

A Civil Rights Agenda for the Next Quarter Century



Racial Reckoning and the Role of Schooling:  
*Exploring the Potential of Integrated  
Classrooms and Liberatory Pedagogies*

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## About the Series

### *A Civil Rights Agenda for the Next Quarter Century*

The Civil Rights Project was founded in 1996 at Harvard University, during a period of increasingly conservative courts and political movements that were limiting, and sometimes reversing, major civil rights reforms. In 2007 the Project moved to UCLA. Its goal was—and still is—to bring together researchers, lawyers, civil rights advocates and governmental and educational leaders to create a new generation of civil rights research and communicate what is learned to those who could use it to address the problems of inequality and discrimination. Created a generation after the civil rights revolution of the 1960s, CRP’s vision was to produce new understandings of challenges and research-based evidence on solutions. The Project has always maintained a strong, central focus on equal education and racial change.

We are celebrating our first quarter century by taking a serious look forward—not at the history of the issues, not at the debates over older policies, not at celebrating prior victories but at the needs of the next quarter century. Since the work of civil rights advocates and leaders of color in recent decades has often been about defending threatened, existing rights, we need innovative thinking to address the challenges facing our rapidly changing society. Political leaders often see policy in short two- and four-year election cycles but we decided to look at the upcoming generation. Because researchers are uniquely qualified to think systematically, this series is an attempt to harness the skills of several disciplines, to think deeply about how our society has changed since the civil rights revolution and what the implications are for the future of racial justice.

This effort includes two very large sets of newly commissioned work. This paper is the fourth in the series on the potential for social change and equity policies in the nation. The second set of studies focuses on California, a vast state whose astonishing diversity foretells the future of the U.S. and whose profound inequality warns that there is much work to be done. All these studies

will initially be issued as working papers. They will be brought together in statewide conferences and in the U.S. Capitol and, eventually, as two major books, which we hope will help light the way in the coming decades. At each of the major events, scholars will exchange ideas and address questions from each other, from leaders and from the public.

The Civil Rights Project, like the country, is in a period of transition, identifying leadership for its next chapter. We are fortunate to have collaborated with a remarkable network of important scholars across the U.S., who contributed to our work in the last quarter century and continue to do so in this new work. We are also inspired by the nation's many young people who understand that our future depends on overcoming division. They are committed to constructing new paths to racial justice. We hope these studies open avenues for this critical work, stimulate future scholars and lawyers, and inform policymaking in a society with the unlimited potential of diversity, if it can only figure out how to achieve genuine equality.



Gary Orfield



Patricia Gándara

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## Foreword

Americans of all races want good schools that treat their children well and prepare them for success in our diverse, competitive economy and divided nation. Education matters greatly. When parents first drop off their child at primary school, they know something very important is beginning in the child's life. Across racial and ethnic lines, there are the same dreams but very different realities. Children and teachers often bring racial stereotypes from implicit bias into school with them. Sadly, our schools typically reflect a society that is segregated and unequal. Schools tend to perpetuate rather than cure inequality. Even within diverse schools the opportunities and outcomes can differ greatly. Segregation and discrimination are strong, persisting features of our society. Teachers grow up in a divided society and face the challenge of creating equity in diverse classrooms, with students from very different backgrounds, often with little training or support. They are trying to create something better than the surrounding society in which they live outside of school hours.

Three years ago, the Black Lives Matter movement erupted in hundreds of American cities, with millions turning out to protest at the height of the pandemic. It seemed like a time of racial reckoning with a new generation on the move, but the movement had little impact on the schools, and the most conservative Supreme Court in a century has moved civil rights policy backward. The situation became even more unequal as the schools failed to provide equal education during the pandemic. Many families lacked equipment and support for effective distance learning and a substantial number of students dropped out. Now, in a number of conservative states, schools are being forbidden to teach about racial history, and staff positions devoted to equity in schools and colleges are being shut down as part of a politics of fear of racial change. How can we work well together when the history and culture of some children are prohibited?

When things are grim, goals are often narrowed and difficult situations rationalized. The authors of this report, however, take a very different stance. In a troubled time, they are committed to using the best research to build effective collaboration across lines of racial division. The authors say that the racial divisions and inequality at the classroom level must and can be addressed. As some states ban work on race, these authors call for more work on race. They see schools failing to realize their potential. They effectively analyze the critical research on racial equity. Their goal is to look forward, helping diverse schools become fair and integrated in a stratified and segregated society. The movement toward these goals has never been easy but, they argue, it is essential even in hard times. This report is enriched by the fact that they have experience as teachers who come from communities of color, deepening their understanding of school realities, both the obstacles and complexities.

This paper is about the racial problems within schools and what can be done to increase equity and understanding in our polarized society. Until there are major policy changes from our courts, law makers, and educational leaders, these challenges will be largely left up to the schools, and will depend on the teachers, administrators, and communities to enact change. Will our schools remain racially segregated and unequal? Will diversity, where we have it, create positive energy and understanding or stratify students by race within a school? This paper grapples with choices. Can we open up our schools to the diversity of our communities and enable victims of segregation to share the better opportunities in our educational system? Can we be fair to students of color within diverse schools, or will we allow practices that separate and discriminate within these diverse schools? These are hard questions. Unless we tackle them, we will lose much of the talent in our racially changing society and many of the opportunities for building strong bridges over our divisions. If we answer yes to the challenge, then, of course, the question is “how?” What do we know about how to overcome the obstacles built into a society based on racial hierarchy and how to

harvest the benefits of integration? That is the subject of this paper, authored by researchers who tackle these questions and analyze research that can help now, within a climate of serious civil rights reversals. These issues were addressed seriously for a time during the civil rights movement of the mid-twentieth century, and important lessons were learned.

Desegregation has been a long struggle. When the *Brown* decision, nearly 70 years ago, concluded that Southern segregation was inherently unequal, little changed until Congress acted decisively in 1964, passing the first truly powerful civil rights law in 90 years, which made the South the least segregated region in the nation. The Supreme Court did not address the issues of Northern segregation and the segregation of the growing Latino population until nearly two decades after *Brown*, and there was little enforcement of its decisions. Since the Reagan era the increasingly conservative courts have reversed desegregation efforts and there have been few resources to support school efforts at race relations.

School desegregation at the beginning asked educators of all races, who were the products of an apartheid society in the old South, to create nondiscriminatory, interracial education in communities in which all the other major institutions remained segregated. There were few teachers of color in many of the newly integrated schools. It was very hard, especially in the beginning. Desegregation was widely described as a failure by segregationists and politicians and the most publicized data on outcomes showed that racial gaps and discrimination remained. Desegregation was only actively supported by government for a few years before critics took power and changed the courts and agencies. Yet interracial schooling turned out to be surprisingly persistent in the South and elsewhere. Data following the lives of the students show major gains in education, income, and other basic aspects of life for the students who participated, even in very imperfect forms. Integration was one of very few tools that showed the capacity to change racial outcomes in a highly stratified society. White students were not harmed academically, and students of all races saw



gains in preparation for living and working in a diverse society. Yet, after a generation, it was largely abandoned. Now teachers face complex multiracial classrooms amid racial and political polarization. Most teachers have no special training for interracial education. Much school diversity now comes in racially changing neighborhoods where schools can help determine whether the outcome is lasting diversity or resegregation.

As U.S. politics became more conservative, support programs were eliminated and the shift to test-driven accountability redirected school focus to test score outcomes, away from the issues of civil rights and poverty. Beginning in the 1990s most of the major school desegregation plans were dismantled as the courts changed. But the country was going through unprecedented demographic change and many thousands of schools, especially in the suburbs, turned from overwhelmingly white to at least temporarily diverse. Many schools became multiracial, and all the challenges of social and racial inequality came into their classrooms with little help. Under the No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top policies, test-driven accountability displaced concern about race relations. During the Trump period, national leaders exacerbated racial divisions. The pressures on schools intensified.

The Civil Rights Project, which has been a basic source of information about school segregation and integration throughout its history, decided to commission two studies about change in segregation, one focusing on the national issues and another about California. These papers could help stimulate thought about where our highly stratified, four-race schools are going. Given that the white birthrate and white school enrollment are projected to continue declining in the next generation, and the growth of the Asian population will make more schools multiracial, it is folly to assume that everything will work out well. Without schools that support positive change in opportunity and interracial understanding, it is hard to imagine a more equal and less polarized society in the future.

It was very apparent, even as the civil rights movement arose 60 years ago, that it was not enough to bring students together in the same schools or allow students of color access to better resourced schools. For highly stratified communities to change successfully, they need support. The 1964 Civil Rights Act included funds for helping communities adjust and for an unprecedented national study, which became the Coleman Report. Congress provided money for retraining staff and creating new curricula through a very popular 1970's program to help prepare teachers and curriculum, and foster positive relationships within schools, which produced real improvements but was cut off by the Reagan administration and never restored.<sup>1</sup> A conservative Supreme Court decided thirty years ago, in the 1991 *Dowell* decision, to dissolve desegregation plans that had produced substantial school diversity and had often included funds for magnet schools and other choice-based integration strategies, particularly in the South. Segregation among schools has been rising consistently ever since.

But there are still many racially diverse schools, especially in our suburbs, which are going through historic racial changes. The suburbs of our large metros now have more than half students of color. Some of these schools have only transitional diversity, as suburban neighborhoods and communities change from white to Black or Latino. Some are stable but choice programs draw students into different schools. Others are changed by gentrification, now operating at high levels in areas with tight housing markets. Rural areas and small towns have less residential segregation, higher shares of whites, and more school diversity. Without a framework of legal mandates or support from state or federal officials, schools that are diversifying from external forces, mostly from housing market changes, now are pretty much on their own in figuring out what to do, often in communities undergoing complex changes.

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<sup>1</sup> The desegregation aid program, the Emergency School Aid Act of 1972, funded voluntary efforts by school districts to foster positive desegregation. It was positively evaluated and extended under President Carter but eliminated in President Reagan's first major budget bill.

This paper summarizes research on techniques and strategies, shown to produce better relationships and educational outcomes for students, that teachers can implement. Much of this research was done during or shortly after the civil rights movement of the 60s and early 70s. Given the vacuum of positive policy about race relations in our governments and by our educational leaders since that time, and the lack of serious training in colleges of education, teachers often assume that what they see as their own inherent fairness and sense of justice will suffice. We once carried out a national survey of teachers asking about their racial experiences and attitudes. We found that most teachers, of all races, simply took the position they would treat all students the same. Many teachers and administrators have, however, “implicit biases” of which they are not aware. They think it is best to act as if race does not exist. All groups of students do not have the same backgrounds, cultures, experiences and needs, so teachers and school staff require training to understand how to make interracial classrooms work.

Teachers play central roles, but teachers can do the most when they have strong support from principals and district leaders, useful training based on evidence, and collaboration with teacher organizations. It is vital that diverse schools have diverse faculties and staffs. State governments, which are critical in setting the framework of education, need to realize that this is not a marginal issue but a central challenge. Trying to solve inequality without deep understanding and good strategies is like trying to cure a serious disease without naming the disease, understanding its trajectory, training doctors in the best techniques and carefully monitoring the treatments.

Effectively addressing these issues would make our diverse schools far more educationally effective and contribute to positive outcomes for all groups of students, and for the communities our schools serve. These are issues that have been largely neglected now for several decades. They haven’t gone away, and possible gains have been lost. This paper asks us to think about the next generation of a society that will be even more diverse, and, unless we make major changes,

profoundly unequal. Every day there are millions of students in schools that could turn their sometimes-polarized schools into much healthier settings for the preparation of our future society if we decide to seriously try. The ideas put forth in this report by a diverse set of young researchers are a good starting point. The growing gaps from the pandemic and the increasing barriers to students of color, created by the Supreme Court's 2023 decision banning affirmative action, make these ideas all the more important.

*-Gary Orfield*

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## Executive Summary

Racism is a pervasive presence in the United States. Despite an alleged national “racial reckoning” after the police murder of George Floyd in 2020, little has been reconciled with respect to race. Race relations remain strained, as evidenced by mass shootings in Black communities by White shooters, continued inequalities in wealth and opportunity, and laws that make illegal certain discussions of race. Schools have found themselves at the center of debates about racism. In the back-and-forth about how race should be discussed in schools, few have broadly considered the role of schooling in racial reconciliation.

Schools have long existed as a means of maintaining democracy in the United States and, given the centrality of race relations to the success of democracy, this paper suggests that schools can be called upon to address racism as well. As such, this paper looks to our rapidly diversifying nation and asks: “What would it take to move closer to meaningfully addressing the legacy of racism in the United States, and what role might schools play in this process?”

Our schools remain segregated for many students, but promising developments suggest that more integration is possible. According to a team of scholars led by Amy Stuart Wells, a majority of Americans support government action to address school segregation and anti-segregation measures are particularly popular in communities of color. In particular, Stephen Kotok and David DeMatthews suggest that bilingual schools and magnet schools may be essential avenues for desegregation. Integration matters for racial equality. New research finds that Black students attending desegregated schools for five years saw about a 30% increase in annual earnings.

School desegregation alone, however, is insufficient for racial justice. In racially diverse schools, many classrooms remain segregated, particularly through gifted programs and advanced coursework. Recent efforts to de-track math courses in California and implement “enrichment

clusters” in Queens, New York have offered promising avenues for diversifying classrooms in integrated schools, despite some political resistance from privileged families.

Lastly, considering classroom pedagogy is essential to racial justice. Developing racial literacy among white students and students of color alike will help facilitate racial reconciliation. In California, and in some districts across the United States, Ethnic Studies courses are becoming graduation requirements, necessitating that students of all racial backgrounds consider race in school. Recent studies have demonstrated the importance of this approach. Matthew Nelsen writes that “exposure to content of this kind led white youth to be significantly more likely to agree that Asian, Black, and Latinx people made significant contributions to American society.” Thomas Dee and Emily Penner at Stanford recently found that students of color engaging in critical pedagogy saw significant gains in academic achievement – increasing attendance by 21 percentage points and overall GPA by 1.4 points. A literature review on Ethnic Studies courses by Christine Sleeter and Miguel Zavala emphasized the potential of Ethnic Studies courses to enhance ethnic identity development among students of color, improve overall student achievement, and can improve racial attitudes for White students as well as students of color.

This paper will further discussions of the potential role that schools and classrooms might play in advancing racial justice. While certainly, significant challenges exist in genuinely reckoning with race in the United States – schools as essential training grounds for democracy – are a crucial component of any movement toward racial justice.

# The Racial Reckoning and the Role of Schooling: Exploring the potential of integrated classrooms and liberatory pedagogies

Suneal Kolluri, Liane I. Hypolite, Alexis Patterson and Kimberly Young

## Introduction

In the summer of 2020, the notion of a “racial reckoning” found its way into news media headlines across the United States in response to the murder of George Floyd and other Black people who lost their lives to police violence. Led by activists across the country, multiracial coalitions joined together in nationwide protests. National Public Radio produced a special on the “Summer of Racial Reckoning.” NBC News developed a web page to honor the reckoning. Poverty Scholars (*The Nation*), pop culture (*The Guardian*), the fashion industry (*The Washington Post*), and others were all said to be due for racial reckonings of their own. Even the persistently conservative *Wall Street Journal* asserted that a Workers’ Strike “Underscore(d) a Moment of Racial Reckoning” in the United States.

As swiftly as the calls for a racial reckoning arose, however, so did White, conservative backlash. The Trump Administration crafted policies banning trainings that mention “critical race theory” or “white privilege” for federal employees (Executive Office of the President, 2020). Conservative-led state legislatures followed suit, passing laws that sought to limit conversations about race in schools. A conservative Supreme Court currently seems poised to end race-conscious college admissions policies, closing off a path to universities that provide social mobility to many racially minoritized young people. Any reckoning that began with George Floyd’s death in 2020, has itself been reckoned with, constraining many of the policies and practices that sought to undermine racial inequality in the United States.



Yet, a sustained racial reckoning towards racial justice remains sorely needed. The United States historically has much to reconcile with respect to racial oppression. Racism has a long and storied history in the United States. It has persisted, in part, due to the pursuit of the ideals of individualism against the backdrop of ahistorical depictions of the policies and practices of the past and present. The impacts of these processes have resulted in race-based differences in power and opportunity, which are grounded in White supremacy and anti-Blackness. Efforts to redress historical oppressions – paying reparations, defending affirmative action policies, and even removing statues that celebrate racists – have faced passionate and effective resistance. With respect to race in the United States, many are awaiting a reckoning that may never materialize.

Indeed, research indicates racism is a persistent and pervasive presence in the United States. Wealth gaps between White, Asian, Black and Latinx families are wide and expanding (Parker, Horowitz, & Mahl, 2016). Since wealth for the middle class is often maintained in real estate, the long and continuing legacy of discrimination in housing markets has significantly disadvantaged communities of color (Rothstein, 2017). Research has demonstrated that racism continues to influence the housing market by way of discrimination in home appraisals and subprime lending practices (Korver-Glenn, 2018). Studies have also thoroughly demonstrated bias in hiring practices – resumé with stereotypically Black or Latinx names earn significantly fewer interviews than resumé with stereotypically White names (Pager, Bonikowski, & Western, 2009). Leveling the racial playing field necessitates a reduction of racial prejudice and supporting policies like reparations and affirmative action, the latter policies having received scant support in public opinion polls and elections primarily due to White skepticism (Conroy & Bacon Jr., 2020). In politically progressive California, a 2020 proposition reinstating affirmative action recently failed to pass. In New York, a reliably Democratic stronghold, Black students attend the most segregated schools in the nation (Frankenberg, Ee, Ayscue, & Orfield, 2019). In alignment with Derrick Bell’s “racial realism” thesis

(1991), there exists scant evidence for optimism that racial oppression will dissipate in the foreseeable future.

Yet, we maintain hope in the possibility of a racial reckoning. By “racial reckoning,” we mean a democratic movement that produces practices and policies that address persistent racial inequalities – to equalize racial wealth gaps, to eliminate structural disadvantages for racially minoritized groups in schools and universities, job and housing markets, among other goals – and foments a sustained national discourse that explicitly names racism and considers how to combat it. In his final book, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. suggested what a reckoning on race would require: “America must be a nation in which its multiracial people are partners in power” (King, 1968, p. 55). He went on to remind us that to reach such a goal, we would need to acknowledge and reckon with our past and its impact on our present circumstances. To clarify this point, King drew upon the words of James Baldwin: “And if the word integration means anything, this is what it means: that we, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it” (p. 63). We agree, and we assert that rather than continue as sites for social reproduction, truly integrated schools can foster reckoning, understanding, and ultimately, freedom through liberatory education.

Over the next thirty years, what would it take to move closer to meaningfully addressing the legacy of racism in the United States? Schools have become the battlefields on which the wars for racial justice are being waged. On one side, schools in California are working to meet curricular mandates that teach an Ethnic Studies to all students by 2030. On the other side of the country geographically and ideologically, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis has banned a pilot Advanced Placement course in African American Studies. Unfortunately, meaningfully addressing race in schools will be challenging in many states. We argue here, however, that schools are essential institutions in efforts of racial reconciliation in the United States. Indeed, conservative power

brokers have recognized them as such. Acknowledging this political challenge, we intend for this chapter to offer an outline of data-informed arguments for how schools need to play a role in efforts for racial justice. First, we look at schools as social structures with the potential for anti-racism. How might schools be racially integrated to produce opportunities to reduce prejudice and facilitate movements towards community-driven, racial justice? Next, we narrow our lens from schools to classrooms. Heterogeneous classrooms can be a starting point, but not an endpoint of racial integration. We address how educational leaders and policymakers can craft systems that ensure the success of liberatory practices for marginalized students— considering group dynamics and culturally relevant pedagogies. In so doing, we offer a framework for the educational pursuit of an honest reckoning on racial inequality, suggesting how schools might support the United States in moving closer to the fulfillment of its promise of liberty and justice for all. We encourage those on the front lines of the battle against racism to leverage this evidence to advocate for educational policies that situate our schools at the foundation of a just and thriving multiracial democracy.

## **The School and Policy Context**

First, we lay out the educational policy conditions needed to achieve these lofty educational ambitions. In particular, we focus on school integration and the policies and practices that might produce the conditions most conducive to racial reconciliation. At the policy level, how can we ensure that White students and students of color are taught to eliminate racial prejudice and to engage in democratic processes that energize movements for racial equity? As racial diversity in the United States expands and transforms – where White people are racial minorities in many contexts and more young people identify as multiracial – attention to how we can reckon with our racist history can better prepare us to pursue racial equity amidst complex racial dynamics of the future.

Research suggests that integrated schools can have meaningful impacts on reducing prejudice. In a thorough review of the research on intergroup contact, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) demonstrated that interactions with people outside of one's race tend to reduce prejudice, provided the interactions are not forced or threatening. Indeed, elementary school students who have diverse friendships exhibit less racial bias both as children and adults (Aboud, Morton, Mendelson, & Purdy, 2003; Kahlenberg, Potter, & Quick, 2019). Students at diverse schools report more interracial relationships (Quillian & Campbell, 2003), implying that school integration might offer fertile ground for racial reconciliation. In a longitudinal study of college students, interracial friendships were also predictive of increased support for affirmative action policies (Northcutt Bohmert & DeMaris, 2015). Integrated schools can produce interracial relationships, which can encourage students to eliminate racial prejudice and consider policies that might address racial inequity.

Even if integrated schools can help reduce prejudice and compel conversations for racial justice, two barriers tend to obstruct this process. First, integrated schools have long been elusive. Second, when schools are able to maintain a level of racial integration, they implement policies that harden social hierarchies by race and ethnicity. The challenges associated with integration and the tendency of schools to create structures that resist meaningfully integrated experiences are in line with Derrick Bell's (1991) *racial realism* thesis. Through racial realism, Bell asserts that any racial progress in the United States is perpetually ephemeral, representing only temporary "peaks of progress" (p. 373) that obscure the steady continuity of racial oppression.

While sharing in the frustration of the "fits and starts" of racial progress, we aim here to consider how schools might play a role in more lasting change. This work is founded on the belief that progress toward racial justice is possible with meaningful intervention. We suggest that integrated schools attuned to equitable policies and practices provide an essential foundation for

democratic schooling towards racial justice. We believe these schools are possible, and they are essential to movements for racial justice.

### **Segregated Schools and School Districts**

Despite widespread condemnation, segregated schools have persisted throughout U.S. history. An analysis of Supreme Court cases across the last century indicates shifting judicial opinions. Decisions have transitioned from “separate but equal,” to segregation as “inherently unequal,” to a snail’s pace of desegregating schools with “all deliberate speed,” and leading up to more recent trends towards releasing districts of court-supervised desegregation orders fostering a return to resegregated, neighborhood schools (Ogletree, 2004; Orfield & Eaton, 1996; Tooley & Atwood, 2021).

More recently, segregation has become even more entrenched. Trends indicate that not only are schools segregated at the site-level, but also at the district level (Taylor, Frankenberg, & Siegel-Hawley, 2019). As described by Weathers and Sosina (2022), “Racial segregation increased during the 1990s, driven predominantly by increases in segregation between school districts. While between-and within-district segregation declined moderately during the 2000s, both remain high, and students are still more racially segregated across district boundaries than among schools (p.2).” With more segregated school districts, greater onus is placed on district, state, and federal policymakers to consider potential solutions that advance integration, as discussed later. As such, segregation remains a persistent reality across U.S. schools. Multiple processes such as complex patterns of White flight, the growing importance of standardized testing, the growth of choice options like charter schools and vouchers, the drawing of district boundaries as well as their secessions and annexations have contributed to the resegregation of today’s schools (George & Darling-Hammond, 2021; Pearman & Swain, 2017).

Today, White and Latinx students are the most segregated groups in U.S. schools (Frankenberg, et al., 2019), and for the past several decades, segregation of Black students has become more pronounced (Orfield & Jarvie, 2020). Rosiek (2019) argues that pervasive anti-Blackness and institutional racism constrain efforts to integrate schools. Rosiek and Kinslow (2015) document the process through which one school district created segregated schools where there were not segregated schools before because White parents feared integration would siphon White families and financial resources from their district. Such patterns of invoking the fear of “White flight” are not unique and, as Donnor (2021) suggests, “White flight within the context of school desegregation not only signifies White people’s opposition to policies designed to eliminate racial inequality, White flight is also intended to catalyze White protest to the aforementioned policy efforts” (p. 267). The extent of White flight due to school integration, however, may be overstated. Many studies on the history of school policy have argued White flight from urban districts occurred irrespective of segregation plans in the local schools (Orfield & Eaton, 1996). Nonetheless, the threat of White absence from free public schools is leveled regularly against school desegregation efforts.

In addition to concerns about the loss of White and wealthy families and resources, Schneider, Piazza, Carey, and White (2020) argue that the recent emphasis on test scores as a proxy for “good” schools has also reinforced segregation. White, middle-class parents – like all parents – naturally want the best education for their children, but structurally are more likely to have the power and resources to advance their needs. Through their research, the authors explore how White parents leverage their social capital and test score data to enroll their children in the highest performing schools. Using test score data as the primary measure of academic success reinforces segregationist pressures. Schools serving White and middle-class students tend to perform well on standardized tests, given the racialized and class-based foundations and correlations of these

assessments (Au, 2016; Knoester & Au, 2017), ultimately drawing more White and middle-class students to those schools.

Recent debates about New York City’s public schools, for instance, have brought more tools of school segregation to light. Schools with screening processes, including but not limited to those designated as “exam schools,” have long used entrance exams as a mechanism for providing or limiting access to particular students and families (Bailey, 2021; Rucinski & Goodman, 2021). Across New York City Public Schools, over 100 high schools use these screening structures based upon varied combinations of test scores, attendance data, and behavioral records (Lecher & Varner, 2021). Given extensive research about the racialized and class-based implications of testing (Rosales & Walker, 2021; Steele, 1997), structural factors that influence attendance (e.g., residential and school mobility) (Crowley, 2003; Gasper, DeLuca, & Estacion, 2010), and differential disciplinary enforcement for students of color (Morris, 2016; Wiley, 2021), these screening procedures cement race and class-based segregation across the district (Lecher & Varner, 2021).

In noting these troubling patterns of the resegregation of U.S. schools, we do not intend to suggest that integrating schools is impossible or undesirable. The empirical data demonstrate that the South made monumental gains in integrating schools after *Brown v. Board of Education*, and the region remains far more integrated today than it was before the decision (Orfield, Ee, Frankenberg, & Siegel-Hawley, 2016). Coordinated movements for civil rights can have meaningful impacts on social systems. And while integrated Black students faced challenges in their new educational contexts (Walker, 1996), they reaped many benefits from the resources of previously White schools. As economist Rucker Johnson (2019) writes, “Contrary to popular wisdom, integration benefitted – and continues to benefit – African Americans, whether that benefit is translated into educational attainment, earnings, social stability, or incarceration rates (p. 3).” As such, at the end of this chapter, we detail some promising strategies for school integration. First, however, we emphasize that by

itself, the policy of school desegregation is inadequate, and we address racial oppressions that linger even in the most racially integrated of schooling contexts.

### **Segregated Students**

Many scholars have cautioned against seeing integrated schools as a panacea for stubborn racial inequities. Even in these schools, students may remain segregated. As stated by Orfield and Eaton (1996), “Desegregation itself is certainly not a cure-all for inequality in society. Racial and socioeconomic integration in schools and housing should be viewed as preconditions for equalizing routes of access and an unequal structure of opportunity” (p. xix). Given the complexity of achieving equitable integration that expands opportunity, schools serving diverse student populations may enact policies that discourage the type of interracial engagement that would promote prejudice reduction and racial justice. Issues concerning, but not limited to, informal (e.g., interracial friendships) and formal (e.g. academic tracking) structural challenges contribute to reifying racialized power hierarchies even in racially diverse schools and classrooms.

When considering some of the informal structural challenges that occur in racially diverse schools, Aboud and colleagues (2003) noted that, though interracial friendships predicted less racial bias for elementary school students, interracial friendships tended to become weaker and less common by fifth grade. A similar pattern at an urban middle school compelled Beverly Tatum (1997) to ask, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* arguing that racial identity development in schools is circumscribed by policies and practices that marginalize students of color. In their study of four newly integrated elementary and middle schools in a city in New England, Zirkel (2004) found that students of color experienced relative social isolation when compared to White students.

“Academic tracking” is a more formal structural challenge that makes integration elusive within school walls. “Tracking” describes the process by which students are assigned to levels of



academic courses varying in rigor and approach based upon perceived academic abilities, indicators of achievement, and teacher subjectivities, often resulting in sorting students by race (Frankenberg & DeBray, 2011; Tooley & Atwood, 2021). Practices of academic tracking in diverse schools tend to widen the distance between students based on race, whether that be by placing White and Asian students into advanced coursework or by placing Black and Latinx students into segregated spaces through special education or disciplinary practices (Irizarry, 2015; Tooley & Atwood, 2021). In their quantitative study of Black students' math-taking trends, Francis and Darity (2021) argue that “within-school segregation at the high school level is linked to the legacy of racialized tracking born from the resistance to the desegregation of schools by race” (p. 187) whereby White and Asian students tend to be enrolled in advanced courses and Black and Latinx students tend to be relegated to standard and remedial levels. Relatedly, Lucas and Berends (2007) found that the likelihood of Black participation in advanced coursework declined with an increase in White students at their schools. In alignment with limited access to advanced coursework, gifted and talented programs are often segregated by race, with lower representations of culturally, linguistically, economically, and ethnically minoritized students (Briggs, Reis, & Sullivan, 2008; Roda, 2015). Research indicated that a student's ethnicity contributed to teachers' decision-making processes for referrals to gifted and talented programs (Elhoweris, Mutura, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005) and that this pattern of teacher subjectivities persists in integrated schools (Mykytyn & Lefkowitz, 2019). Gándara and Orfield (2012) have illuminated an additional axis of segregation along the lines of language. They find that English learners are among the most segregated of any students in K-12 schools, facing constrained access to non-remedial coursework and their English-speaking peers. Academic tracking by race, ethnicity, and linguistic background are pronounced in K-12 contexts.

Advanced Placement (AP) courses are a particular type of advanced course offered at the high school level that provides opportunities for earning college credit. Segregated, under-resourced

schools in urban and rural settings tend to have fewer AP offerings, offerings which have also been critiqued for being less rigorous for a variety of reasons (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2016; Hallett & Venegas, 2011; Handwerk, Tognatta, Coley, & Gitomer, 2008; Zarate & Pachon, 2006).

Alternatively, the challenge with integrated schools can be that racially minoritized students have limited access to AP enrollment. A report summarizing AP participation trends across U.S. high schools found that in diverse schools, racially minoritized students are less likely to ultimately take the AP exam when compared to their White classmates (Handwerk, et al., 2008). Across clusters of high schools with varying levels of racial/ethnic diversity, one daunting fact remained consistent: “the median percentage of African American students who participate and succeed in AP programs is nearly 0 in every cluster, regardless of AP program intensity” (p. 23). As a result, inequities in advanced course taking remain profound by race and ethnicity (Kolluri, 2018). Segregation by race both between schools and within them has proved profoundly challenging to undo.

## **The Classroom Context**

In this section, we look deeply into the classroom dynamics that reproduce inequity. We argue that teaching diverse groups of students in the same room will not alone undo the pervasive structural hierarchies informed by race, ethnicity, or social class. Our pedagogies and curricula themselves can be segregationist. Pedagogies and curricula that are welcoming for White students and exclusionary for students of color can reproduce the experience of segregation even when students are in the same classroom. White students will be able to engage intellectually with classroom content, and other students will not. In the process, racial divisions remain. Though in the previous section we spoke broadly about school and classroom integration, we seek now to illuminate the ways in which pedagogy and curriculum fall short of integration with the potential for racial reconciliation. Specifically, we discuss here the group racial dynamics of classroom interactions

and the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogies that elevate questions essential to multiracial democracy. Without considering the integration of pedagogy and curriculum, any academic efforts towards racial justice will be incomplete.

### **Integration by Pedagogy**

By *integration by pedagogy*, we mean the ways in which teaching practices might develop academic competence for all students, regardless of racial background or prior academic strengths. Including all students in classroom learning is essential for racial justice. Indeed, classrooms are susceptible to reproducing the status dynamics that exist beyond their walls, and these status dynamics can reify racial stereotypes. Elizabeth Cohen initially observed this amidst school desegregation that was occurring shortly after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. In a review of the literature on the impacts of desegregation on race relations, Cohen (1975) found the evidence to be messy and inconclusive. In many instances, desegregated schools actually hardened racist ideologies among White students, many of whom graduated with stereotypical beliefs of Black incompetence. Without studying how classroom dynamics unfolded in diverse classrooms, Cohen argued, researchers would be unable to isolate the specific processes in desegregated schools that might compel students to believe in racial equality.

Scholars who have looked into the racial dynamics of classrooms emphasize classrooms as social systems. Instead of viewing classrooms solely by student responses to teacher instruction (Lotan, 2006), this work envisions classrooms as webs of multidirectional interaction among students whose identities and unique strengths frame opportunities for learning. These interactions are informed by status hierarchies that exist within and beyond classrooms. Race and class matter. Perceptions of intelligence matter. And personality traits, like extroversion and social competence, matter. Individual characteristics and collective understandings of status inform opportunities for

learning. Understanding classrooms as social systems compels educational researchers to see how even diverse classrooms can reinforce racism.

Research has begun to uncover the processes that interrupt patterns of inequity in student interactions within these classroom social systems. Looking to the micro-interactions of students in small-group settings has proved to be a useful way to understand how status inequalities emerge and how they might be interrupted. Cohen (1973) demonstrated that in laboratory settings, when researchers include robust messaging to alter “expectations of competence” for Black participants in student groups, the group exhibited more equal status behaviors. In a quasi-experimental design in classrooms, Cohen and Lotan (1995) demonstrated that what they called “status treatments” can undermine unequal participation during classroom group work. When teachers assign competence to low-status students, teachers can interrupt patterns of unequal participation in cooperative academic work (Cohen & Lotan, 2014). Students who receive explicit instruction on common pitfalls that lead to unequal group interactions are more likely to conduct group work that is not beset by status inequalities in student participation (Patterson, 2019). Teachers who prepare for the status issues inherent to group interaction may be able to resist the racialized hierarchies characteristic of much classroom instruction.

A second consideration of racially heterogeneous classrooms regards the nature of academic tasks themselves. Lotan (2003) argued that to offset status inequities in classrooms, tasks that encourage students to cooperate ought to be “group-worthy.” Group-worthy tasks are open-ended, requiring that multiple perspectives are considered; they represent significant content, calling on the “big ideas” of disciplinary inquiry; and they are oriented around multiple abilities of students in a classroom, ensuring that students can demonstrate competence regardless of their particular set of academic strengths. As a status treatment, Cohen and Lotan (2014) encouraged teachers to emphasize for their students that successful completion of the task requires that every student can

contribute an academic strength to the final product. Such final products might require skills such as creativity, visual representation, negotiation or performance to supplement more traditionally tested abilities like reading, writing, and computation. Horn (2005) found that mathematics departments that successfully de-tracked their courses leaned heavily on group-worthy tasks in math courses to honor the abilities of all students and challenge them to cooperatively answer complex mathematical problems.

These processes are particularly central to the development and maintenance of racial understandings in schools. Na'ilah Nasir (2011) emphasized that racial identities are actually *racialized* identities, and the racializing process occurs prominently in classroom interactions. Beliefs about race are thus in part constructed by way of practices and pedagogies implemented in schools. For example, students from marginalized backgrounds might be negotiating “school-smart” or “street-smart” identities that are valued differently in school settings (Flores-Gonzalez, 2002; Nasir, McLaughlin, & Jones, 2009). Classroom practices make available some identities to students, but obscure others. Teachers who neglect these hierarchical identities in designing classroom activities may reinforce inequality. These racializing processes have important implications for how young people make sense of race, and pedagogies that explicitly consider interrupting status hierarchies are essential tools for challenging racist ideologies.

Thus, racial reconciliation will require that educators strategize beyond integrated classrooms. Bringing students from different racial backgrounds together into the same classrooms may actually reinforce systemic inequalities. Status hierarchies inevitably frame classroom interaction. As such, pedagogies must explicitly encourage cooperation and destabilize the inequalities that typically frame student interaction. De-segregating classroom opportunity is a necessary precondition for successful anti-racist work.

## Integration by Curriculum

In addition to *how* teachers teach in diverse classrooms, *what* they teach deserves equal consideration. When students leave their schools, they will enter into communities that are profoundly unequal. By *integration by curriculum*, we mean curricula that elevates the challenges of racism and systemic inequality in such a manner that prepares students to be advocates for change. Here, we indicate how teachers incorporate anti-racist, critical pedagogies that inspire and embolden students to be advocates of social justice (Seider & Graves, 2020). While integration by pedagogy elevates the urgency of building equal status connections between students, the goal of integration by curricula plays the long game by framing the education of marginalized groups in its capacity to empower and disentangle their marginalization. Liberatory pedagogies conceive of education as part of a larger democratic process. They borrow from Freireian conceptions of *praxis* – teaching “the word and the world” and working with students to engage questions of power and oppression in their communities (Freire, 2000). Interrogating such questions in classroom contexts has been shown to have meaningful impacts on the political engagement of students of color (Seider & Graves, 2020). Curriculum that fails to encourage students to consider questions of racism and political equality will ensure the continuation of a separate and unequal society.

The body of evidence detailing the potential for liberatory pedagogy to have tangible impacts on students is small but growing. Quasi-experimental research designs demonstrate that racially minoritized students who experience pedagogical interventions that entail investigations of race and social change report increased inclinations towards collectivism and social action (Lewis, Sullivan & Bybee, 2006; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020; Thomas, Davidson, & McAdoo, 2008). Additionally, given the tendency among White Americans to discount racism as significant in present-day contexts (Bonilla-Silva, 2006), the participation of White students in pedagogies that investigate social injustice is likely crucial to undoing ideologies that constrain possibilities for racial reconciliation (Matias, 2013).

When they take classes that overtly discuss race and racism, White students demonstrate a reduction in bias and build empathy for non-White peers (Sleeter, 2011). Nelsen (2020) finds that White students who engage with critical pedagogies are more likely to report that people of color have made meaningful contributions to democracy. Thus, in addition to growth on traditional academic metrics like GPA and attendance (Dee & Penner, 2017), critical pedagogies that elevate questions of race and racism can enhance conversations towards racial equality and possibly ignite movements towards a more just and racially integrated world.

Classroom conversations about race may be beneficial to young children as well. As early as elementary school, pervasive among White children are negative attributions associated with race (Burkholder, D'Esterre, & Killen, 2019). Teachers can leverage research-based curricula to engage students in conversations about diversity and inclusion (Killen & Rutland, 2013). In these endeavors, adopting a role of facilitator rather than participant is essential, encouraging the young people themselves to negotiate the complexities of racial equity in their social worlds. In addition, critical pedagogies that ask students to negotiate political inequalities beyond the classroom have been shown to also be effective for students in younger grades (Christensen & Aldridge, 2012). In the long run, supporting students' moral reasoning from their earliest years of schooling can work towards developing them as future agents of change (Killen & Dahl, 2021).

The relationship between engaging students in political questions in classroom settings and their later participation in democracy is robust. Leveraging two-panel surveys with more than one thousand students in California and more than four thousand students in Chicago, Kahne, Crow, and Lee (2013) found that controversial conversations in classrooms can predict student engagement in politics and the likelihood that they will vote in elections. They also found that service-learning opportunities are associated with a greater likelihood that students will take community-based action. The combination of political conversations and community action in high

school coursework serves as a foundation for the engagement of young people in democracy. Hess (2009) outlined how teachers can encourage democratic discussion towards political engagement. Recent efforts in Chicago to bring conversations about police brutality to high school classrooms, for example, have proved successful at engaging students in passionate conversations of racial justice (Baker, 2019). Anyon (2009) explained that pedagogies towards racial reconciliation can be more effective if oriented around civic action. Engaging students in democratic discussion and community engagement around questions of racial reconciliation, though underemphasized in many social science courses (de los Rios, López, & Morell, 2015; Vasquez Heilig, Brown, & Brown, 2012), is essential to democratic engagement and movements for equality. Liberation of students' communities necessitates classrooms that employ diverse methods to adequately prepare them to be anti-racist advocates for change.

## **Policy Strategies and Political Considerations**

Schools can play a pivotal role in elevating important conversations about race, potentially bringing us closer to meaningfully addressing racism in the United States. Schools have the capacity to connect neighborhoods and communities, bridging social divides through racially integrated learning opportunities. They are essential institutions that introduce young Americans to ideas that shape our world, and certainly, race and racism are amidst the most prevalent ideologies that influence U.S. society. Schools can prepare students to transition to adulthood ready to engage democratically with fellow citizens to build a better nation. A racial reckoning in the United States may depend on our ability to design schools that meaningfully advance racial equality.

However, powerful political currents work against any such racial progress. First, desegregation has been largely undone by Supreme Court decisions that ended federal desegregation mandates, passing the responsibility for school integration on to local municipalities. These



communities were deeply segregated by race and class, and city leaders were under the influence of educational rhetoric about “neighborhood schools” and “local control” that precluded meaningful efforts to maintain racial balance across their school districts (Orfield & Eaton, 1996). Rapidly, segregation returned in cities that were once integrated, and schooling systems that had always been segregated remained so. Today, Black and Latinx students are as segregated as they were before the Supreme Court handed down its momentous decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Meanwhile, schools that serve diverse student populations under-serve their students of color, tracking them into less rigorous coursework and engaging in unfair disciplinary practices. Schools and districts that attempt to de-track are met with stiff political opposition from parents seeking to maintain curricular advantages for their children (Wells & Serna, 1996).

Conservative political currents are also mounting a forceful resistance against efforts to elevate conversations about race in schools. After people across the United States watched the video of the police murder of George Floyd, many school districts began questioning whether their curricula and teaching practices paid adequate attention to issues of race and racism. Before these ideas could be acted upon, conservative backlash arose to prevent discussions of racism in schools. As such, fair questions can be asked about whether schools can realistically play any role at all in racial reconciliation in the United States. Indeed, these movements may best be achieved outside of formal institutions via mass protests that have arisen in the wake of police murders of Black and Brown Americans and other visceral moments of racial injustice. Here, however, we outline some potentially successful strategies for overcoming political resistance to efforts at racial reconciliation in schools.

### **Challenging School Segregation Within and Between Schools**

Segregation, followed by desegregation, and more recently, resegregation has been the prominent story of school enrollment since *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. Segregation by race

and ethnicity is entrenched in most communities across the United States given historical and persistent residential segregation further amplified by resegregated schools (Hill, 2019; Orfield, et al., 2016). While patterns of increasing and decreasing residential and school segregation change over time, their mutually informing relationships persist. Ultimately, the relationship between residential and school segregation is bidirectional and reciprocal such that decisions about where to live are informed by local school options (especially decisions made by parents with power and resources) and school-based decisions are often informed by local political entities (Frankenberg, 2013). To further complicate dominant narratives about resegregated schools and neighborhoods, Owens (2017) finds that, “the degree of inequality between neighborhoods—not just the composition of immediate neighborhood—matters” (p. 77) creating opportunities for school district boundaries to help facilitate neighborhood segregation. Certainly, the extent to which schools and neighborhoods remain segregated by race and class today is deeply disheartening for those who believe interracial contact to be essential for democratic movements towards racial justice.

However, there are promising signs of improvement. McCarthy (2019) reports that a majority of Americans support government action to address school segregation, and anti-segregation measures are particularly popular in communities of color. A majority of students who attended desegregated schools in Boston reported wanting the same integrated schooling experience for their own children (Eaton, 2001). Wells and colleagues (2019) assert that public support for integrated schools has been increasing steadily for decades. While younger generations of White parents are more receptive to enrolling their children in schools where they would not be a racial/ethnic majority, people of color continue to pursue any available pathways that lead them and their families towards quality education. Recent efforts have demonstrated promise at convincing families to voluntarily attend racially and socioeconomically integrated schools, like magnet programs, with requirements for socioeconomic diversity (Wells, Keener, Cabral, & Cordova-Cobo,

2019). To the extent that parents' expressed desires for their children to attend diverse schools are genuine, ranking schools not only by achievement data but also on measures of racial and economic integration might encourage parents to choose integration when deciding where to enroll their children in school (Schneider et al., 2020). In addition, legislative developments in the U.S. Congress, such as the Strength in Diversity Act of 2020, suggest a political climate receptive to policies aimed at school integration.

Bilingual schools and magnet schools may be particularly fruitful avenues for desegregation. In Gallup poll data, McCarthy (2019) found that magnet schools were very popular among all races as a method to enhance school integration. Magnet schools have been shown to leverage parental choice and incentives to encourage diverse schools that close racial achievement gaps (Wells, Fox, & Cordova-Cobo, 2016). Spanish-English bilingual schools have also shown significant promise as a lever for racial integration. They are often highly sought-after schools among families from all racial backgrounds (Kotok & DeMatthews, 2018), and when designed carefully, can emphasize the linguistic and cultural strengths of Latinx communities (Navarro Martell, 2021). Such schools have been shown to prevent the isolation experienced by many English learners in schools (Gándara & Aldana, 2014). Though neither magnet schools nor bilingual programs typically mandate desegregation, they are choice- and incentive-based models that have demonstrated effectiveness at equitably integrating schooling across diverse communities.

Along with voluntary parent choice and pilot programs, there are also possibilities for broader desegregation initiatives through school assignment policies using school districts' administrative authority (Monarrez, Schonholzer, Chien, & Rainer, 2021). Anderson and Frankenberg (2019) suggest that there are four main ways that district leaders can go about pursuing voluntary school integration through student enrollment including: (1) through the admission of a diverse range of students to magnet schools, (2) through changes to attendance zone boundaries, (3)

through district wide choice with civil rights protections, and (4) through considering diversity when transferring students among schools. Despite unclear legal footing and some political pushback, Anderson and Frankenberg (2019) found that despite these complexities, large schools and community districts in New York City, New Jersey, and San Antonio are actively pursuing racial and socioeconomic integration efforts today.

Additionally, Frankenberg and DeBray (2011) offer as strategies towards desegregation, “in an environment of limited federal budgets, the incremental approach—instituting pilot programs (as was the case with Moving to Opportunity), planning good evaluations, and studying the results—[as] the most viable” (p. 8). Moving to Opportunity for Fair Housing (MTO) describes a longitudinal, 10-year randomized housing mobility experiment funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) (Sanbonmatsu, et al., 2006). Pilot programs that can provide multiple sources of data can be leveraged to describe the localized, context-specific benefits of integrated schools and garner continued parent and community support.

Thus, there are hopeful signs that the United States might be able to meaningfully address segregation in our schools, assuming we have the political will to do so. However, as many scholars have noted (e.g. Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Lewis-McCoy, 2014), even schools that have successfully integrated students across identities of race and class often fail to ensure that students meaningfully interact with peers from different backgrounds. In particular, racialized tracking policies have long segregated students attending diverse schools. Two strategies might address within-school segregation caused by academic tracking. For one, school leaders might eliminate advanced coursework (“de-track”), moving all students through the same courses and asking teachers to differentiate instruction as necessary. Alternatively, they might advocate for rigorous, college-preparatory courses for all of their students, pushing as many students from marginalized backgrounds as possible into advanced classes.

Briefly in the 1990s, there were movements to de-track classrooms inspired by research findings suggesting wide racial disparities in access to rigorous curricula in schools. Unfortunately, these have seen limited success. One school that offered “open-access” to advanced classes experienced continued segregation by race in those classrooms (Yonezawa, Wells, & Serna, 2002). Black and Latinx students were reluctant to enter into those classes because they felt unwelcome in spaces with few other Black or Latinx students. Racially diverse districts seeking to de-track their courses have faced vehement opposition from privileged White parents (Wells & Serna, 1996). Parents do not object that their students would be in mixed-race classrooms, but rather “that their children [would] learn more in an environment where all students are as motivated to learn as they are – in a homogeneous ability classroom” (p. 102). De-tracking policies were rapidly disbanded at schools in favor of stratified learning opportunities.

More recently, some promising policy movements suggest the possibility of schools eliminating some hierarchical school structures and teaching all students in the same courses. California, for example, is now considering a proposal to recommend students at all levels of math competence take the same courses through tenth grade, eliminating racialized tracking for many California students (CA Dept Ed, Forthcoming). A similar approach to de-tracked math instruction in San Francisco Unified School District had promising outcomes for students and informed the California proposal (Boaler, et al., 2018). Kahlenberg, Potter, and Quick (2019) describe school programs that require all students to participate in “enrichment” courses in an area of interest and leverage practices of differentiation to offer some students “honors” credit without separating them into different classrooms. Efforts to keep students of all ability levels in the same classroom have gained some traction in U.S. schools.

More commonly, however, schools have kept stratified course offerings in place but attempted to encourage participation among more students from marginalized backgrounds. In their

comprehensive book on advanced coursework, Finn and Scanlan (2019) document a variety of programs that have invited more racially minoritized students into advanced coursework in states like Texas and New York. In Texas specifically, Jackson (2007) found noteworthy shifts in the attitudes of students and counselors driven by the state efforts. Research has found that targeted efforts at increasing advanced-course enrollment for racially minoritized students – including talent development and mentoring, information-sharing with educators and parents, increased cultural competence among educators, high expectations for youth of color, and hiring more educators of color (Francis, de Oliveira, & Dimmitt, 2019; Whiting & Ford, 2009) can expand access to advanced course for marginalized students. In addition, incorporating culturally relevant approaches (Ladson-Billings, 1995) to enhance access to advanced learning opportunities may invite more students to participate in gifted education and Advanced Placement (Ford, 2011; Kolluri, 2019). Latinx students, for example, are well represented in courses like AP Spanish and AP Spanish Literature (College Board, 2020), two courses where the cultural strengths of Latinx communities are at the core of the curriculum. A newer college-readiness program, dual enrollment, may actually be more effective than courses like Advanced Placement at closing racial enrollment gaps, particularly when districts offer financial incentives for schools to expand access to dual enrollment courses (Xu, Solanki, & Fink, 2020). Much research has illuminated potential avenues for diversifying advanced classrooms, bringing more students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds into contact in public schools.

Integrating schools and classrooms is possible. However, despite the promise of some of these policies, any attempts at widespread reform will inevitably endure systemic racism. Scott and Quinn (2014) documented the myriad ways that current policies have constrained school integration. The preferences of parents with power can reinforce segregation. When presented with opportunities to attend diverse schools, White parents often choose segregated options, and schools with more choice tend to be among the most segregated in the U.S. (Whitehurst, 2017). Diverse

schools that attempt to racially integrate their classrooms often meet resistance from White, middle-class parents (Gross, 2020; Joffe-Walt, 2020). Lewis and Diamond (2015) reported on “White flight” from de-tracked classrooms at a suburban school. In addition, some teachers are vocally resistant to de-tracking policies that would force them to teach in heterogeneous groups of students (Loveless, 2011). Thus, schools and district leaders that want to desegregate often face stiff opposition from parents and teachers who are much less willing to do so.

Schools, as bedrocks of their communities, offer profound opportunities for cross-cultural conversations towards racial reconciliation. Because of racism, even the most well-designed efforts at school integration might struggle, and even when school desegregation efforts succeed, the implications for racial justice are unclear. For example, Amy Stuart Wells (2009) documented the experiences of White students in adulthood. Given the racially stratified labor market and the segregation between neighborhoods, between work and home, the graduates of integrated schools experienced very little racial integration after high school. They lamented the lack of opportunities for their own children to have racially integrated experiences. Without a fundamental change in the systems that perpetuate racial inequities, like historical and present-day discrimination in housing (Rothstein, 2017) and the job market (Pager, Bonikowski, & Western, 2009), desegregation efforts in schools will do little to offset the segregation of opportunity elsewhere. As Rosiek (2019) writes, “to desegregate our schools, we must acknowledge that racism is a persistent social force that adapts to our efforts against it” (p. 8). As such, anti-racism is necessary to address the challenges of integrating schools. Thus, we turn now to race-conscious efforts that can be made within classrooms to facilitate social efforts to reckon with long and continuing legacies of racism in the United States.

### **Challenging Race-Evasiveness in Curriculum and Instruction**

To advance racial reconciliation, teachers need to consider race both with respect to how they teach and what they teach. Though integrated classrooms are a necessary prerequisite, racial

justice will not come about by way of interracial proximity alone. Teachers who do not carefully consider potential status hierarchies in their classroom instruction may reproduce racist structures. Teachers who avoid discussions of racism miss an opportunity to build collective understandings of injustice that might spur genuine efforts at social change.

### Addressing Racialized Status Hierarchies through Pedagogy—Including Some Classic Ideas for More Equitable Classrooms

Those concerned about the prospects for racial reconciliation in the United States must attend to the nature of classroom interaction. Building equitable status interactions in classrooms necessitates adequate training for teachers of diverse students. In particular, preparation in complex instruction – an approach that emphasizes equitable group interactions – is essential for teachers to undo student status hierarchies that often form along the lines of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and other stratified social identities. Some of the most successful teacher education programs, nominated by curricula experts for the extent to which they prepared teachers to offer equitable opportunities for deeper learning, use complex instruction to facilitate deep intellectual engagement across racial lines (Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2021).

However, serious impediments exist when developing teachers to become adept at creating the conditions for productive, equal-status collaborations in diverse classrooms. Such learning opportunities are not widespread in U.S. schools. Across thirty campuses and through hundreds of hours of observations “in search of deeper learning” Jal Mehta and Sarah Fine (2019) found that engaging, interactive learning opportunities were strikingly rare in academic classrooms. Most teacher education programs – underfunded and under pressure to navigate competitive, test-based learning expectations like the recent “Race to the Top” initiative, which provided limited grants to a few competing districts (Zeichner, 2013) – may neglect to support prospective teachers in developing status-mindful group work for heterogeneous classrooms. Redoubling efforts at



cooperative learning in teacher education and professional development will be essential for this work. We recommend this teacher development happens in three ways: through an enrichment of teacher repertoires, coaching, and organizational support.

Teachers benefit from instruction on social contexts, theories, and strategies that can enhance equity in their practice. Considering the social contexts of instruction is an important first step – reflecting the potential for social systems that can stratify students and produce different levels of engagement (Hammond, 2014). Generally, teacher education can be more impactful if recommendations for practice are grounded in theories and the social conditions of schools (Lotan, Cohen, & Morpew, 1998; Zeichner, 1992). Next, future teachers can learn and practice pedagogical strategies that encourage equitable student interactions. Lotan (2004) found that through modeling and practice, teachers could learn to see their classrooms as social systems and develop strategies for delegation of authority, roles for equal student engagement, and cooperative norms. Jilk and Crespo (2015) found that using video to support math teachers in identifying student strengths could be a useful way to orient teachers towards seeing the assets of their low-status students. Skinner, Louie, and Baldinger (2019) recommend reflecting on assumptions and practices that may reinforce student hierarchy in math classrooms.

Aronson and Bridgeman (1979) also contended that the competitive nature of American classroom hindered equal status interactions. They argued that “whatever differences in ability existed between minority children and white children prior to desegregation are emphasized by the competitive structure of the learning environment” (p.440). Aronson developed learning activities around the “jigsaw” technique (1978), a teaching strategy that encouraged smaller groups to delve into subtopics to then strengthen the collective understanding of the whole group in an interdependent, noncompetitive manner. Blaney, Stephen, Rosenfeld, Aronson, & Sykes (1977) conducted experiments across classrooms in Austin, Texas. Students in the treatment classroom

experienced many positive benefits from participating in the jigsaw as compared to their peers in the control group who did not get the jigsaw experience. There were significant increases in students liking their groupmates across and within ethnic groups, there was a significant increase in students liking of school, and there was an increase in self-esteem. As opposed to students in competitive contexts, students engaged in interdependent tasks were more likely to make similar kinds of attributions to their peer's performance as their own. This demonstrated the elimination of attribution bias/error towards others which is especially relevant to racial prejudice (Aronson & Bridgeman, 1979). The jigsaw approach continues to be referenced as a pedagogical approach capable of addressing racialized status hierarchies in classrooms (Nishina, Lewis, Bellmore, & Wilkow, 2019). Amidst the “smog” of racist ideology that all of us breathe (Tatum, 1997), considering social context and pedagogy can orient teachers towards approaches that address status inequality in classroom settings.

Additionally, teachers will benefit from consistent feedback and organizational support. Research on professional development suggests that intensive training that consists of summer workshops followed by classroom observations and feedback sessions can dramatically expand the quality and quantity of equal-status interactions in classrooms of diverse students (Lotan, Cohen, & Mophew, 1998). Engaging deeply with student data alongside a teacher coach can illuminate for teachers ways that their curricula are offering unequal opportunities for their students (Baldinger, 2014). When teachers participate in this type of professional development as teams along with school leaders, the practice becomes more institutionalized and embedded at the school site. Broadening resources across school communities may be particularly important since teachers are often drawing on a wide range of contexts when considering instructional practices (Louie, 2017). Preparing students to develop cooperative learning strategies that address status-hierarchies requires

consistent and collective effort. This work is essential to building interracial bonds and undoing racialized stratifications in schools.

### Addressing Race in the Curriculum

While ensuring equal-status interactions among students does important work in protecting them from racist ideologies, it will do little to address racial hierarchies at their source. The springs of racism exist largely beyond the classroom ecosystem, and, ultimately, a reckoning on race and racial injustice will necessitate that young people talk about racism as it unfolds locally, nationally, and around the world. As noted above, these practices may be particularly beneficial in diverse classrooms. The breadth and availability of these opportunities in schools will have meaningful implications for racial reconciliation in the United States.

Unfortunately, the resistance to conversations about race in schools has been swift and effective. Leveraging the term “critical race theory” as a multi-purpose cudgel to stamp out any discussion of race and racism in schools, is a forceful effort among conservative leaders. Their actions have led to legislation targeting teachers inspired to teach about racism amidst recent movements for racial justice. Before the state board of Florida unanimously passed a bill banning discussions of Critical Race Theory in schools, the state’s Republican governor had become a leading voice against discussing race and racism in schools. He remarked,

It's offensive to the taxpayer that they would be asked to fund Critical Race Theory, that they would be asked to fund teaching kids to hate their country and hate each other ... If we have to play whack-a-mole across this state, stopping this Critical Race Theory, we will do it (Hatter, 2021)

The resistance to teaching ideology is curious, since ideology is largely inescapable in curricular considerations. Given the centrality of ideology to curriculum development (Apple & Apple, 2018), we encourage the framing of an effort to elevate race conversations in schools as ideologically pro-achievement and pro-democracy. The broad framing of Critical Race Theory by conservatives to

undermine any classroom conversations about race necessitates strategic rebuttal. In focusing on discussions of race and racism for their contributions to academic achievement and democracy, educators can advance practices and pedagogies that generate movements towards racial reconciliation in the United States.

Americans have a longstanding fondness for educational reform in the name of economic advancement. From “A Nation at Risk” to “No Child Left Behind,” to “Race to the Top,” educational reforms couched in the language of economic competition have consistently gained legislative traction in the United States. Engaging in this achievement discourse can also be fruitful for educators interested in conversations of race. There exists a robust scholarly literature on the positive impact of culturally relevant pedagogies that elevate questions of race and non-dominant culture in the classroom (Dee & Penner, 2017; Irizarry, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Elevating the potential for increased academic achievement through culturally relevant approaches can support political efforts for more discussions of race in schools.

Additionally, as the United States rapidly approaches its destiny as a nation without a racial majority, preparing students to have productive conversations about racism will be essential to the maintenance of our multiracial democracy. Framing this effort as such will be essential to ensuring that conversations about race can happen in educational contexts. Advocating education for the sake of democracy has historical precedent. Common schools of the mid-nineteenth century were initially justified for their capacity to incorporate new Americans into the democratic project (Cremin, 1988). Though education’s democratic foundations have been obscured in recent decades, preparing students for civic engagement has bipartisan appeal (Harvard Institute of Politics, 2021). Race has become a centerpiece of political discourse in the United States, and democratic self-government will necessitate a populace adept at engaging productively in these conversations. Educational institutions can be central to this endeavor.

One promising area of development in many districts has been the development of ethnic studies courses, justified for their ability to enhance academic and democratic opportunities for diverse students. Positive academic outcomes for students such as increased literacy skills, enhanced sense of academic agency, increased engagement, positive identity formation, a reduction in absenteeism, and a higher completion of classes towards graduation are just some of the academic benefits for students who have taken ethnic studies classes (Cabrera, Milem, Jaquette, & Mars, 2014; Dee & Penner, 2017; Kisker, et al., 2012). As a discipline, ethnic studies incorporates political, social, economic, and cultural experiences and histories of marginalized ethnic groups into an established curriculum that has long been heavily focused on traditional narratives of American history. Ethnic studies assert validity and highlight the contributions and vast histories of those from marginalized communities (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015). Ethnic studies also afford students the opportunity to participate in our democracy. Youth Participatory Action Research, community engagement, and supporting students' development of political agency are central in ethnic studies pedagogy (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Ethnic studies curriculum purposely builds upon students' critical intellectualism and incorporates access points to literacy and democratic principles, while providing an opportunity to grapple with the complex histories of the United States. Ethnic Studies programs, currently in an "age of expansion" (Cabrera, 2019), offer fruitful pathways to democratic engagement around questions of race and racism.

However, conversations of race and racism need not be confined to Ethnic Studies classes. Much scholarship has investigated how conversations about race might be prepared across the disciplines. English teachers can draw on the literatures and narratives of communities of color to elevate questions of racial justice (Irizarry, 2017; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). Science teachers might ask students to scientifically investigate issues of racial injustice, like urban parks (Schindel Dimick, 2016) and the Flint water crisis (Patterson & Gray, 2019). History curriculum

might be expanded to more holistically address the legacies of racism in communities of color (Kolluri & Young, 2021; Vasquez Heilig, et al., 2012). Math teachers might help students to develop statistical analyses of racial injustice during the Jim Crow era (Lynn & Jennings, 2009) or apply geometry concepts to encourage them to analyze issues of spatial injustice in urban communities (Rubel, Lim, Hall-Wieckert, & Sullivan, 2016). Conversations about racial justice can be pertinent across the curriculum in K-12 settings, and these conversations can enhance academic performance as well as democratic movements for justice.

Of course, quality teachers are a prerequisite for this work. Early school desegregation efforts effectively dismissed school leaders and educators of color and replaced them with a majority White teaching population (Tillman, 2004). Black and Latinx teachers have been shown to benefit Black and Latinx students (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019), and teachers of color are less likely to use exclusionary disciplinary practices for their same-race students (Shirrell, Bristol, & Britton, 2021). Therefore, inviting more teachers of color back into the classroom will be essential for racial reconciliation in schools. Today, even though White students make up less than half of the K-12 population, White teachers make up over 80% of the teaching force (Meckler & Rabinowitz, 2019; Sleeter, 2017). Some efforts have produced positive results in this regard, for example, by creating apprentice programs that allow schools to “grow their own” to diversify the force (Lehrer-Small, 2021). In addition, doing this work necessitates adequate teacher preparation. Teacher education programs, currently steeped in White dominant norms, can build a critical consciousness among teachers to attune them to status disparities and encourage conversation around how disciplines like English, history, science, and math have marginalized non-dominant ways of knowing (Carter Andrews, Richmond, & Floden, 2018; Lotan, 2006; Sleeter, 2017). Teacher preparation and recruitment are essential to effectively engaging students to consider social hierarchy and racial injustice in classrooms and communities.

To reiterate, working to change schools to better undermine systemic racism will not be easy. Race consciousness is under attack at multiple levels of education. Considering race in school enrollment, curriculum development, college access, teacher hiring, and other facets of education faces stubborn resistance from large swaths of the country who believe racism is a relic of the past that need not be addressed in the present. Nonetheless, we remain hopeful that focused, strategic efforts can make a difference. We encourage anti-racist policy actors to consider how in their local contexts they can best implement the practices we outline here. For example, in California, school integration remains elusive, but there is real momentum for race-conscious curricula that teach students to understand and address systemic racism. In southern states, teachers may be barred from discussing race, but there exist long histories (and some success) of efforts at integration. In each context, policy advocates might build from existing policy momentum. They might call on courageous educators (e.g. fugitive pedagogues” [Givens, 2021] in conservative states) and community leaders (e.g. Maryland parents speaking out at Board meetings against re-segregating schools [Garcia Cano & Rankin, 2020]) to resist existing policies that perpetuate racism. The evidence is clear that racism remains a scourge and that schools can be a salve. Strategic political action, grounded in this evidence is needed to undo racialized stratifications in our communities.

## Conclusion

In 2020, demonstrations that erupted across the country inspired national conversations about racial inequities and brought language concerning “institutional racism” into the public’s lexicon. This was not without pushback from former President Donald Trump, the Republican Party, and White nationalists. In 2050, the year at which this project is directed, we will be approaching 200 years since the end of the enslavement of African people. Our hope is that by then, thoughtful Americans well-versed on race and racism will have made meaningful progress in

undoing some of the harms of slavery and racial oppression. We believe that despite setbacks, the foundations of this racial reckoning can emerge in schools. Moving our nation forward on the thorny issues of race and racism will require a knowledgeable, empathetic, and engaged citizenry. Classrooms must be designed to nurture these young citizens to respect one another and advocate for change.

Classrooms are important sites in which our society might begin the hard work of reckoning with long legacies of racial oppression. Integrated schools may be of particular importance. Schools serving students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds have been shown to reduce prejudice and increase interracial friendship. However, they might also reinforce beliefs about intellectual competence. Teaching and learning are inherently social, and social hierarchies from beyond classroom walls inevitably filter through. In meaningfully integrated classrooms, teachers ensure equal-status interactions among students across racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and linguistic differences. Anti-racist teachers also attend to realities outside the classroom where marginalized groups are surveilled, exploited, and disenfranchised by oppressive social structures. Schools, as currently organized – segregated, hierarchical, and disconnected from democracy and the political resistance in marginalized communities – are not doing this work. Racial reconciliation, essential to a more just and equitable future, will require educators and educational leaders to reimagine schools and classrooms in the United States.

Racial reconciliation faces significant political headwinds, particularly in schools. Since *Brown v. Board of Education* 70 years ago, racial integration has remained elusive, as subsequent court decisions undermined momentary advances shortly after the decision. In schools that have succeeded in maintaining a level of racial integration, course enrollment patterns and classroom status hierarchies limit cross-racial interactions for equality. Pedagogies that challenge racism are similarly evasive. Right-wing firebrands in congress and on primetime news channels have



successfully framed classroom conversations about race as anti-American. Undergirding these trends is the ever-present scourge of racism. Racial equality in schools has long been constrained by racist practices within schools and racist social structures beyond them. Our hope is that the same institutions that have long perpetuated racial inequality can begin to chart a new anti-racist course. Policies that can meaningfully challenge racism through schooling are within reach. Through school integration and focused efforts by educators to challenge racial hierarchies within their classrooms and in their communities, an honest racial reckoning can shake the racist foundations on which this nation was built.

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