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Amy Jo Samuels

*University of Montevallo*, [asamuels@montevallo.edu](mailto:asamuels@montevallo.edu)


Gregory L. Samuels

*University of Montevallo*, [gsamuels@montevallo.edu](mailto:gsamuels@montevallo.edu)

Brandon Haas

*Plymouth State University*, [bjhaas@plymouth.edu](mailto:bjhaas@plymouth.edu)

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## **The Revolution Will Be Live: Examining Educational (In)Justice through the Lens of Black Lives Matter**

**Amy Samuels**  
**University of Montevallo**

**Gregory Samuels**  
**University of Montevallo**

**Brandon Haas**  
**Plymouth State University**

**Abstract:** The article explores current sociopolitical implications of race through the lens of Black Lives Matter. In highlighting critical incidents in the movement and connecting to related events of historical significance, we establish parallels to emphasize the persistence of bias, race-based oppression, and injustice. The article focuses on established power structures and explores inequity, oppression, and sociopolitical contradictions by examining institutionalized racism. We emphasize how deficit perceptions, racist ideologies, and silence on racism are dangerous and must be challenged to foster action, advocacy, and change.

"Well, if one really wishes to know how justice is administered in a country, one does not question the policemen, the lawyers, the judges, or the protected members of the middle class.

One goes to the unprotected — those, precisely, who need the law's protection most! — and listens to their testimony. Ask any Mexican, any Puerto Rican, any black man, any poor person — ask the wretched how they fare in the halls of justice, and then you will know, not whether or not the country is just, but whether or not it has any love for justice, or any concept of it. It is certain, in any case, that ignorance, allied with power, is the most ferocious enemy justice can have." (Baldwin, 1972, p.149)

### **Introduction**

Sociopolitical issues of race are an undeniable component of the history and culture of the United States. The recent presidential election, particularly President Trump's response to the events in Charlottesville, and the movement inspired by Black Lives Matter, have brought these issues to the forefront of national discourse. Even though many attempt to minimize, redirect, or reverse the implications of racism, as Baldwin (1972) suggests, we must not look to the

privileged to confirm this reality, but rather, draw evidence related to historically (and currently) disenfranchised groups and listen to their experiences with systemic racism, racial inequality, and violence in order to evaluate the status of (in)justice. In this article, we explore the idea of Black Lives Matter, as both a movement and a critical question, and examine the role of systemic racism to argue the need for determined efforts to foster change and promote diversity, equity, and justice.

### **Do Black Lives Matter?**

Reflecting on the national context, it is important to critically examine who is valued, who is not; who is given voice, who is silenced; who is portrayed as an asset, who is portrayed as a liability; who is represented positively, and who is represented negatively. One must consider the messages sent to explore the question of whose lives matter. Although people are seemingly proud of the fundamental values related to freedom, liberty, justice, and equality for all, when considering the dominant narrative and examining what social norms and legal decisions suggest about the value of Black lives, a harsh contradiction is exposed.

Throughout the last four years, news stories have saturated media outlets and provided national voice regarding violence against Black Americans. Whether related to police violence or actions of private citizens, the result of many of these stories is the unnecessary death of yet another person of color.

Tracing back to 2012, Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old, was shot and killed when walking home after purchasing a snack from a local convenience store in Sanford, Florida. Although Trayvon was unarmed, he was perceived as a threat and someone to fear. Similarly, nearly sixty years earlier, in 1955, 14-year-old Emmett Till was also perceived as a threat and someone to fear when allegedly flirting with a White woman outside a grocery store in Money, Mississippi.

Consequently, he was terrorized and lynched. In connecting the tragic demise of these young men, we must consider the legacy and violence of White supremacy: essentially, both Trayvon Martin and Emmett Till were murdered as a result of White supremacy. They were both stalked, terrorized, and killed for being young Black men. It is also important to note that the courts were unable to bring justice to these young men and their families as the men responsible for their deaths were acquitted in the court of law and suffered no consequences. Just recently, the White woman who accused Emmett of flirtation, recanted her original story, admitting she exaggerated and lied in court regarding her interaction with Emmett Till (Perez-Pena, 2017).

Emmett's mother, Mamie Till-Bradley, is known for passionately speaking against her son's murder, publicly grieving, and demanding a call for action and responsibility. She declared:

Two months ago I had a nice apartment in Chicago. I had a good job. I had a son.

When something happened to the Negroes in the South I said, 'That's their business, not mine.' Now I know how wrong. I was. The murder of my son has shown me that what happens to any of us, anywhere in the world, had better be the business of all. (Till-Bradley, 1955 as cited in Hasday, 2007, p.34)

Considering how violence, injustice, and the victimization of communities of color persist six decades after Till's tragic murder, the legacy of racism and White supremacy in America must seriously be examined. If the deaths of Emmett Till and Trayvon Martin were isolated incidents, perhaps one could take into account the details of the events and minimize the role of race. However, while continued evidence mounts in relation to the tragic deaths of Black men – such as the murders of Tamir Rice, Walter Scott, Eric Garner, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Terence Crutcher, and countless others - it is undeniable that racial ideologies play an

influential role in perceptions of Black Americans, as well as the actions and consequences that transpire from those perceptions and biases. Evidence reveals, even with multiple witnesses, videos, and live social media footage, there is no legal justice for the men, their families, and their communities. Evidence suggests that what happens to *them* is not *the business of all*.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the National Association for the Advanced of Colored People (NAACP) hung the famous “a man was lynched yesterday” flag outside its New York City headquarters to increase awareness of the terror and murders of Black Americans in the south. Now, nearly 100 years later, a revision of the flag reading, “a man was lynched by police yesterday” is displayed outside the NAACP headquarters in New York City when an African American life is lost to police violence (Rogers, 2016). This message and the continued devaluing of human life inspires reflection on whose lives matter. Disruptive protests have drawn attention to the current crisis and heightened the conversation: however, it is critical to reflect on how to foster discourse on how institutions (mis)represent, (de)value, and (under)privilege. How does one engender change in the current context to create a climate and culture where Black Lives Matter? It is important to consider a holistic picture when reflecting on implications of race-related violence, victimization of communities of color, and deficit orientations since these notions impact nearly all economic, political, and social institutions. For example, how do the deeply-entrenched negative perceptions and biases impact educational institutions, access, and opportunities? How does one disrupt the rigid dichotomy of pervasive educational inequity and justice? Although protests and advocacy have resulted in a live, televised narrative of the current crisis and injustices, it is imperative to consider how disruptive discourse and calls for action can truly inspire and foster sustainable and revolutionary change.

## **A Society Without Racists**

“The paradox of the American Revolution-the fight for liberty in an era of widespread slavery- is embedded in the foundations of the United States. The tension between slavery and freedom-who belongs and who is excluded- resonates through the nation’s history and spurs the American people to wrestle constantly with building ‘a more perfect Union.’ This paradox was embedded in national institutions that are still vital today.” (National Museum of African American History and Culture, NMAAHC, 2016)

Race and “othering” remains as much a part of society today as ever. There is a prevalent myth that racism concluded with the Civil Rights Movement and death of Jim Crow, yet it prevails in a society “without racists” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). As such, it is important to consider that the institutions of race and White privilege remain highly visible in society for anyone who cares to see. White privilege has been around since colonial times (Jacobson, 1998) and seemingly withstands any signs of fading. Loewen (2006) contends that “even after it ended, slavery was responsible for the continuing stigmatization of African Americans” (p.138) evident through the Civil Rights Movement, policy laden with coded language, and mass incarceration.

In 1795, Blumenbach’s affirmation of the superiority of the Georgian (Caucasian) skull in his categorical collection was used to compare all others and established a pseudo-scientific support for a racial hierarchy. Therefore, along with sociocultural influences, science was also used to reinforce the establishment of a racial order. Consequently, racism was established and race was born. Coates (2015) argues that “race is the child of racism, not the father” (p.7), and has been around since well before the birth of the United States, but gained traction amidst the birth of the nation. Baldwin (1984) asserts that those responsible for perpetuating the racial hierarchy “have brought humanity to the edge of oblivion: because they think they are white” (p.3). Baldwin continues to demonstrate that “othering” is a central focus in the United States when highlighting that African Americans “were not Black before [they] got here either, who

were defined as Black by the slave trade and have paid for the crisis of leadership in the White community for a very long time” (n.p.). The authenticity in Baldwin’s words persists today. In the wake of multiple horrific deaths at the hands of police, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) student from Nigeria blogged about his experience in his country in comparison to the United States. Of his life in Nigeria, he said, “Because we’re mostly black, ‘being black’ was never a term that was part of my daily vocabulary” (Vincent, 2016, n.p). Yet this distinction based on race has been a part of the fabric of America since its inception. People’s beliefs that they are White or Black normalize the social construct of race (Baldwin, 1984; Coates, 2015; Smedley, 2007) that has stratified people throughout history.

Race and slavery were significant points of contention during the penning of the Declaration of Independence, as well as other political foundations. Thomas Jefferson inserted a section about slavery that was subsequently removed as to not bring attention to the hypocrisy of enslaving people in a new country founded on the basis of freedom, liberty, and justice (NMAAHC, 2016). The men of the Constitutional Convention of 1787 were tasked with defining the composition of the House of Representatives in the U.S. government. As a representative democracy, it was concluded that state representation would be based on population, a makeup that heavily favored the southern states given their populations of enslaved people. Therefore, an agreement, found in Article I Section II of the U.S. Constitution, reducing each enslaved Negro to three-fifths the value of a White man, was established. Consequently, the Three-Fifths Compromise effectively continued to forge the shackles by which Black men and women would be bound.

While the Declaration of Independence claims that “all men are created equal,” it undeniably did not intend to include those enslaved peoples who were taken from Africa, nor

their kin born in the U.S. In 1857, the Supreme Court officially affirmed this notion when it ruled against Dred Scott. In Chief Justice Roger Taney's opinion of the 7-2 decision, he concluded Africans and their descendants, free or not, were never intended to be considered citizens under the Constitution. Although this decision was nullified by the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments, such legislation failed to decisively put an end to the question of the racial hierarchy or the oppressive legacy of racism.

Black Codes enacted after the Civil War empowered southern states to continue to oppress African Americans by limiting access to courts, voting, and employment. Following Reconstruction, the era of Jim Crow permeated society through 1965. *Separate but equal*, established in 1890 and upheld in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), mandated *de jure* segregation of schools and facilities that became commonplace throughout the south. While discrimination of hiring practices and housing policies characterized *de facto* segregation in the north, it was not limited to these practices. The establishment of "sundown towns" began as an attempt to bar Black Americans from various towns nationwide and was far more common in the north (Loewen, 2006). *Brown v. Board of Education* successfully put an end to *separate but equal* in 1954, but implementation remained slow even after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965. Following the demise of Jim Crow, the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and the symbolic stance taken on the medal podium at the 1968 Summer Olympics by Tommie Smith and John Carlos, the question of civil rights came to its zenith amidst other social turmoil of 1968. Robert Kennedy's assassination and the heightened tension surrounding the war in Vietnam fueled the fire of social unrest in America. Victory in the decades-long struggle for justice and equality seemed to be at hand in the eyes of many Americans. However, a new era of oppression was only just beginning.



## Denying Racism is the New Racism

While sundown towns emerged during the reign of Jim Crow as an overt means of denying settlement to Black Americans (Loewen, 2006), they gave way to the slippery practice of maintaining the status quo by guiding people into specific neighborhoods and other social institutions. Bonilla-Silva (2006) characterizes this phenomenon as color blind racism: “color-blind racism explains it as the product of market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and presumed cultural deficiencies” (p.132). The normalization of segregation as “the way it is” can also be glimpsed in Bonilla-Silva’s (2006) description of Naturalization. In one instance, he provides an excerpt of a person in Detroit claiming people self-segregate based on choice and it is natural to be among people who look like you. The problem, however, lies in the lack of understanding the need for integration. People often fail to grasp the nature of economic and social inequality inherent to the United States, instead choosing to believe one’s position in life is due solely to the choices he or she makes, thereby normalizing segregation while maintaining that no underpinnings of race exist in this plight. Proponents of racial hierarchy had no intention of idly allowing the progress of the Civil Rights era to persevere and they would seek a new tactic for maintaining the established social order.

Coded language provided the means for the establishment to maintain White supremacy and privilege. The preservation of segregation hinged on a new approach under the guise of combating lawlessness. In *The New Jim Crow*, Alexander (2012) discusses the establishment of “a new racial caste system without violating the law or the new limits of acceptable political discourse, by demanding law and order” (p. 28). Coded language for racist actions initiated racial profiling as well as continued empowerment of those dedicated to the old order. Battle lines for this new war on crime were drawn, suspiciously, along the same divisions as those of

segregation and anti-civil rights (Alexander, 2012). Furthermore, Nixon's 1968 campaign was fueled by this agenda, and Kevin Phillips (1969) suggested that Republicans could benefit from a realignment driven by this coded language. These rhetorical devices would continue to play a role in the campaigns appealing to the "silent majority" and waging a "war on drugs." During the 2016 presidential campaign, Trump regularly referred to the silent majority, and publicly declared, "I am the law and order candidate" at a July 2016 rally following the shootings of police officers in Dallas (Wilkie, 2016), thereby making his position explicit. He made additional comments in July 2017, when he encouraged police officers to be rough with the people they arrest. Even in a time of heightened tensions between law enforcement and the public, particularly communities of color, Trump stated, "When you see these thugs being thrown into the back of a paddy wagon.... I said, 'Please don't be too nice.'"

### **Implicit Bias**

The National Center for State Courts (NCSC) (2012) describes implicit bias as "the bias in judgement and/or behavior that results from subtle cognitive processes that often operate at a level below conscious awareness and without intentional control" (p.1). The formation of implicit bias lies at the root of personal, social, and cultural experiences that stigmatize certain groups as inferior or fear-inducing (NCSC, 2012). The notion permeates society and media to the extent of normalization and transcends Black versus White; it is apparent in the privilege associated with lighter skin tones, also known as colorism. Colorism has been an issue since the days of slavery when mulattoes were privileged due to the lighter skin tone that resulted from a White father (Herring, Keith, & Horton, 2004). However, this notion persists today. A scan of famous Black American women typically yields a large number of celebrities who have lighter skin tones, such as Kerry Washington, Halle Berry, and Beyoncé Knowles, while former First

Lady Michelle Obama was frequently the target of racist attacks regarding her skin tone and facial features.

Colorism extends beyond celebrity success and is evident in society and media. Cartoonist Ronald Wimberly (2015) discussed this issue as it related to his job as a comic book illustrator. When depicting a character described as having a Mexican father and African-American mother, which informed his decision to make her skin tone brown, Wimberly received an editor's request to lighten it to a shade one would expect of a White character. Wimberly (2015) asserted that colorism phenomenon is not a random occurrence in his field and emphasized that people do not tend to have issues with characters whose appearances are colors such as blue, green, or translucent; only brown. Because we often do not stop to reflect on our reaction to color, it is easy to overlook the connection. For example, one might make a list of things that come to mind when she considers the color white, and then repeat the process for black. It is likely that for white, words such as clean, good, and angelic come to mind. For black, however, words such as dirty, evil, and death might come to mind. This process can be expanded to include various colors and gender norms may also become apparent. Colors such as pink and purple are associated with femininity, while blue and green are related to masculinity. The existence of this line of thinking is the result of constant messaging that implants itself in the subconscious. Unfortunately, implicit bias and colorism are experienced by most, often unbeknownst to them, including students and educators in schools across the country.

### **U.S. Educational Institutions**

#### **Silence on Race and Racism in Schools**

As Jackson (2007) argues, "The system of education as we know it was not designed with minority groups in mind" (p.2). A deafening silence regarding race and racism is pervasive

within educational institutions in both K-12 and higher education, and people “often minimize the chronic nature of the educational circumstance that African American students face” (Jackson, 2007, p.3). In classroom lessons, textbooks, media - even the Department of Education and Capitol Hill - these discussions are frequently silenced. One may pinpoint the family dinner table or community spaces as places of education and indoctrination where unnecessary filters become evident in discussing these important pieces of national identity, but the reality is the narrative of White supremacy has endured because we have not done a good job confronting the corresponding evils and the consequences of racial inequality.

The aforementioned NCSC (2012) summary fails to explore this silence and discuss implications of implicit bias in education. The historical overview demonstrates what Apple (1995) refers to as “official knowledge.” Although the narrative of the United States is permeated with slavery, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights Movement, February remains Black History Month, addressing the need to incorporate Black history into American culture solely during this time. Even then, a clear majority of teachers do not extend beyond the commonly-referenced people and events that textbooks emphasize, and information is not covered in depth to challenge students’ preconceived notions about race or the racist legacy to which they have been subjected.

When learning about slavery, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow, students typically walk away with the erroneous notion that the North was a place of safety. Omission of content such as the existence and composition of sundown towns implicitly paints the picture of a safe-haven for Black Americans. The exclusion of this history allows untruths to go uncontested. Race, therefore, “has functioned as a metaphor necessary to the construction of American-ness,” which Toni Morrison (1992) argues has been defined as “White” (p. 92 as cited in Takaki, 2008, p.2).

King, Warren, Bender, and Finley (2016) emphasize, “when social studies teachers distance themselves from creating relevant material to Black students’ lives, they also distance themselves from allowing Black students to explore their own racial identities” (p. 97). Consequently, the null curriculum (Eisner, 1985) evidences implicit bias that encourages continued silence regarding the legacy and violence of White supremacy and exclusion of the contributions of Black Americans in both formal and informal curriculum.

During a CNN (2010) news segment, host Anderson Cooper spoke with then-Arizona-Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Horne regarding his support to ban the Ethnic Studies Program in the Tucson Unified School District. Justifying the ban on “La Raza Studies”, Horne (2010) stated:

It divides students up by race...one of the principle ideas of the American public school system is we bring kids together and we teach them to treat each other as individuals...and not what race was he born into...to treat each as individuals and not to infuse them with ethnic chauvinism about a particular race...and teach them narrowly just about the background and culture of the race they happen to be born into, but to teach them about all different cultures and different races and different traditions and not divide them up by race. I think that’s really backwards.

This colorblind notion of curricular design illustrates a top-down approach to erase students’ identities. Unfortunately, this framework is not solely embraced in Arizona, but rather, it is perpetuated by policymakers and administrators throughout the United States.

Superintendent Horne and other policymakers seemed to perceive race and ethnic studies as a threat to the dominant narrative and were unwilling to accept counter narratives, regardless of their role in history. As Pitts (2016) asserts, “Students pay attention to everything we say and do.

They particularly pay attention to our silence” (p. 47). She addresses the notion of educators’ strategic silence in moments of racial tension or violence by explaining that students are explicitly reminded of their inferior place in society when their stories are silenced in the classroom. Consequently, if educational stakeholders remain closed-minded, silent on topics of race, racial-consciousness, and culturally-relevant curriculum, and refuse to embrace counter narratives, students and their families will continue to suffer from an incomplete story, a story missing the voice of our most valuable constituents. Therefore, educators must consider what their silence is saying when discussions of race and racism are not promoted, discouraged, redirected, or purposefully avoided in educational contexts.

Despite initiatives to promote more inclusive and representative curricula, hierarchical educational structures continue to influence education that lacks representation of historically disenfranchised populations and diverse voices (Loewen, 2007; Takaki, 2008). Rather than continue to utilize a narrow lens, thus perpetuating indifference to the legacy of racism, as suggested by Horne (2010) and like-minded educational policymakers, *a different mirror* (Takaki, 2008) must be employed to facilitate a racially-inclusive ideology. However, prevailing classroom resources used by most educators continue to convey the story of America through the eyes of the White, Christian, heterosexual male (Loewen, 2007; Takaki, 2008). Furthermore, educators who ignore revisionist history are also reluctant to give voice to counter narratives inclusive of racial, sexual, or religious minorities beyond moments when something is done to them, versus when historically disenfranchised people achieve (Pitts, 2016). As a result, a deficit-based lens, as opposed to an assets-based approach, continues to be employed for historically marginalized people. Considering the current sociopolitical context, to minimize the school-to-prison nexus (Stovall, 2006), negate the current state of police violence against Black

males, and overlook the disturbing numbers and ultra-punitive mass incarceration (Alexander, 2012) is to both silence racism and permit racist ideology, White supremacy, and modern racism.

### **An Emancipatory Approach within Schools**

Modern schools should serve as sites for open discussion regarding (in)justice and encourage emancipatory learning about current-day issues in connection with history while simultaneously providing students a sense of agency. Contextualizing current events and modern issues is important, but best practices thrive in a school climate that embraces true multiculturalism and inclusivity, counters deficit approaches, and consistently identifies assets among diverse learners. As Jackson wisely questions, “Why then is it not a policy decision to require culturally competent teachers for our schools?” (2007, p.5).

Since consciousness of diversity is represented minimally in education (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Ndimande, 2004) we must attempt to counter the dominant narrative and the continued silencing of historically disenfranchised groups. It is through counter-ideals and counter-narratives, such as the Black Lives Matter movement, as well as other emancipatory practices in educational institutions where diverse stories of power, agency, active voice, and a relevant connection to the curriculum can be promoted.

Existing distortions of identity aligned with the omnipresent question surrounding recent violence against Black males lead us to wonder: Why are Black men feared in society? Is it because they have been historically disenfranchised, devalued in their humanity, and their stories have been excluded from the dominant narrative? Is it because the ideology of White supremacy has perpetuated multiple untruths, or perhaps due to a deeply-rooted sense of implicit bias which has been established as a collective response to these factors?

To counter these untruths and misperceptions, educators can employ a multicultural approach inclusive of various perspectives that contextualizes all populations more accurately.

This need for inclusiveness is captured in the reflections of Takaki (2008):

...what happens when historians do not ‘record’ their stories, leaving out many of America’s peoples? What happens to borrow the words of Adrienne Rich, ‘when someone with the authority of a teacher’ describes our society and ‘you are not in it’? Such an experience can be disorienting – ‘a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing.’ (p. 19)

Considering educational institutions as participants in the industrializing of U.S. schools, although policymakers and school leaders are not preordained to design systems that silence racialized voices or the influence of race on the quality of schooling, that silence is upheld. Moreover, even if they are not aware, classroom educators are often involved in the perpetuated silence that marginalizes people of color and overlooks their stories. Therefore, rather than exploring the complex story of America, a basic, uniform narrative is perpetuated that is incomplete and misleading. However, through advocacy, inclusive curricular design, and better preparation, educators can work to challenge the dominant narrative. They can promote curriculum and foster learning that: (a) values differences and commonalities between people; (b) highlights existing social injustice; and (c) encourages students to take action to positively advocate for justice and counter hegemonic practices (Lucey & Laney, 2009). As argued by King, Warren, Bender, and Finley (2016), “Black youth deserve a history that is culturally relevant and humanizing that reflects the multitude and complexity of Black identity and history” (p. 97). With such practices in place, educators can minimize the potential for schools to become institutions of social control, and racial ideology can become part of the discussion. By



legitimizing authentic efforts of emancipatory groups, exposing White privilege, and maximizing access and opportunities for diverse learners, schools can work to both disrupt and dismantle the school-to-prison nexus that has resulted in a most unfortunate connection between ineffective schooling and mass incarceration (Stovall, 2006).

### **The Danger of Resegregation in Schools**

As race continues to be silenced and racist ideologies perpetuated, re-segregation further underscores the deeply-rooted legacy of racism in educational contexts. As renowned educational activist Jonathan Kozol proclaims, “Among the many burning issues of concern to educators and educational ethicists during the past few years, none appears to provoke more heated controversy than the devastating backswing of our urban public schools to racial resegregation at a level of intensity the nation has not seen in decades” (2007, para. 1).

Subsequently, to think about schools as spaces that promote diversity and places for students to share stories and experiences, exchange ideas, and nurture meaningful relationships with peers in inclusive environments, is a seemingly unrecognizable concept for many. Despite the judicial successes of the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) desegregation policies, contrary to what many families in homogenous suburban communities would like to espouse, not all school boundaries are created equal. Conflicting with misconceptions of the *all deliberate speed* of desegregation, there was a necessity for a second *Brown v. Board of Education* trial (1955), citywide busing, and the continued racial tracking still evident today in some school systems. Darling-Hammond (2010) emphasizes, “by 1964, fully a decade later, 98% of African American students in Southern schools were still enrolled in all-Black schools, and over 70% of Black students in the North were still enrolled in predominantly minority schools.” (p. 35). Orfield and Lee (2007) report “that racism in education remains a significant problem and that segregation

has reasserted itself with a vengeance over the last decade (p. 1). Consequently, there remain many inherent tangible and intangible challenges in educational systems that have proven oppressive, disadvantageous, and even fatal for some Black youth.

Throughout Jim Crow, Blacks were subject to second-class citizenship in most areas of life. Subsequent to the *Emancipation Proclamation* (1863), a new kind of oppression emerged, with the revived efforts of the Ku Klux Klan, *de jure* segregation in the south, and *de facto* segregation in the north. Despite popular belief, both *de jure* and *de facto* segregation resulted in discriminatory and oppressive practices, especially in education. Schools in existence after the *Brown v. Board* cases would no longer be segregated by law, but, consequently, by neighborhood and racially-homogenous communities. Alexander (2012) connects the modern era of mass incarceration of Black Americans to the experience of Black citizens during Jim Crow, many of whom fell victim to social control. She states, “Through a web of laws, regulations, and informal rules, all of which are powerfully reinforced by social stigma, they are confined to the margins of mainstream society and denied access to the mainstream economy.” She continues to highlight the inability to gain “employment, housing, and public benefits” (p. 4). Alexander (2012) parallels mass incarceration as a form of social control: Americans witnessing the continued re-segregation of schools today can draw a similar comparison.

Since there have been few policy initiatives aimed at cultivating desegregation in the past thirty years (Orfield & Lee, 2004, 2007; Kozol, 2007), desegregation efforts have been largely abandoned. As a result, some schools that were succeeding at the desegregation process are starting to become increasingly re-segregated. In fact, schools today are just as segregated, even more so in some cases, than they were in the 1960s. The Census Bureau suggests that by 2050, approximately 60 percent of people under eighteen will be non-White; however, many White

students still have little contact with students of color, and schools continue to be overwhelmingly segregated spaces (Orfield & Lee, 2004, 2007; Kozol, 2007). On average, White students attend schools at which 80 percent of the students are also White. Conversely, Latino and Black students attend schools where only approximately thirty percent of the students are White (Dunn & West, 2009; Orfield & Lee, 2004). Even though suburban populations are approximately 25 percent minority and high numbers of Black and Latino students are relocating to suburban areas, they often move into racially segregated schools (Orfield, Frankenberg & Lee, 2003).

As a result of the “profound inequalities in resource allocations to schools” (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 35), re-segregated schools are comprised primarily of students of color and are often less academically rigorous, provide less peer support and competition, and employ fewer qualified teachers, in addition to other inequitable educational resources that result in large gaps compared to their White counterparts (Kozol, 2006). Considering these disparities, students are often disadvantaged by the less rigorous curriculum of schools with lower graduation rates and decreased opportunities to enroll in higher education, in which they are closely monitored and measured (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Kozol, 2006). As we bear witness to school re-segregation during the post-millennial era, decreased resources and other byproducts that negatively impact academic success and quality of life must be considered. It is also critical to explore how mortality rates of Black males in those systems of social control are impacted.

In a podcast of *This American Life*, Hannah-Jones (2015) provides a narrative surrounding the modern-day legacy of segregation in Ferguson, Missouri, and the life-threatening concerns related to such inequity. She provides an emotional account from Leslie McSpadden, mother of recently slain Black teenager Michael Brown:

**Leslie McSpadden:** This was wrong, and that was cold-hearted.

**Nikole Hannah-Jones:** She's standing in a crowd of onlookers, a few feet from where her son was shot down, where he would lie face down on the concrete for four hours, dead. And this is what she says.

**Leslie McSpadden:** You took my son away from me. You know how hard it was for me to get him to stay in school and graduate? You know how many Black men graduate? Not many!

**Nikole Hannah-Jones:** I watched this over and over. A police officer has just killed her oldest child. It has to be the worst moment of her life, but of all the ways she could have expressed her grief and outrage, this is what was on her mind-- school, getting her son through school.

Reflecting on Michael Brown's victimization and demise in conjunction with the current crisis of police violence, Hannah-Jones probed into Michael's educational background and discovered his situation was symbolic of something much more common. She stated, "Most Black kids will not be shot by the police, but many of them will go to a school like Michael Brown's" (Hannah-Jones, 2015). Although many Black students will avoid physical violence, tragically, they will be subjected to emotional and spiritual violence by attending re-segregated, inferior schools that send them the message that they are not valued and respected.

Only time will determine additional correlations related to re-segregation, but stories like that of Michael Brown are frightening and tragic, especially since there are other *Michael Browns* who walk the halls of his alma mater in the Normandy School District, the most

underperforming school district in Missouri, as well as similar schools throughout the nation. The community and local law enforcement agencies project their fears onto this population as well, which is exemplified by families who avoid living within the Normandy School District and thereby perpetuate racial-homogeneity and school re-segregation. These families voraciously claim their concern is not about race, but safety. However, they advocated for metal detectors to ensure no weapons would enter the school with “those students.” While no issues of this nature occurred, the implicit bias of the community regarding “those students” remained clear.

It is also striking that local law enforcement seemingly perceives the population as deficient and potentially threatening, as evidenced by their frequent approach of Black youth with fear and resentment. As such, the dangers of school re-segregation become more than just a historical marker in the modern era, but rather a political crisis for educational policymakers tasked with providing access to a quality education and protecting those whose lives are threatened by racialized disparities and the pedestal of White privilege (Hannah-Jones, 2015).

### **Breaking the Silence: Using Education to Facilitate Democratic Transformation**

Many educators, politicians, and other stakeholders, attempt to undermine the sociopolitical implications of the modern legacies of racism and White supremacy: however, others understand the strong connection between historical oppression and the dominant narrative that perpetuates negative perceptions, biases, and injustices. Given the current sociopolitical crises, particularly in relation to the propagation of racist ideologies in schools, as well as decreased access and opportunities, the continued silence related to race and racism cannot persevere (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gay, 2010; Hernandez & Marshall, 2009). Determined efforts must be invested to break the silence and underscore implications of racism on educational institutions and for students of color. Although the idea of fair and equal

education and opportunities is something to actively pursue, it is currently not the reality for many students of color (Anyon, 2014; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Kozol, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Taking into account the emotionally and spiritually violent state created by hegemonic structures in schools through institutionalized racism, deficit perceptions, and a systemic fear of many students of color, a contradictory message is sent to students regarding *whose* lives are valued, and whose futures are held in high regard (Kozol, 2006; Ndimande, 2004). The consequences are not only unfair, but grossly unjust: therefore, to challenge the perpetuation of race-based educational inequity, we must break the current silence.

In reflecting on how to challenge the dominant narrative and start the conversation related to racism and race-based injustice, it is imperative to foster a climate and culture in which stories of historically (and currently) disenfranchised people are respected and valued. A mindset must be embraced that advances beyond the idea that oppression and privilege are individually-based and recognizes the socially-constructed, deeply-rooted, institutional nature of racism (Paris & Alim, 2014; Lucas, Villegas, & Gonzalez, 2011).

Difficult conversations continue to be silenced in many environments. Regardless of the deeply-entrenched historical and sociopolitical implications, race and racism are rarely discussed in schools or educational training (Hernandez & Marshall, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Many educators explain their training did little to prepare them to address diversity or consider the needs of racially diverse learners (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Research conducted with pre-service teachers determined students' knowledge of diverse cultures was limited (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Consequently, in order to effectively educate culturally diverse students and work to counter existing racist ideologies in schools, we must ensure that pre-service and in-service teacher education focuses on inclusive practices. We

must make certain that teachers are equipped to understand issues of racial inequity and imagine how racial equity can look. They must be prepared to reflect on difficult questions and challenge traditional notions of what is (un)fair and (un)just. They must be willing to self-examine their practice and consider how their (in)actions influence change or embrace the status quo.

If educational leaders, teachers, and teacher candidates are given the opportunity to develop a social justice consciousness and foster a fundamental belief that all students matter, it is likely that this heightened consciousness would promote a positive shift in attitudes, beliefs, and expectations of students' assets and abilities. Even though many attempt to legitimize the need for colorblind or race-neutral environments, or minimize the impact of racism, the reality is that the historical and sociopolitical development of the United States was not colorblind or race-neutral; therefore, attempting to silence the legacy of racism only serves as a further injustice.

### **In Summary**

The United States is in a period of disequilibrium regarding race and many are beginning to acknowledge the nature and source of modern racism and White supremacy. However, despite the heightened awareness and conversation on the national stage, there is still a need to advocate for increased discourse, difficult dialogue, and strategies for change. Although Black Lives Matter is deemed controversial by some, the nation is in the midst of a national crisis: the comfort of the privileged cannot continue to be prioritized over the access, opportunities, and outcomes of Black students in schools and in overall society. Yes, indeed all lives *should* matter, but much work remains to address injustice, promote educational equity and social justice for students of color, and foster an educational climate and culture where Black Lives Matter. Therefore, until all lives *actually* matter, the emphasis must be placed on lives that are systematically misrepresented, devalued, and subjected to violence. Borrowing from the words

of James Baldwin (1972), wisdom, aligned with action, advocacy, and change is the strongest ally justice can have. May the live narrative unfolding on the national stage be a testimony for the need to challenge the insidious nature of racism and examine educational injustice to bring about sustainable change. May the disruptive protests and advocacy movements of the current narrative not just be a moment defining this time in history, but rather a revolution, unfolding live in front of us, that will inspire true transformation, progress, and justice.

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