# SUFFERING IN NEW JIM CROW SCHOOLS: UNDER THE COVER OF DIVERSITY IN POST-*BROWN* EDUCATION

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The *Brown* v. Board of Education ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court brought hopes of long-denied freedom to Black communities and their inhabitants. However, to white citizens, the *Brown* decision appeared to deliver horror over imagined miscegenation and other racial nightmares (Lopez & Burciaga, 2014). Consequently, implementation of *Brown* ushered in more misery than a mandate for equality. Far too often, post-*Brown* schools became regular "sites of suffering" for Black pupils (Dumas, 2014).

Black suffering had long existed for Black students but white supremacy, which had always been a presence in and around Black schools, became meaner. Remarkable metaphors have been used by Black scholars to represent the corpus of Black voices in attempting to describe the increasingly violent, racialized school landscape that transpired after the court ruling. Michael Dumas, for example, draws on one of Octavia Butler's key protagonist in asserting that his Seattle informants suffered "losing an arm" after the implementation of *Brown* in that city (Dumas, 2014). Sonya Horsford, in listening to former Black school superintendents, draws upon Martin Luther King, Jr., to analyze routine post-*Brown* school suffering by Black pupils as "learning in a burning house" (Horsford, 2011). Importantly, these metaphors were utilized to illuminate collective memories of suffering and not simply to relate individual descriptions of trauma experiences. (For one such individual school trauma memoir, see Ibram X. Kendi's 2019 *How to Be an Antiracist*). In addition, the metaphors were intended to locate Black humanity in places that routinely denied its existence (Dumas & Nelsen, 2016).

Why have most Americans so readily dismissed such affect-filled rhetoric in annual celebrations of the *Brown* decision? White citizens, overwhelmingly, were distraught over the *Brown* decision (Patterson, 2001). For example, new evidence has emerged from buried archives at the University of Texas at Austin that a testing regime was immediately put into place, post-*Brown*, explicitly to deny Blacks admission at that predominantly white institution (Price, 2019). Collectively, over time, white Americans increasingly acted as if racial discrimination after the *Brown* decision was ended and relegated to the dustbins of history after *Brown*.

On the other hand, as political science scholar Daniele Allen (2006) opined, *Brown* ushered in "anxieties of citizenship" due to feelings of racial distrust. To be sure, distrust across the color line was not new. Yet, in highlighting the iconic photograph of a white female all but spitting on one of the Little Rock Nine, Allen asserts that this racial distrust gained renewed, venomous energy. "When citizenly relations are shot through with distrust, efforts to solve collective problems inevitably founder," Allen (2006, Loc 46) asserts. Real solutions to the collective problem of school segregation certainly foundered on the shoals of this revitalized distrust. Drawing inspiration from Sonya Douglas Horsford (2019), this essay asserts America has experienced a New Jim Crow era of schooling.

Whether it has been a hyper-focus on diversity (that often badly misses the mark) (Fusarelli, 2004), myriad remedies at gerrymandering enrollment boundaries (Siegel-Hawley, 2020), or the dogged insistence on integration as the premier ideal (even to the point of near-fetish),[1] despite our seeming inability to implement such a lofty goal, America has resolutely experienced a more than fifty-year period of crisis-induced anxiety over school segregation. As many observers have noted, our focus through color-blindness, a rush to declare a realized post-race destination, and a reversion to "dog-whistle politics" have exacerbated already bad circumstances (Haney Lopez, 2014). The result has been the suffering so eloquently described by Black scholars. The trauma-informed metaphors even echo another by historian Vincent Harding over the long-expressed desire to learn in Black communities despite legal and unofficial prohibition of such activity. In fact, Harding (2005) asserted that Black education had been like "learning to play on a locked piano."

Also, perhaps without simple coincidence, *Brown*-induced suffering occurred alongside the rise of mass incarceration that Michelle Alexander (2012) illuminates in *The New Jim Crow*. To be sure, school suffering and mass incarceration have been visited upon Black bodies with indiscriminate regularity. These two collective experiences are distinguished, however, by the "cruel optimism" that relentlessly adheres to Black schooling (Berlant, 2011). As Lauren Berlant (2011, p. 1) asserts, "(a) relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing." Tragically, in the years since Brown, schools appear to be a profound obstacle to a flourishing Black future.

This account explores three key elements of the suffering caused by the Brown decision. First, the demise of fulsome Black counterpublic spaces are examined. Analyzed next are the array of cruel choices that have accompanied the quality school search for Black families that resulted from the counterpublic school downfall. Jarvis Givens (2019), in a recent book, describes something akin to this: the dichotomous choice for Black learners between becoming "literate slaves" or "fugitive slaves." Last, this narrative examines the burgeoning school accountability industry and the torture that all too commonly results from such schemes.

With Dumas (2014, p. 2), this essay attends to "how policy is lived, and too often suffered, by those who have little hand in policy formation or implementation."

## Theoretical Framework

Historical scholarship about schooling, even that of the recent past, often neglects explicit discussion of theoretical positions that undergird appropriate analyses of that past (HEQ, 2011). On the other hand, "critical historians dig beneath the surface of events and phenomena using critical theoretical frameworks" (Aldridge, 2015, p.103). In the case of critical race history, these analyses always interrogate race in the narratives to uncover hidden forces behind masked rhetoric and relate counterstories to the master narrative (Morris & Parker, 2019).

Some archives, even if not of primary sources, can provide rich fodder for examination of the past and imagination of the future. As one recent historical exploration of reparations for slavery's psychic and physical toll on African-Americans suggests, that "(r)evisiting key historical moments at which things could have gone differently…can provide the opportunity not only for regret and reflection, but to revive those lost and more just futures in the present" (Franke, 2019, p.13).

However, the educational present for Black students remains mired in the shadow of the plantation (i.e., Jones, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2005). Thus, the sort of critical race history as investigated here can help us to "imagine the futurity of Black people against the devaluation of Black life and skepticism about (the worth of) letting Black people go on" (Dumas & ross, 2016, p. 442).

Among the missing archives important for this critical history are collective memories from the Black community, the kind which rarely accompany any official school records. Still, they remain essential for critical history needs (Alridge, 2015). "The historical experiences and accumulated folk knowledge of (B)lack Americans have long been marginalized or underutilized as a site of possibility for educational theorizing…" (Kezembe, 2018, p. 146). Further, "…people of African heritage (Black Americans in this case) have always tended to recall and leverage cultural memory (Sankofa) as a way of making sense, making meaning, navigating, and transcending crises" (Kezembe, 2018, p. 146). This theoretical articulation, "the Black Radical Tradition in education[,] is a sentient force requiring constant activation of a Black cultural memory in order to stimulate educational and pedagogical imagination" (Kezembe, 2018, p. 156).

The use of the Black radical tradition in education is accompanied here with the use of "Afrofuturism, … a cultural, literary and aesthetic form characterized by the necessity to 'bend time' … because 'protocols of institutional memory' … write Black lives without history" (Pillow, 2017, p. 134). And "Afrofuturism asserts recognition of Black apocalypse

and thus the necessity to reconceptualize history as temporal, linking survival in the present to the ability to rethink unwritten pasts and reimagine Black futures" (Pillow, 2017, p.134). Therefore, this critical historical exploration of *Brown* and its impact on Black schooling endeavors to rethink the (un)written past to reimagine Black educational futurity.

## The Rise and Demise of Black Counterpublic Schools

The desire for schooling burned bright for African-Americans, enslaved and free, before Emancipation (Williamson, 2005). Schooling opportunities increasingly developed for Blacks through persistent individual and collective self-determination (Anderson, 1988). Free or public schooling only sparsely existed for Blacks before the Civil War (Kendrick & Kendrick, 2006). However, even during the Civil War, as free schooling blossomed through strategic Black and white partnerships, Black parents cautiously entered into the nascent enterprises (Green, 2016). Only recently, has scholarship begun recognizing that fugitive schooling, unaided by public means, persisted for Blacks long after the early opening of segregated public schools (Davis, n.d.). Importantly, public school growth for Blacks largely existed as an element of steadfast toil and resilience.

As public schooling for Blacks developed and even flourished in some places, an increasing number of these institutions morphed into decidedly counterpublic ones (Davis, n.d.a). These burgeoning schools remained cocooned within Black communities, operated with minimal oversight (or even simple surveillance) of white observers, and, most importantly, served as sites of public deliberation, a rhetorical enterprise routinely denied to Blacks in more public settings (Black Public Sphere Collective, 1995).

At first, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) predominated in this collection of the experience of counterpublic schools. Over time, and mainly occurring after Reconstruction ended, a growing number of Black K-12 public schools emerged alongside HBCUs to constitute an "archipelago" (Heathcott, 2005) of way stations on a geography of liberation (Jansen, 1990).

To be sure, as Vanessa Siddle Walker (1996) has long reminded readers in her brilliant *Their Highest Potential*, segregated schools for Blacks regularly "faced enormous challenges." Similarly, Black counterpublic schools persistently toiled to keep as much as possible of their classroom work untainted by white surveillance. Throughout varying circumstances of freedom, these institutions maintained a modicum, at least, of what one scholar has recently termed a "second" curriculum, one in which Black consciousness animated the learning experienced by Black students (Favors, 2019, p. 5). In this way, even counterpublic schools retained a nature of fugivity, where "Black study" (with its deeper, more robust intent) could occur (Harney & Moren, 2013). Indeed, these counter-

public schools, K-12 and higher education institutions, served as the base from which emerged the "hidden heroes who fought for justice in schools" (Siddle Walker, 2018).

This world of intrepid Black schooling expired, however, as the implementation of *Brown* descended, and any vestiges of self-determinist visions were extinguished. White school administrators, like the larger white society, increasingly acted in ways small and large to turn a hyper-magnified white gaze ("surveillance") (Browne, 2015) upon features of Black life that *Brown* exposed as deficient. As Coates (2019, p. 21) so eloquently puts it, referring to a move to the plantation's big house, "…you might think that you have saved me from something, but what you have really done is put me right under their eye. … Up there, with them right over you…well, it's different." Black schools could no longer be largely left to their own ministrations, at least some of the time. Instead, regimes of surveillance, such as testing and other measures of school accountability, permeated these formerly counterpublic schools (see below). As a result, Black public schools, in many parts of the country, remained mere vestiges of their old, vibrant, and meaningful selves.

Black schooling opportunities, in proximate or distant relation to Black homes, became, increasingly hostile environments for Black children and youth. Too often, these students' humanity remained unarticulated, certainly unfulfilled. A "geography of oppression" now characterized the Black schooling landscape.

Paramount to this new "permanent war" (Darda, 2019) against Black schools was the rapid removal of Black administrators. In some areas of the South, a near-total overhaul of the principalship occurred, leaving scores of Black school leaders without employment (Tillman, 2004). Black teachers, likewise, were driven out of schools in large numbers. In near-echo fashion, later, the Katrina hurricane allowed for a fresh intrusion of white supremacy in New Orleans. There, the New Orleans' schools had deteriorated in the years before the violent storm, or some reformers felt, and, in rebuilding them, they cast aside large numbers of experienced, dedicated Black teachers (Henry, 2016). Simply, Black teachers were discarded as unnecessary and, indeed, undesirable.

In recent years, a revitalized public call for Black teachers in many schools has arisen under the cover of diversifying the schooling process (Davis, n.d.b). In the absence of Black teachers and amidst a "manufactured" Black teacher shortage (Davis, n.d.b), districts increasingly urged white teachers to adopt "culturally relevant pedagogy" practices (Ladson-Billings, 2009). This exercise appears to have had less-than-desired results. While white teachers can or at least could teach in such ways, little archived evidence concludes that they will do so. Black pupils' suffering, consequently, persists.

When Black teachers were found and placed in these schools filled with dreams of diversity, cross-race tensions readily apparent in oth-

er work settings appeared (Alfred, 2018). Routinely, Black adults in these diversity-driven institutions, were seen as "less than colleagues and colleague less" (emphasis in original) (Tate, 2014, p. 2479). As Coates has his protagonist told, "…they trust a freeman less than a slave" (2019, p. 175). The hostility felt in New Jim Crow Schools, thus, reinforces the realities of teacher shortages when Black teachers recognized hostile employment and detour around and away from teaching possibilities (Davis, n.d.b).

## Black Parents' Bad Schooling Choices

Missing Black teachers in public schools that recognize little humanity in Black citizens represents one of the distinctive barriers to quality education sought by Black parents for their children. "Critical race parenting" becomes tortuous in such circumstances (DePouw & Mathias, 2016). In Black communities experiencing the New Jim Crow Schooling, too many children return home from school asking "Mommy, is being Brown bad?" (Mathias, 2016). Or, in another articulation of the torture experienced by Black pupils, in James Baldwin's (1974/2018, p. 79) memorable words, "…they are really teaching the kids to be slaves." Parenting is difficult enough without schools harming children in this fashion.

Voiced concerns about finding quality schooling opportunities for Black children were a new revelation for this author fourteen years ago when he initiated a critical race theory doctoral program. Black mothers (who were also full-time educators) filled the program's seminars. Their pain was evident every week when we congregated for collective study. As is common with other similar "story circle" study, vulnerability served as the font for much in class. Included in the positive results of such affective dialogue, was "that the power of stories and of storytelling made the experiences of … people of color … the basis of our intellectual theorizing" (Fujino et al., 2018, p. 79). Painful stories of searching for viable, if not optimal, school opportunities for their children transformed into significant, meaningful theorizing about anti-Black school policy and pedagogy.

Among the first post-*Brown* tortures visited upon Black students was the bullying of Black students in new school integration experiments. This form of systemic oppression was also experienced, years later, when all-male universities opened their doors to the first females (Perkins, 2019). To be sure, bullying sounds all too tame for the often-violent circumstances. As Diamond, asserts, "The simple word 'abuse' does not fully describe the ordeal suffered by the student, Elizabeth Eckford" (Diamond, 1980-1990, 157fn60). Too, this rhetoric adds to the cognitive dissonance already felt by white listeners to such remembered violence. Bias is easily explained, these whites would proclaim, but good whites behave in more polite fashion and surely, there are just too few bad whites to make this a systemic problem. Unfortunately, even Black students occasionally masked the day-to-day racialized interactions to shield their parents

(Ming, 2015). Such tortuous everyday occurrences, however, increasingly were revealed to be epidemic in nature by careful, brilliant Black scholars. Tragically, even burgeoning attention to trauma-informed school practices routinely fails to recognize racism as trauma (*Brown* et al., 2019).

Post-*Brown* reform efforts that included large-scale busing, too, exacerbated the burdens on Black parents. Simply, white parents rarely had to contend with the inconveniences that arose from busing (Delmont, 2016). Certainly, busing added travel time (even hours at a time) to already busy school days. Additionally, busing added difficulty to schools and their extra-curricular offerings. Many students who had to rely on busing to attend school were denied the possibility of enriched learning that resulted from extracurricular activities. Often, Black parents quietly accepted the hardships of busing; Black communities overwhelmingly represented the origins of school bus routes. However, white parents predominated in voiced concerns over busing, despite the greatly reduced chance that their children would be bused to school. Paramount in Black parents' concerns over busing, surely, was the horror of violence, even death, for their children. All-too-often, school busing took Black children into white residential areas within which these Black parents would not drive at night, due to concerns over safety.

Next up to complicate Black parents' choices over school opportunities arrived from "choice" reformers (Ravitch, 2016). Ironically, the unintended result of public choice advocacy for Black parents was a worsened landscape of school choices. Among the most prominent headliners for choice supporters were school vouchers and charter schools. Routinely, school voucher schemes fell flat for myriad reasons for Black parents. Charter schools too regularly experienced financial difficulties (often due to operator greed and graft). What continues to stand out as a reasonable route to new Black counterpublic schools has resulted, instead, in a lost opportunity that further cripples the freedom paths of Black parents. So, time and again, calls for increased school choice results in less real choice.

Home-schooling, another choice for Black parents, increasingly receives support from within the Black community. "Historically in the African-American community, the use of garden schools, mothers' clubs, and women's associations served as forums where empowerment and self-education fostered informal or home-like instruction" (Henry, 2017, p. 3). The rise of Black counterpublic schools, however, stalled or competed with the utilization of such informal schooling. More recently, in the wake of defunct Black counterpublic schooling, home-schooling seems to be an inspired choice for Black parents. On the other hand, home-schooling's hardships, visited upon all members of a family's household, would seem to mitigate against such a drastic choice. Yet, in a field of bad school choices, home-schooling concerns Black public school principals who witness increasing numbers of Black parents taking up the challenges of home-schooling their own children (Anonymous, 2019).

## New Jim Code Algorithm of School Accountability

Arising from the chaos after the Brown ruling, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) promised positive outcomes for "disadvantaged" youth (Shepard, 2008, p. 27). Too, "it launched… the school accountability movement." "The evaluation provisions in… [the ESEA]…came about" because senior federal policymakers "doubted whether school administrators knew…how to provide effective programs for disadvantaged children" (Shepard, 2008, p. 26). Thus, the Act's designers "expected that evaluation data could be used by parents as a 'whip'…to leverage changes in ineffective schools" (Sheppard, 2008, p. 27). In tragic fashion, the unintended consequence of such institutional evaluation, instead, saw districts metaphorically whipping Black children, their parents, and the schools they attended.

The hyper-surveillance represented in the new school accountability measures that grew from those nearly benign ones of the ESEA, including the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), became onerous for students learning in schools ill-designed for them. Developed within the bosom of a racialized crisis and contextualized along with white supremacy, newly developed accountability methods can be understood as a form of "New Jim Code." (Benjamin, 2019). As scholar Ruha Benjamin (2019) recently has described this phenomenon as "the employment of new technologies that reflect and reproduce existing inequities but are promoted and perceived as more objective or progressive than the discriminatory systems of a previous era," (Benjamin, 2019, p. 5). Bad IQ tests became good evaluation intended for improvement. Combined with the demise of Black counterpublic space, these new tools used in pseudo-desegregated institutions caused additional suffering for Black pupils.

Soon, discussions of Black school achievement blasted a monotonous drone of unrelenting failure (Darby & Rury, 2018). This harsh, anti-Black rhetoric (Dumas, 2015) became a blunt cadence that sounded like an overseer's drumming meant to keep the enslaved on task. On the other hand, Black scholarly rhetoric over educational achievement soothed with alternating Blues-like riffs of subjugation, sorrow, and striving. Every once in a while, an utterance over school achievement soars like one of Du Bois' "spiritual strivings" (Shaw, 2013). While not directly discussing school achievement, a lyrical quotation by Martin Luther King, Jr., might capture this quality best. Many Black adults will be swept up with King as he intoned, "(b)ut be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer, and one day we will win our freedom" (King in Whitehead, 2019, p. 172). School achievement by Black students, in other words, as

recorded in history's register, finally will overtake freedom's finish line.

On another register, Black school achievement melody rarely rises and routinely falls flat in contrast to others' flights of success – indeed, fancy. One glorious lyricism that evades this overused, ugly score spies a scene of beauty in viewing internal, intergenerational improvement over time in measurements of school achievement. The hopeful hymn-like text by Span and Rivers (2012, p. 14) declared that "African-Americans have made some of the greatest strides in improving their educational performance and outcomes in virtually every measurable category used to assess the achievement gap." This success, moreover, has arisen most perceptively since the *Brown* decision, which decimated the Black principalship and sharpened the scrutiny of the white gaze into, and over, Black schools (Karpinski, 2016).

Importantly, improvements in Black school achievement resulted in no slake of suffering by Black students. Black scholarship is replete with the onslaught of suffering that accompanied the nation's tortuous experiments in school desegregation. Dumas (2014) and Horsford (2011) are the most colorful in describing the suffering experienced by post-*Brown* Black students. Their poetic, empirical research gasps with references to learning in burning houses and the loss of an arm in the process. James Baldwin presaged these sentiments, writing to his son: "This innocent country set you down in a ghetto in which, in fact, it intended that you should perish," (1962/1993, p. 6) The material result within these songs of suffering are perhaps best referred to as scars of torture, a sharp descriptor for an experience little seen by white observers of Black students throughout American history. And slavery, again, serves as the pinnacle of torture to Black hands, hearts, and minds. This torture may be understood best through the prism of antebellum times, during which "achievement," as considered in cotton picking, is most eloquently noted by historian Baptist (2014, Loc 2905): "(t)he total gain in productivity per picker from 1800 to 1860 was almost four hundred percent." The unfathomable horror evinced by this extraordinary statistic suggests that school achievement gains, over time – nearly impossible to see through the fog of anti-Blackness – remain less uncommon than we might otherwise imagine. As Baldwin (1963) notes in the larger national context, "American history is longer, larger, more various, more beautiful, and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it." At least, that is, in words the average (white) citizen can hear. The "permanent scars" (Baptist, 2014, Loc 3113) on Black hands, hearts, and minds, due to the persistent pursuit of education amid horrifying violence (again, burning houses and lost limbs) begs for some rising Phoenix of beauty.

Historian Baptist (2014, Loc 3068) provides the beauty for us as he references "Patsey's hands" from the film "12 Years a Slave." He describes Patsey, and other cotton pickers who gilded slaveowners' pockets, as "genius(es)" (Baptist, 2014, Loc 3611). Their skillful innovations led to

concert pianist-like "sleight(s) of hand" (Baptist, 2014, Loc 3095). "Patsey's hands, both of them, right and left – each did their own thinking, like those of a pianist" (Baptist, 2014, Loc 3068). Brilliant achievement, indeed, was illuminated through the incandescence of suffering.

Unfortunately, the damaging public and professional rhetoric that surrounds the racial gap in achievement persists. Too, supposed colorblind policies continue to batter students and staffs in Black schools with a relentless pulse. To use but a single example, majority-Black school districts all across the country have experienced de-accreditation in light of policies that attempt to treat all students equally (Tate et al., 2015). Systemic and contemporary ills, however, continue to blanket the Black school landscape. Black suffering only intensifies.

Torture, thus, constitutes a part of the alchemy of Black school achievement. As Weinbaum (2019, p. 1) asserts, "(s)lavery lives on as a thought system…subtended by a 'racial calculus and political arithmetic.'" To be sure, school accountability could have been imagined in non-racialized, non-punitive terms. Tragically, it was not and suffering ensued.

## Conclusion

Likely, suffering in New Jim Crow Schools will continue. On the other hand, we might use the past as prologue to reformulate fulsome, freedom-directed Black public schools. Schools in the past, occasionally, have responded to Black community pressure over anti-Black school reform (Davis, 2019, n.d.a). During the Civil War in St. Louis, Missouri, for example, as free schools were developed for Black students, the Black/white partnership that fostered these new schools into life, repeatedly – if only rhetorically – sought Black teachers. However, this nascent professional class of educators found solace perhaps, maybe even more money, in private "subscription" schools (Christensen, 2001, p. 305). Black parents responded with their support. Political resistance against public schools continued throughout the Reconstruction Era. Black parents resolutely preferred private schools versus the emerging public schools. This resistance developed into protest after Reconstruction ended. In 1878, Black educators were allowed into public school classrooms. Two years later, as this teacher replacement was more fully developed, Black parents lifted their "boycott" (Fultz, 2012, Loc 589).

An emergent political resistance appears to be arising in Black communities. Today, this resistance is less specifically about Black teachers than *Brown*-influenced school changes, and, more generally, that have significantly transformed the school landscape for Black students. Actual school protests remain scattered and diffuse. On the other hand, political resistance to public schooling ills by Black parents could pay off in small and large ways. Most importantly, it could bring a reduction in suffering for Black students.

## Endnotes

1   See the impressive corpus of work by Gary Orfield and his col-
    leagues at "The Civil Rights Project" at UCLA (formerly at Har-
    vard University).

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