide great examples for how counterstorytelling, grounded in the experiences of people of color, may prove to be a powerful tool used to promote and provoke reaction, response, and reflections that can lead to different ways of understanding and meaning-making. These accounts can provide insight to future educational leaders that will better prepare them to work with students and communities of color.
However, it is important that the use of these counternarratives be shared within the context of larger race-based methodologies, which "arise because existing theoretical models and methodological discussions are insufficient to explain the complexity of racialized histories, lives, and communities" (Pillow, 2001, p. 186). Thus, educational researchers and leaders must actively challenge and critically assess the traditional, mainstream methodologies and epistemologies used in education research to better determine the aims and goals of our research and practice. According to Pillow (2001), "such absence of engagement allows and perpetuates a categorization of race-based research work as simply identity work, standpoint theories, or counterstances" (p. 183). She added that race-based methodologies "offer a larger a critique of the epistemological and methodological foundations of social science research, i.e., a powerful critique that is of considerable significance to all researchers" (Pillow, 2001, p. 183).

Exposing aspiring educational leaders to alternative ways of living, knowing, and understanding, as uniquely experienced by individuals who are similarly raced or racialized, better prepares these students to lead in diverse schools and communities. According to Rusch (2004), "Respected leaders in the profession suggest that faculty hold some responsibility for children’s academic failure because we ill-prepare aspiring administrators to work in diverse and dynamic communities (Bjork & Ginsberg, 1995)” (p. 16). When the findings of a nationwide study of educational leadership faculty revealed minimal discourse related to race, Rusch (2004) asserted, "If educational leadership faculty members wish to keep the idea of a dynamic democracy going, we must couple our privilege to know with the responsibility to learn” (p. 43). This requires the willingness and ability of teachers and educational leaders to learn and demonstrate
what participant Dr. Clark described as the skill of identifying and developing the potential of the Black student. Perhaps laying bare the narrative of White privilege, coupled with exposure to counternarratives and race-based methodologies, will prepare future educational leaders to acknowledge and embrace this fundamental responsibility.

Implications for Policy

Voluntary desegregation plan and programs that are currently operating in school districts across America are faced with the possibility of being deemed unconstitutional, furthering the concerns of many about the dismantling of desegregation. As a result, the viability of desegregation policy and the conceptualization of race-conscious education policy are particularly relevant in light of the current cases from Seattle, Washington and Louisville, Kentucky pending before the U.S. Supreme Court, which challenge the use of race in school admissions policy, based on the notion of a “color-blind” constitution.

Although all desegregation plans, nor the implementation and administration of these plans, are not created equal, officials at the school district, local, and state levels will need to take a close look at whether or not their respective desegregation plans have led to the outcomes that were intended by Brown v. Board of Education. Have their plans realized the gains that were intended by Brown, or have they been subverted as a result of interest convergence components that have contributed to what I have described in this study as vestiges of desegregation? Moreover, will policymakers acknowledge the historical, social, and political context of desegregation efforts in order to avoid perpetuating the (un)intended consequences that Black communities, educators, and children have suffered and are still trying to overcome?
The research suggests that these questions and more like them should be presented to policymakers and those who influence policy, before blindly supporting race-based education efforts without critical reflection of how these policies have impacted the communities they were designed to serve in the past. Unfortunately, the solutions are not clear, but the discourse generated as a result of these questions may reveal opportunities to improve education policy created to benefit historically marginalized and disenfranchised students, the teachers who teach them, and the schools they attend.

Implications for Future Research

This qualitative study was in no way intended to establish the case for or against school desegregation or school choice. Rather, it was an attempt to document and explore the standpoints, experiences, and perspectives of eight, retired, Black school superintendents on issues of segregation, desegregation, school choice, and Black student achievement. Their unique responses and narratives, and the emergent themes presented in this study, are not to be generalized or even essentialized as the standpoint of all Black school superintendents. However, future research that examines the role of the racial standpoints of educational leaders, and how these vantage points help shape and develop their perceptions and opinions of desegregation policy and other race-based education policies, would serve as a great contribution to the field. Another area of inquiry that could benefit the field would be to identify how educational leaders of color, similar to those in this study, were/are able to successfully or unsuccessfully address the needs of underrepresented and/or marginalized students, despite the racial and social stratification that arguably exists within their places of work.
A provocative observation developed as I reviewed my reflexive journal. The observation centered on the process of me, a Black researcher, studying the thoughts, opinions, and narratives of individuals of the same race. I frequently mentioned perceived feelings of mutual trust, support, and comfort with the study participants, which I attributed to our shared racial identity and shared experiences based on that particular identity. I related strongly with one superintendent’s desire not to “do something foolish and disgrace everybody that looks like me” and wondered if this was only the case with individuals of underrepresented races or other non-dominant groups, such as women. Do members of White dominant culture ever worry about “embarrassing their race” or feel the burden of representing their entire race? What about White researchers who study members of their own race? Are they concerned or confronted with challenges to their objectivity and potential bias as a researcher based on the racial identity they share with their participants? Furthermore, in what way does the privilege of dominance influence or not influence the research process? These are just some of the questions that I believe would prove to be both insightful and provocative, particularly in the areas of qualitative inquiry and studies in education.

Finally, the use of critical race theory as a methodological and interpretive framework in studies that interrogate the intersections between race, policy, and politics in education are also important for expanding the scope of research that gives voice to “voices of color” and increases our awareness and understanding of racial standpoints distinctive from our own. As such, it would be interesting to replicate this study with participants that represent other communities of color, particularly Latino communities, whose
students are currently experiencing overwhelmingly high levels of segregation within many of our nation's public schools and school systems.

As indicated earlier, although this study sought to learn more about the connections between school choice, desegregation, and Black student achievement, the richness of the data collected did not lend itself to a sufficient analysis or discussion of participant views on school choice. However, future research that examines these relationships would greatly inform our understanding of the implications of school choice for communities of color, and the broader goal of racial justice.

Conclusion

The realities of racism are key to explaining the existence of the assumptions and perceptions that Blackness is inherently deficient, the implication of desegregation policy was, and continues to be, problematic, and that our nation’s public schools and school systems are still not integrated today. Although many scholars continue to argue and advocate for race-conscious education policies designed to promote integration, how valuable are these strategies when they are forced, contrived, and resisted by those who do not want their children to attend school with “other people’s children?” (Delpit, 1995).

African Americans and communities of color, in general, can no longer expect the system to be changed in favor of students of color by those who currently exercise the privilege and power over the policymaking, funding, and administration of these systems. We have witnessed for too long that the system is successful, and as Dr. Steele described, “doing exactly what it was intended to do,” that is sift and sort children according to their present situation and perceived future capabilities. There must be a grass-roots movement
developed, replicated, and supported at various levels to include students, parents, educators, school board members, and other policymakers that acknowledges the reality of racism and interrogates the vestiges of segregation and desegregation.

By enlisting race as a political tool, resisting the power that so easily besets communities of color, and mapping out a transformative agenda for social change in education, we can “free ourselves from the damage which has been to our children” and support them in their pursuit of a quality education.
AFTERWORD

This dissertation study was developed as a result of my interest in Black education and its current state of affairs within the larger context of public education in America. As indicated in the preface, the national media coverage, celebrations, and local community discussions held in recognition of the 50-year anniversary Brown v. Board of Education compelled me to learn more about this landmark decision, and why the promise of equal educational opportunities for all children, regardless of race, was seemingly unrealized more than 50 years later. I began to read more about Brown I, Brown II, the cases that led up to Brown, and the subsequent Supreme Court decisions that appeared to dismantle Brown. I then read books and articles on desegregation, resegregation, and racial separation in today’s public schools, or what Kozol (2005) referred to as “the restoration of apartheid schooling in America.”

Although I was troubled by the disheartening data that demonstrated how racially isolated so many of our nation’s schools were, I was further disturbed by the fact that the burden of desegregating schools always appeared to be placed on Blacks, although this is the very population that integration was historically intended to help. Furthermore, these desegregation plans and tactics have seemingly failed to curb the growing “Black-White achievement gap,” underachievement of the African American male; overrepresentation of Blacks in special education, behavioral programs, high-school drop-out counts; and the list goes on. As such, this complex of legacy of Brown, coupled with the current debate
surrounding race-conscious education policies, makes for interesting research papers and conversations, but these startling anecdotes and statistics mean so much more as they directly affect the everyday lives and the very future of Black children, families, and people across our nation. What are the options for a Black mother or father faced with these widely documented bleak prospects for her or his child’s education? What am I to do as a mother of Black children, when to use Lisa Delpit’s words and posit Katherine Richardson Bruna’s question, other people’s children happen to be my very own?

Although I am left with many of the same questions I had before I began this study, I do know that there is a need for a broader counternarrative for Black education, coupled with what the Commission on Research in Black Education (2005) describes as, “a transformative research and action agenda for the new century.” One that does not perpetuate a master narrative that uses “racially neutral” terms to identify Black children as “low-income,” “at-risk,” or “disadvantaged” and Black communities as “ghettos,” “projects,” and “poor neighborhoods” (King, 2005, p. xv). As Ladson-Billings (2005) noted, “There is no language of excellence, hope, and promise aimed at Black people and their circumstances.” She continued, “In those instances in which Black people excel we are quick to identify individuals as exceptions or suggest group excellence is not as significant as other fields of human endeavor” (p. xv).

It is my hope that the stories, interpretations, and new understandings reflected in the pages of this study contribute to a “language of excellence, hope, and promise” as it pertains to both the history and future of Black education in America. Perhaps it will help others to realize that these voices, experiences, and perspectives are not uncommon, just commonly unheard.
APPENDIX A

LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS
May 1, 2006

Superintendent Name
Mailing Address

Dear Superintendent,

I am conducting a dissertation study currently entitled *Perspectives of Black School Superintendents: On Desegregation, School Choice, and Black Student Achievement* in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree at University of Nevada, Las Vegas. I invite you to participate in this study and would greatly appreciate your contribution to this very important research project.

The purpose of my study is to explore the lived experiences of self-identified Black educators who have served as superintendents. I believe the narratives, oral histories, and experiential knowledge of Black superintendents will provide the wisdom and insight missing from the current discourse concerning the impacts of desegregation and school choice policy as it relates to Black student achievement.

Your participation will include submitting an autobiographical sketch of your personal and professional background and being interviewed in-person for approximately 90 minutes. A 5 to 15 minute follow-up phone conversation may be added if deemed necessary after the interview.

You may be vulnerable to someone’s determining who you are and what you’ve said, but I will protect you from this possibility as much as possible by using a pseudonym for your name and for the district you led. I will also give you a hard copy of the transcript of your interview so you can make any necessary changes.

This study will be shared with my dissertation committee and other appropriate members of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas community. The dissertation that results from this work will be published in hard copy and microfiche, which will be housed on the UNLV campus.

I greatly appreciate your giving time to this study, which will help inform the next generation of Black educators and scholars, such as myself, on the implications of these very important issues. I will follow-up this correspondence by telephone in the coming days. If you have questions in the meantime, please feel free to call me at (702) 555-1212 or e-mail me at shorsford@cox.net.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Sonya Douglass Horsford
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Educational Leadership
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT
INFORMED CONSENT

TITLE OF STUDY: Perspectives of Black School Superintendents: On Desegregation, School Choice, and Black Student Achievement

INVESTIGATOR/S: Sonya Douglass Horsford, Student Researcher; Dr. Edith Rusch, Faculty Advisor

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: (702) 555-1212

Purpose of the Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to describe and examine the lived experiences and perspectives of Black school superintendents concerning desegregation efforts, public school choice, and Black student achievement.

Participants
You are being asked to participate in this study because you have achieved the superintendency, are self-identified as Black, and can recall personal experiences as a K-12 student prior to and/or during desegregation, which have contributed to your current thoughts and perspectives on school desegregation, public school choice, and Black student achievement.

Procedures
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to answer questions presented in an in-depth one-on-one interview with me, the researcher. The interview will be audio taped and should only take 90 minutes to complete. You may also be asked to participate in a 5 to 15 minute follow-up phone conversation with me to clarify any information you provided in the first interview.

Benefits of Participation
There may be no direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. However, we hope to learn more about the best ways to view desegregation and school choice policy in order to improve educational outcomes for all students who may not be doing well under the current system.

Risks of Participation
Risks associated with participating in this study are minimal. It is possible you may become uncomfortable answering some of the questions asked. If so, you are encouraged to discuss this with me. I will explain the questions to you in more detail. Please note that all information gathered in this study will be strictly confidential.

Cost/Compensation
There will not be financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take about 2 hours of your time. You will not be compensated for you time.
INFORMED CONSENT

TITLE OF STUDY: Perspectives of Black School Superintendents: On Desegregation, School Choice, and Black Student Achievement
INVESTIGATOR/S: Sonya Douglass Horsford, Student Researcher; Dr. Edith Rusch, Faculty Advisor
CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: (702) 555-1212

Contact Information
If you have any questions about the study, you may contact me, Sonya Douglass Horsford, at (702) 555-1212. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, you may contact the UNLV Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at (702) 895-2794.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with the university. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Confidentiality
All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study without your prior permission. All records, including audio tapes, digital audio recordings, transcripts, and notes will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my home office. I am requesting your permission for the archival of these records at UNLV so they will be available as part of an historical record for future research and scholarship.

Participant Consent
I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Signature of Participant Date

Participant Consent to Audio Record (Signature)

Participant Name (Please Print)
APPENDIX C

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Interviewer: Sonya Douglass Horsford

Personal and Professional Information

1. Tell me about yourself. Where are you from originally? Where did you attend primary/secondary school? Where did you attend college? Where do you call home?

2. In terms of race, and identity, what does it mean to be Black? How do you define Blackness? At what point did you begin to identify yourself as “Black?”

3. When did you know you were going to be an educator? Why this field?

4. Tell me about your professional experience as an educator. A superintendent. What was your proudest moment? Most frustrating moment or aspect?

Lived Experience: Before and After Desegregation

5. Tell me about your memory of the Brown decision? How old were you and where were you attending school? Describe the climate of your community, the country as you remember it.

6. What did Brown mean or represent to you during this time? Your family? Your community?

7. What educational choices were available to you before Brown? After Brown?

8. In the context of Brown, what do you remember most about your own educational experience as a child?
   a. How did these experiences shape the person you are now?
   b. How did they shape you as an educator?

9. Upon reflection, and fifty years after Brown, what does the decision represent to you now? How does it influence your thoughts on desegregation?

Black Student Achievement and School Choice

10. Discuss the achievement/opportunity gap between black and white students? Why aren’t Black students performing at higher levels? Who’s to blame?

11. Does public school choice policy (e.g. magnets, charter schools, Afrocentric immersion schools.) help Black students?

12. What are the strengths of public school choice plans? The weaknesses?

13. If you had to craft a school choice plan, what would it look like?

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The Future of Public Education for Black Students

14. Where do you see the public school system headed in the next 5 years? 10 years?

15. “Today’s Black students have been given equal opportunities to quality education.” Do you agree with that statement?
   a. If so, what needs to happen for those opportunities to translate into successful outcomes?
   b. If not, how will they be able to access those opportunities?

16. Today, what advice would you give a Black parent with a student who is struggling academically or socially in a public school?

17. What advice would you give that student?

18. What advice would you give the next generation of Black superintendents who are committed to improving educational outcomes for Black students?

###
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Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).


*Virginia Pupil Placement Act of 1964*


VITA

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