



## **A Dream Deferred? An Examination of Black Education in the United States**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The history of education in the United States is situated on a dual system that has elicited binary themes and purposes: schooling for democratic citizenship and schooling for second-class citizenship. Such opposing traditions have thrived in American society and have been validated by the government and mainstream society. While education is regarded as a means for great equalization, history echoes the socio-historical factors that impacted formal education for African Americans since the conception of the United States. Nevertheless, the representation of Black education in the historical literature is often narrow and primarily focuses on the fiscal inequalities between segregated Black and White schools. It further characterized Black education as deficient and dependent on outside stakeholders. However, some scholars who have conducted historical research on Black schools during segregation have gone beyond such truncated representations (Bracey, 2016; Green, 2018; Walker, 2013). This article investigates an important, but often ignored, intellectual trend in the historical and contemporary scholarship on Black schooling. It further offers a counternarrative to the representation of predominantly Black schools and the experiences of Black people in education, and suggests directions for research on contemporary education for African Americans in the United States.*

**Keywords:** achievement, Black schooling, Black education, equity, equality

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## INTRODUCTION

In the United States, the education of African Americans has historically been synonymous with a dual system of education that is often characterized as sporadic and unreliable. Conceived as a means for great equalization, history echoes the intense disapproval of formal education for African Americans since the conception of the United States. Although African Americans encountered significant legal barriers and threats of death while trying to obtain an education, their yearning for knowledge and opportunities served as a catalyst for the establishment of successful African American schools. As a result, African Americans erupted from slavery with a philosophy of education and perseverance that served as a precursor to the establishment of universal schooling that would serve their needs and provide hope for a better life.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The methodology for this article consists of a literature review that focuses on electronic resources provided through the library at the University of West Georgia. The first electronic database search through the Educational Resources Information Center Search Engine (ERIC) focused on keywords and phrases such as “Black education,” “Black schooling in the United States,” and “history of Black education.” Citations were identified by exhaustive searching of the Library Literature, ERIC, America History and Life, Digital Dissertations, and WorldCat databases. Bibliographies of those citations were reviewed to identify additional sources. Key authors were identified and author searches were then performed in the databases listed. Next, abstracts were reviewed to narrow down the literature and identify the most appropriate selections for inclusion.

The significance of this review lies in its attention to a significant examination of an underrepresented area in education. Through this review, educators, parents, policymakers, and researchers may gain a better understanding of the value of Black education and the strength and resilience that is often overlooked when discussing the history of Black education in the United States. Unfortunately, the representation of Black education in the historical literature is narrow and, as has been noted, primarily focuses on the fiscal inequalities between segregated Black and White schools. In reviewing the literature, I hope to examine the history of Black education in the United States and outline implications for future policies and research in education.

In essence, the purpose of this review is to summarize, interpret, and critically analyze the extensive body of literature relevant to the primary question: How has the history of Black education in the United States impacted the current state of Black education today?

### **History of African American Education in the U.S. South**

Long before the Emancipation Proclamation and northern missionaries entered the South in 1862, scholars note that African Americans understood the power of education and sought it by any means necessary (E. Anderson & Moss, 1999; Duster, 2009; Walker, 2001). Without waiting for White encouragement and sponsorship, African Americans established, owned, and operated African American schools, staffed them with African American teachers, and raised funds from community efforts. Although African American educational initiatives were often in confrontation with powerful Whites, leaders of Black education were not powerless. Their faith in the power of education largely shaped many southern African American institutions. The African American agenda was highlighted in thousands of small choices such as African American parents' decisions on when and where to send children to school, decisions by churches and local communities to start new schools, and the decision to oppose outside philanthropy (E. Anderson & Moss, 1999).

The relationship between African American self-help and educational attainment in the South was highlighted by J. D. Anderson (1988). He provided a detailed account of former slaves' educational efforts in Georgia. In December 1864, a committee of African American leaders met with Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton and General William T. Sherman to solicit support for the education of Georgia's African Americans. The end goal of this meeting was the establishment of an organized system of free schools. A year later, African American leaders formed the Georgia Educational Association (GEA) to supervise schools and districts throughout the state, establish school policies, and raise funds to help finance the cost of education. Through this association, African Americans in Georgia owned and operated at least two-thirds of their schools. This accomplishment fulfilled the primary purpose of the GEA in that freedmen aimed to establish schools in their own communities that were supported entirely by African Americans. Additionally, E. Anderson and Moss (1999) further noted that these beliefs and behaviors were consistent with other southern states such as Louisiana, South Carolina, and Virginia. J. D. Anderson (1988) outlined some schools that opened in the South such as schools in Monroe, Virginia, in 1861

under Mary Peake, an African American teacher, and a school in Savannah, Georgia, existing from 1833 to 1865 that was led by an African American teacher by the name of Deveaux. While many of these early schools lacked a lot of financial resources, many made great headway in providing a blueprint for an education system that was structured and unique to African American roots and values. Often, African American leaders and newly freed African American slaves in southern states such as Georgia were critical of misconceptions that attributed the schooling of freedmen to the philanthropy of White northerners.

Croom and Alston (2009) further elaborated on the establishment of Black schools and noted that schooling for former slaves in the U.S. South did not arrive with the federal army during the American Civil War. For example, the Penn School for freed slaves was established at St. Helena Island in 1862 after the area came under the control of federal troops. In addition, as reconstruction after the Civil War led to the widespread development of schools for former slaves, there were many literate slaves in the South prior to and during the Civil War (Fraser, 2001).

Without White support, African Americans were preemptive in establishing their own Sabbath and African American-controlled and operated schools, staffing them with African American teachers, and supplementing outside help with community self-help (Jones, 1978). In one instance recorded in the *Freedmen's Record*, complaints were made about the tendency of African Americans who preferred to send their children to private African American-controlled private schools rather than to White-dominated free schools (J. D. Anderson, 1988). The ability to establish and control their own schools gave African Americans the opportunity to restructure their lives and establish their freedom. Although they were grateful for northern philanthropy, they resisted any efforts that threatened to undermine their own educational philosophy and self-reliance.

### **Northern Philanthropy**

Butchart (2010) provided an overview of Northern philanthropy that impacted education in U.S. south after the Civil War. In particular, the Freedman's Bureau was established in the War Department in a department was established and charged with overseeing education of northern missionary schools in the South raised funds and recruited teachers who were both African American and White. In essence, the Freedman's Bureau was a school governing organization that assisted various aid societies and schools that educated African Americans.

Northern private generosity and the federal government deserve credit for aiding African American education during Reconstruction, but scholars dispute the primary incentives and costs for such aid to Black schools. Freeman (2010) noted that northern philanthropists presented philanthropy as “something that northern Whites *did* to southern Blacks” (p. 148), but mostly out of “paternalistic, condescending, self-aggrandizing and hegemonic motivations” (p. 149). Similarly, scholars (Brazzell, 1992; Gasman & Sedgwick, 2005) viewed northern philanthropists as condescending and pretentious towards African Americans and cultural differences.

While northern philanthropy was depicted by some scholars as hegemonic, some scholars have highlighted the significance the education partnerships between African Americans and northern White philanthropists had on the efficacy among Black schools (J. D. Anderson, 1988, 2002; Walker, 2000, 2001). Anderson (1988) pointed out an observation made by the Freedmen’s Bureau’s superintendent, John Alvord. Alvord recognized the structure and tenacity that underlay the African American school campaign and (as cited in J. D. Anderson, 1988) noted, “They [schools] are growing into a habit, crystalizing into a system...more and more complete and permanent. Self-reliance is becoming their pride as it is their responsibility” (p. 15). While most White northern missionaries held preconceived notions about African Americans and their ability to establish schools based on the belief that slavery had completely dehumanized them, African Americans aimed to establish schools that would uplift them and be supported by state funds. Yet, in the midst of their independence, many African American schools still continued partnerships with northern philanthropic societies that often hinged on debates surrounding practical control and competing ideological debates.

The extensive desire for education among African Americans at the close of the Civil War was so strong that W. E. B. Du Bois (1935) was prompted to conclude that “Public education for all at public expense was, in the South, a Negro idea” (pp.168–169). In the quest to mitigate African Americans from the harsh realities of racism and provide an avenue for African American advancement in education, northern philanthropists miscalculated just how powerful White supremacy had become in the South. For example, Jim Crow laws served to reiterate the belief that African Americans were inferior to Whites. Further, the institutionalization of such beliefs provided a safeguard for southerners to justify racism. In the hopes of trying to form an alliance with the South’s upper class, White northerners were deflected from their

original aim to challenge racism through means such as liberal education and equal opportunities. Instead, they compromised with the South's White supremacists to provide African Americans with what was believed to be an education for slaves that could fit into the scope of what would not be farfetched from slave work.

By the 1880s, many White Southerners realized that any attempts to eradicate ex-slaves' school campaigns would not be fruitful and elicit more slave revolts. As such, Anderson (1988) noted that numerous White Southerners began to make amends with many northern Reconstruction-era education reformers. Since several southern Whites did not agree with the idea of universal education for African Americans, they instead placed focus on adapting the education system to the region's traditional social structure and racial values. To this end, the Hampton-Tuskegee-Tuskegee model of industrial education, was posited as the great compromise for ensuring education for African Americans and controlling the "race problem" in the South.

### **A Philosophical Compromise**

The Hampton-Tuskegee model served a means to avoid confrontations and to maintain existing social order in the South for one significant reason in that it did not challenge traditional inequalities of wealth and power (J. D. Anderson, 1988). In keeping with the hegemonic ideal about African American value in society, Samuel Armstrong felt that African Americans should be disfranchised and do laborious field work of which they were accustomed, and he had an ally to support his model for Black education: Booker T. Washington. As a result, Armstrong's collaboration with Washington, however, placed Washington and his school, the Tuskegee Institute, at the center of confrontation for Black leaders. In particular Dennis (1998) noted the "Hampton-Tuskegee" was counterproductive to the educational and social movement that ex-slaves began.

The Hampton-Tuskegee program did not go without criticism, however. African American scholars such as W. E. B. Du Bois (1935) argued that the model was apolitical, and was not designed to challenge the *status quo* for African American educational experiences. This, according to W. E. B. Dubois (1935) further served as an ideological convergence between Southern and Northern Whites that maintained the existing social order in the U.S. All in all, this was not the classical type of education offered to many White students in the North.

Centered on industrial education for African Americans, the Hampton-Tuskegee model encompassed a more powerful and well-organized movement than had the early missionaries and former slaves in the mid-19th century. The Hampton-Tuskegee model had garnered huge support from northern businessmen and southern Whites. Additional support was also won in small areas of the African American community. In all, the success of this movement can be attributed to the ability of its supporters to orchestrate a well-organized campaign that kept with traditional southern ideologies. Ultimately, the Hampton-Tuskegee model debates set the stage for the early 20th century struggle over what quality education of African Americans should encompass. Fanon (1967) posited although Du Bois and Washington's backgrounds were different, they shared a common dream of delivering African Americans from a life of economic servitude and social immobility. The debate continues and is reflected in the legislation passed by Congress, originally in the form of the Smith-Hughes Act, and is further reflected today in the provisions of the Carl D. Perkins Act for Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act of 1990 and various reauthorizations of the legislation for decades to come (Fletcher, 2006).

### **Self-Reliance and Support**

While northern private generosity and the federal government deserve credit for aiding the education of African Americans after the Civil War, the primary stimulus and sustaining force came from African Americans. J. D. Anderson (1988) highlighted extensive social activism among African Americans in areas to formalize education by former slaves. He further noted that former slaves were first among White southerners to campaign for a universal, state-supported education system (J. D. Anderson, 1988). In their quest for universal schooling, ex-slaves welcomed and often pursued the aid of the Republican politicians, the Freedman's Bureau, northern missionaries, and the Union army. This uprising among former slaves, however, was the central threat to the planter rule and White southerner conceptions of the appropriate roles of school, church, and family in matters of education.

At this time, the South had some poor White children, but they were educated as a means of charity from wealthy White southerners through private means. State-funded education, however, was against the planters' beliefs. These ideals stemmed from the belief that the state government should not interfere in education, and ultimately that the social caste system should remain intact to ensure the "natural" evolution of society (J. D. Anderson, 1998).

The Freedmen's educational movement did not commence, however, without opposition. Postwar southern economic and social development was heavily influenced by the domination of the planter class. The planter ideology centered on an established hierarchical system that placed African Americans at the bottom with limited, if any land ownership. J. D. Anderson (1988) noted that in 1880, 75.4% of the South's labor was in agriculture, and 40% of African Americans constituted the total agricultural labor force. Lee (2006) further highlighted examples of African American laborers' desire for education could be seen in their labor contracts that entailed "educational clauses" between planters and ex-slaves. However, southern planters were fueled by fears that the education of African Americans would mean the end of African American plantation labor.

Combined with economic, political, social, and psychological relationships among southern Whites, both wealthy and poor, these ideologies helped to establish a system of opposition to universal public education. To this end, former slaves broke sharply with the planters' beliefs and instead formed relationships with Republican politicians that helped them to garner significant political influence in state governments. This rise in political affluence served as a catalyst for universal public education in the South.

### **The "Common" School Movement**

African Americans did much more than establish schools based on "self-help" and support for their schools. In their quest to establish universal schooling in the South, their hard work and efforts helped to materialize a national common school movement by 1870. Started by Horace Mann in the mid-19th century, common schools were conceived in Massachusetts as a means to ensure social and economic stability and patriotism. The concept of the common school for all people stressed many ideals. Specifically, there was a need to create an institution capable of preparing students to contribute positively to the community and society as a whole. In order to achieve this lofty goal, Horace Mann advocated three main ideas: (a) schooling should instill Protestant virtues in students; (b) community should be taxed to support the school in order to create a bond between the school and the community; and (c) a commitment to training those who teach America's youth (Urban & Wagoner, 2009).

Efforts made by the common school movement to educate the masses or be the "Great Equalizer" as Horace Mann hoped, proved great in theory; however, they did not fulfill the promise of equality to groups other than White males, especially in the southern region of the United States. The



“social control” arguments that were used to garner support of common schools in the North did not appeal to southern Whites. Laws such as *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896) allowed schools to be segregated by race, setting the conditions for inequitable distribution of educational resources from the state government for African Americans and their schools.

### **Segregated Public Schools: Pre-Brown**

According to Powell (1973), the ideal of equal education opportunity was a goal to be considered only after the needs of White children were met. Once Jim Crow laws were firmly established in the public schools of the South, inequities persisted and increased. Examples of inequities included, but were not limited to, African American teachers teaching classes that were twice the size of those taught by White teachers, while receiving pay that was only half as much as their White colleagues. Further, African American schools often received the White students’ old books, desks, and other equipment (Powell, 1973; Walker, 2000, 2001). Etta Joan Marks (as cited in Foster, 1997) recalled:

in 1961 or 1962, when our school burned down, we didn’t have textbooks of any kind. We held classes in the church. The White schools sent us their used textbooks just before they were ready to put them in the trash. Pages were torn out; they were old, worn, and so marked up that there wasn’t any space to write our names. (p. xxxii)

As segregated public schools became available to African Americans toward the end of the 19th century, two consequences resulted: (a) public funds were diverted to White schools, and (b) there was major opposition to African American education among many planter and White southern small farmers (J. D. Anderson, 1988). Consequently, African Americans in the South could expect little, if any, state and local support for public education. So, this often left African American schools to find alternatives to resources from state and local revenues. The alternatives were necessary because White school boards and government officials seized school funds, gerrymandered African American school districts to keep them from collecting certain local tax benefits, and double-taxed them. Essentially, the structure of this oppressive education system set the stage for the dominant ideology among African Americans that centered on “self help.”

Despite the inequities that existed between White and African American schools, African American communities continued to utilize self-reliance and organization that helped to make many African American schools successful.

Additionally, these schools succeeded in providing nurturing environments that aided in the educational success of African American students. Though the memory of segregated African American schools is rife with focus on unequal distribution of resources, scholars (J. D. Anderson, 1988; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2001) place emphasis on the extensive communal and caring models that were present in such schools.

### **Success by Any Means**

The memory of inequities and deficit perspectives are often recounted in literature on African American schooling during segregation. However, such documents have only painted a partial portrait of the whole truth. Thomas Sowell (1974) recounted the positive attributes of African American schools and notes these schools are remembered as having atmospheres where, “support, encouragement, and rigid standards combined to enhance students’ self-worth and increase their aspirations to achieve” (p. 3). Additionally, Henry Bullock (1967) utilized a conceptual framework that centered on the unintended consequences of intentional school board neglect and segregation on Black education. Primarily, J. D. Anderson’s (1988) work speaks to the unintended consequences of neglect among African American schools and highlights two major themes present in African American schools such as parent advocacy and caring African American teachers and principals.

#### Parent Advocacy

Although the financial role of African American parents is often discussed, their role as advocates is often neglected and downplayed in much of the literature. Walker (1996) outlined their role in the education of their children and the broader community. Specifically, in Caswell County, North Carolina, Walker (1996) provided a context of parents and their role as major advocates. She went on to further highlight the lack of support from local school boards in establishing new schools, which was often rationalized as an expectation that African Americans should be grateful that they could contribute to their own schools. In fact, the idea of self-help among African Americans was often counterproductive for African American schooling in that local school boards expected African American communities to offer labor and materials in exchange for little support such as flooring, from the local school board. In essence, African Americans had to “prove” their need for education by demonstrating their resourcefulness in helping to achieve it (Walker, 1996).

African Americans have continuously searched for ways to improve the educational opportunities for their children. At a time when the Parent–Teacher Association (PTA) was a burgeoning force in White schools, African American parents pulled together and also organized to form a PTA. This organizational structure of such meetings included the expectations and overview of school budget and concerns, but the significant value of such meetings is evidenced in the way Walker (1996) recalled a parent from one of the meetings. She noted,

What parents frequently recall about the nature of these talks about the school and their children was not just the particular information received but the tone of genuine concern the principal conveyed for the educational advancement of the children. (p. 70)

Through the PTA, parents further made efforts to support the community both in and out of school.

### **Teachers and Principals**

Although research on segregated schools reveals that they were indeed lacking in facilities and funding, some evidence proposes that the environment of the segregated school had effective traits, institutional policies, and community support that helped African American children learn in spite of the neglect their schools received from White school boards (Walker, 1996, 2000). In her study of a formerly segregated African American school community in North Carolina, Walker (1996) found that many teachers and principals created environments of teaching and learning that inspired students to excel. Walker concluded that “they countered the larger societal messages, which devalued African Americans, and reframed those messages to make African American children believe in their ability to achieve” (p. 219).

The segregated school is most often associated with a family where teachers and principals, with parent-like authority, exercised almost complete autonomy in shaping student learning and ensuring student discipline (Walker, 1996, 2000). Several accounts of this period emphasized that educators became part of students’ extended families, as they resided, worshipped, and worked in the same communities as their students (Beauboeuf-LaFontant, 1999; Walker, 2000). These studies further maintain that because of their knowledge of and investment in the communities of their students, African American teachers were able to create community atmospheres in schools where students experienced continuous expectations

and interactional patterns between their homes and schools, their parents, and their teachers (Siddle-Walker, 1996).

## **Desegregation and African American Schools**

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) began its effort to achieve desegregated schools in the early 1930s but initially did so within the “separate but equal” framework of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The “separate but equal” doctrine was illustrated in every facet of U.S. society including schools up until 1954. On May 17, 1954, the United States Supreme Court overturned the *Plessy* decision, and rendered its decision in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*. The *Brown* decision stated that where states had undertaken the responsibility of providing public education, it must do so in a way that ensures equal opportunity for all of its students (347 U.S. 483, 1054).

Lowe (2004) notes Black schools got only 60% of the funding White schools received prior to *Brown*. Attempts by the NAACP to make separate Black schools more equal included investing funds in facilities, teachers' salaries, school terms, and transportation as a way of putting financial pressure on the South to dismantle a dual system of education. Reactions to the decision were varied and touched a range of emotions among nearly all citizens of the United States. For some, *Brown* was heralded as the victory over legal barriers to better educational opportunities for racial/ethnic and minority students. However, for others, it endangered a way of life that in the eyes of some, ensured "separate but equal" under *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896). Whatever the perspective, *Brown* meant a departure from past rules and values. It meant change.

## **Reactions to the *Brown* Decision**

Such change, however, did not come without resistance. Subsequently in 1955, in what came to be known as the *Brown II* (349 U.S. 294, 1955) decision, the Supreme Court basically left the execution of desegregation efforts in the hands of district level courts. The opinion of the court was:

...school authorities have the burden of establishing that a grant of additional time for transition is necessary in public interest and is consistent with good faith compliance at earliest practicable date. School desegregation must proceed with all deliberate speed. (349 U.S. 497, 1955)

The “all deliberate speed” mandate in the *Brown II* ruling was so vaguely phrased that the Court’s opinion was left open for various interpretations of the law. This ambiguity essentially gave individual states license to drag their feet (Ogletree, 2004).

Various critical race theorists have argued that these events came as no surprise. For instance, Derrick Bell (1995) argued that an “interest convergence principle” catapulted the *Brown* decision to the federal agenda. This principle states that interest-convergence covenants are decisions in which “...Black rights are recognized and protected when and only so long as policymakers perceive that such advances will further interests that are their [Whites'] primary concern” (p. 49). Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) further criticized the *Brown II* ruling. They noted that it did not explicitly define equality, much less offer any recommendations as to how desegregation could be realistically achieved. Essentially, the Supreme Court recognized only the large-scale undertaking of the issue without addressing remedies. In effect, by placing the task of implementation efforts in the hands of state and local authorities, power was handed back to those very groups whose goal was to uphold the existing hegemonic structure that maintained racism throughout every institution in the South.

Governors in South Carolina, Mississippi, and Georgia threatened to abolish all public schools rather than desegregate. In their creation of the Southern Manifesto, they aimed to unite all southern states through compliance from the states in the region. This document was drafted by state governors and signed by numerous representatives from 11 states to signal their intention to maintain segregation on the grounds of interposition. The Manifesto declared the Supreme Court’s ruling in the *Brown* decision to be in violation of states’ rights and contrary to the Constitution (Southern Manifesto, 1956).

In the decades following *Brown*, stalling tactics served as a catalyst for defacto segregation and included repealing compulsory attendance laws, funding private White academies, and reducing the flow of funds to desegregated schools (Kluger, 1976). A major desegregation strategy typically consisted of court-approved “choice” plans. These plans took three forms: pupil placement laws, Freedom of Choice plans, and incremental desegregation plans. Pupil placement laws assigned students to segregated schools, but allowed students to request transfers. Requests were evaluated by school boards on an individual basis, and took into account the “psychological qualifications” of the students making the requests, the likelihood of their adjusting to the curriculum, and the possibilities of

community backlash. In light of the fact that these were subjective factors, it is not surprising that little integration resulted from such plans (Kluger, 1976).

Freedom of Choice plans allowed students' parents to select the school of their choice at the beginning of the school year, thereby supposedly eliminating the automatic initial assignment of students to segregated schools and thereby putting the schools in compliance with the required desegregation edicts. Orfield (1969) cited that many White schools claimed to be overenrolled and only encouraged African Americans to enroll in these schools so that it appeared that they were somewhat integrated.

In 1965 the Office of Civil Rights found that approximately 94% of African American children in the South continued to attend segregated schools. In order to try and rectify the problem, some districts that were found in noncompliance with the 1964 Civil Rights Act and were facing termination of federal funding, adopted incremental desegregation plans. These called for the integration of one grade level per year, across districts. While incremental plans demanded a more comprehensive form of integration, they allowed the transition to occur as slowly as possible (Gordon, 1994). Moreover, Tolsdorf's (2004) analysis of defacto and de jure segregation outlined key legislation that helped to integrate public schools; however, he further noted desegregation efforts based on the federal Equal Protection Clause now face severe hurdles, and *Milliken*<sup>1</sup> makes clear that a new direction is needed if effective remedies are to be found.

### **Then and Now: A Discussion on Black Education**

This article aimed to address the following question: How has the history of Black education in the United States impacted the current state of Black education today? African Americans have been exposed to generations of racism and discrimination in the United States. From slavery to Jim Crow to inequities in education today, this article outlines how educational experiences for African Americans have shifted. To believe that these insults have not left a cultural residue—for Whites as well as for African Americans—is to deny what we know about power relationships. In the midst of institutionalized racism, emerged the identity and structure for African American schools. Researchers (Anderson, 1988; Horsford, 2011; Walker,

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<sup>1</sup> *Milliken v. Bradley*, 345 F. Supp. 914, 918 (E.D. Mich. 1972) (reasoning that the decision aimed to "achieve the greatest degree of actual desegregation to the end that, upon implementation, no school, grade or classroom [would] be substantially disproportionate to the overall pupil racial composition").

1996, 2000) provided contrasting accounts of African American education and their schools. In addition, the authors highlighted significant parent and teacher advocacy and caring models that were used to educate African American students. Yet, the conception of a system for African American schools led to conflicting ideologies over the purpose of African American education and ultimately its place in a hegemonic society.

Du Bois (1935) expressed disdain about studies by White educators that purported to show that Black children thrive better in separate schools than in mixed. Six years later he claimed that racist teachers in desegregated classrooms provided significant negative experiences for African American children and that separate schools might be better. While the *Brown* decision in 1954 marked what was to be heralded in education as the end of racial segregation in schools and the beginning of educational equity for African Americans, scholars posit the impact of integration on the identity of African American student (Newby & Tyack, 1971; Rustin, 1980; Smith, 2017). Thus, a demand for “integration” often has reflected a profound distrust of a White power structure that persistently refused to grant equal schools when they were separate; only if there were White children in classrooms as hostages would equality become real; a concept that is outlined as interest convergence (Bell, 2004).

Research such as the *Equality of Educational Opportunity* report (Coleman et al., 1966) demonstrated vast academic disparities between Black and White students, and shifted the focus from inputs—per-pupil expenditure, school size, comprehensiveness of the curriculum—to outputs—the amount its students know, the gains in learning they experience each year. In a review of the Coleman Report, Hanushek (2016) noted the *Equality of Educational Opportunity* report failed to accomplish one of the key goals that led Congress to commission the report in the first place: a forward march toward equal educational opportunity across racial groups. That simply happened haltingly in most parts of the country.

Recent studies continue to posit that low-income and minority students encounter significant inequities in learning, inadequate instruction and support, and lower expectations of their schools and teachers when compared to their White counterparts (Hanushek, 2016; Pitre, 2014; Vanneman et al., 2009). Haycock (2002) argued that schools overwhelmingly reflect the values of White, middle-class society. In Walker’s (2001) view, this is due to the mass numbers of African American educators who were displaced due to desegregation and the closing of African American schools. The racial achievement gap is further evidenced by disparities in school performance, test scores, graduation rates, higher drop-out rates for minority students, and

college completion rates (Taylor, 2006). Ultimately, Walker's (2001) concludes that the result of desegregation policies lies in its failed attempt to fully recognize the implications of closing Black schools, which led to an educational system that lacked cultural competency to support the social, emotional, and academic needs African American students.

The long struggle over the development of education in the United States after the Civil War occurred largely in part because the dominant groups could not convince African Americans that their education relied on maintaining social order. History has steadily shown that the former slaves had the courage and knowledge to resist competing ideologies and chart a course of their own. Moreover, it is important to remember that even within the slave community, a shared belief in self-improvement and universal education was born as a means to secure freedom and citizenship.

This review of the literature on Black education has numerous implications for the education of African American students. In *Victims Without "Crimes": Some Historical Perspectives on Black Education*, Newby and Tyack (1988) asked, "Is there anything to learn from a history of Black education that all too often has been a bleak sociology of oppression?" (p. 206). Primarily, the ways in which the history of Black education is represented in the literature and interpretations dependent on cultural contexts should be considered by policymakers and practitioners when developing policies and practices that impact the schooling experiences of African American students.

Scholars (Frankenberg, 2011; Frankenberg & Lee, 2002; Orfield, 2004) note that failing public schools that often enroll African American students are the new civil rights issue of our day. Additionally, much of the current discussion about school reform in the United States over the past two decades has shifted from one of equity to one based on excellence in the form of student achievement and pressure to produce high test scores (Tate et al., 1996). Past and present economic and social conditions are at the root of the achievement gap between White and African American students. As such, educators and policymakers must recognize that centuries of prejudice and discrimination against African Americans have slowed societal efforts to counteract such factors (Knoester & Au, 2017; "New poll," 2014). Only by understanding these factors can educators develop and implement the strategies needed to improve the academic achievement of African American students, thus increasing access to opportunities for life success as a whole.

Examination of this topic provides insight into potential areas for future investigation that are not well-researched and could benefit from future study. Issues currently lacking or not well-represented include the humanization of



the Black education and experiences through the record of Black agency and advancement in the context of systemic notions of White supremacy and racism (J. E. King, 2017). Furthermore, as previously noted, the paucity of narratives from Black education indicates a need to engage Black educator voices to more fully comprehend the successes of schools that serve African American students. Bracey (2016) noted the difficulties faced when promoting minority histories against dominant White culture. He further concluded that by acknowledging the history and successes of Black schools and education, educators and policymakers can begin to deconstruct the traditional deficit lens that has historically characterized Black education.

## CONCLUSION

The reason for undertaking this review of Black education was based on the need to challenge deficit characterizations that characterize Black schools as “inadequate,” in addition to highlighting implications for our current education system. A literature review on Black education seemed pertinent to open the field for discussion; however, the articles presented an incipient link between the history of Black education and present educational experiences for African American students, showing that there is still a demand to discuss history and its significant impact on African American student success in the educational context.

The establishment of an education system for all students regardless of race, creed, or class still presents issues within public schools today. Much of the current discussion about school reform in the United States over the past two decades has shifted from one of equity to one based on excellence in the form of student achievement and high test scores. Similar to legislation that began in the late 20th century, the hope is still that federal involvement will assist with the issue of underachievement of African American students today. The establishment of a system for all students regardless of race, creed, or class still presents issues that center on equity in public schools.

Well over 50 years after the Civil Rights movement, African Americans are still in a battle to levy equitable approaches to education; they are unsung heroes, understanding that African American children ultimately pay the price for a history that shadows the present. In essence, such a history has shown that while African Americans have achieved much of what they wanted, they also have achieved little of the social vision for education that they originally hoped to sustain: a vision that was built on empowerment and advocacy in the midst of an uncertain future.

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