SITTING NEXT TO WHITE CHILDREN:

SCHOOL DESEGREGATION IN THE BLACK EDUCATIONAL IMAGINATION

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract

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Within urban education policy research, Black people are most often presented as the objects of policy. That is, they tend to be situated on the receiving end, as beneficiaries or victims—the (Negro) problem to be solved by education policy. Very little research has documented how Black communities—particularly in the post-civil rights/post-Black Power era—make meaning of, and attempt to shape social policies. Further, we have not adequately theorized, or even documented, the historical trajectory of the Black encounter with knowledge and schooling, the dialogic between Blackness and education—what I call the Black educational imagination.

This historical ethnography documents how members of Seattle's Black community have imagined and engaged school desegregation policy from the mid-1970s, when the school district implemented a mandatory busing program (notably, without a court order), to the present, now a decade since the demise of that program, and the beginning of the resegregation of the city's schools. Using in-depth interviews and archival data, I explore the cultural production of the "educational imagination" of Black civic and religious leaders, educators and activists operating within the space of an urban Black neighborhood and its

public schools. This project provides a theoretical and empirical space to explore how Black people imagine education and education policy, and how this imagination is informed by local and global political, economic and cultural transformations. In my analysis, I take into account not only the role of community forces and cultural and ideological formations but also how, over time, institutional practices and political-economic processes become implicated in the production of individual and collective education narratives and in the politics pursued to remedy educational injustice.

Research findings offer implications for the future of school desegregation and other efforts to achieve education equity, and more broadly, provide insight into how marginalized communities interpret and seek to influence school reform initiatives.

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CHAPTER I

FOR BROWN BABIES: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Brown baby, brown baby

As you grow up, I want you to drink from the plenty cup

I want you to stand up tall and proud

And I want you to speak up clear and loud…[1]

On April 19, 1967, before a crowd of 4,000 at Seattle's Garfield High School, Black Power activist and theorist Stokely Carmichael[2] called attention to the nation's hypocrisy in sending disproportionate numbers of Black people to fight and die in Vietnam while they faced racial and economic oppression at home. "Our guts and blood have been spilled for this country," he stated, "and we go to the worst schools this country can produce" (Carmichael, 1967). In a speech which connected transnational politics to urban political economy and the cultural struggle for Black recognition, Carmichael argued that it was time for Black people to seize control of their communities, and accused integrationist civil rights leaders of destroying Black communities.

The speech at Garfield—in the 1960s the high school in the city which nearly all Black young people attended—came at a time of growing unrest in Seattle's Black community regarding school desegregation. Most civil rights leaders, at least publicly, maintained that integration was the only way to secure equal education for Black children.

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[1] From "Brown Baby," a song by Oscar Brown, Jr. (1960), recorded by Brown, and popularized by a number of artists, including Nina Simone, Mahalia Jackson and Lena Horne.

[2] Later known as Kwame Touré

They argued that the reason Black children went to "the worst schools this country can produce" was because schools remained racially segregated, even a decade after the *Brown* decision. However, many residents in the Central District, where most Black folks were concentrated, agreed with Carmichael that local control would be in the best interest of the community and its children. Their concern was that integration efforts would lead to the closing of schools in the Central District and long bus commutes for Black children to schools in distant and potentially unfriendly white neighborhoods. Further, they believed that school desegregation could serve to undermine the stability of Black political and cultural institutions, and impair the psychosocial development of Black children.

By the mid-1990s, the political tide had turned, and turned again. The influence of Black Power had declined throughout the 1970s, and by the end of that decade, Seattle, like many cities across the country, had implemented a mandatory citywide busing program to desegregate public schools—what the school board called The Seattle Plan for the Elimination of Racial Imbalance. Over the next 20 years, the Seattle Plan would undergo a number of revisions, each one intended to provide more choices in school-assignment. Along the way, the board also conceded to less stringent definitions of racial balance, often in response to fierce white opposition and growing skepticism in Black communities, but also as a result of new rulings by an increasingly conservative judiciary, which had allowed a growing number of school districts to rescind or weaken their desegregation policies (Kohn, 1996; Orfield & Eaton, 1996).

"I don't have to sit next to someone of another color to learn," declared John Stanford, Seattle's school superintendent in November 1996, in support of the recent Seattle School Board vote to abandon the district's effort to desegregate the city's schools. (That

Stanford was Black added to the vote a certain legitimacy—yea, a necessary blessing—in this predominantly white city known for its excruciatingly self-conscious liberalism). Proponents of school desegregation reminded Stanford and the city's residents that integrating schools was never simply about sitting next to white children, but acknowledging that in a society in which political and economic power is racially skewed toward whites, separate schools will always be, as the high court ruled in *Brown*, inherently unequal (Frankenberg, Lee & Orfield, 2003). And beyond that, they argued, by bringing students of all racial groups together, we strengthen our 'American' democracy by teaching the values of tolerance and diversity.

It is now a decade since the Seattle School Board voted to end racial school desegregation, and as students have returned to neighborhood schools, they have found themselves in buildings that mirror the segregation in the city, where the north end is predominantly white and middle- to upper-middle class, the historically-Black Central District is now effectively gentrified, and the south end is the home of most people of color (Pate, 2000). Even as Seattle has become more integrated over the past 30 years, Black people remain the most racially segregated group in the city (Orians, 1989; US Census Bureau, 2000). Reflecting the national trend, Black children remain on the bottom of nearly every indicator of academic achievement. Research reveals that Black (and Latino and Native American) students are far more likely to attend schools with a concentrated number of poor students, and with less access to experienced teachers and advanced course offerings (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). This contributes to an alarming achievement gap, not only on state tests, but also with regard to grades and high school completion (Huggins, 2002; Wright, 2003).

(Re-)theorizing school desegregation

About twenty years before the *Brown* decision, W.E.B. DuBois (1935) raised concerns about integration in *The Journal of Negro Education*, in an article which posed the provocative question, 'Does the Negro need separate schools?' Should Black people preserve Black-only schools, DuBois wondered, or put their energies into the struggle for integrated institutions? He makes two important observations: First, that this is a false dichotomy, as both separate and integrated schools may be necessary and useful; and second, that the question is, in the end, beside the point. "The Negro needs neither segregated schools nor mixed schools," DuBois concludes, "What he needs is Education" (1935, p. 335). He explains:

> There is no magic, either in mixed schools or in segregated schools. A mixed school with poor and unsympathetic teachers, with hostile public opinion, and no teaching of truth concerning Black folk, is bad. A segregated school with ignorant placeholders, inadequate equipment, poor salaries, and wretched housing, is equally bad. Other things being equal, the mixed school is the broader, more natural basis for the education of all youth. . . . But other things seldom are equal, and in that case, Sympathy, Knowledge, and the Truth outweigh all that the mixed school can offer.

DuBois' argument foreshadows a concern I have about much of the scholarly work written in support of school desegregation. It is not that I am opposed to desegregation; in fact, as DuBois acknowledges, integrated schools potentially offer far richer opportunities for learning and social interaction. However, what if Black children are met with all the factors that make conditions less than equal: ill-prepared teachers, low academic and social expectations, and public resistance to racially diverse classrooms, despite a veneer of openness? What if desegregation policies serve to destabilize Black families and deterritorialize Black spaces in the city? And what if Black children are treated so wretchedly (and not overtly, but simply through disregard and condescension), they emerge from schools

with their spirits broken? Nothing in mainstream research on school desegregation is intended to measure these things, or create space for theorizing the complex range of thought and emotion which must necessarily inform how Black people think about the meaning of school desegregation.

Instead, school desegregation research tends to assess effectiveness in terms of legal victories and policy compliance; the willingness of whites to participate in busing programs, rather than flee public schools; and the extent to which white and Black people express verbal support for hegemonic liberal conceptions of equality and diversity. The intent of much of this research is to provide evidence that school desegregation improves educational opportunities for Black people, at the same time as it benefits whites, or at very least, does not negatively affect their educational experiences. In other words, the message is that integrating schools helps Blacks without hurting whites.

In large part, this body of research has not taken up a number of questions about school desegregation raised within Black communities and in a number of Black cultural and political spaces: What will be better about the education *our* children receive in integrated schools? How will the souls of our children be nurtured in integrated schools? To what extent can whites be trusted to treat our children fairly and share resources equitably? How will integration, and specifically integrated schools, help us as a [Black] people?

To be fair to *researchers*, the breadth of these questions—taking into account everything from the psychosocial development of Black children to the effects of neighborhood gentrification—is beyond the purview of school desegregation policy analysis. However, to be fair to *Black folks*, I would contend that to extricate policy questions from the context of everyday life and cultural politics is to reify the position of Black people as the

object of social policy. In this way, school desegregation research (and education policy research in general) tends to situate Black people on the receiving end, as beneficiaries or victims—the (Negro) problem[3] to be resolved by this or that intervention.

I would argue that a more emancipatory approach to the study of school desegregation embraces the messiness at the dialogic between Blackness and education reform, that terrain which I have theorized as the *Black educational imagination*. By this, I mean to denote the polyvocal cultural processes through which Black political actors make meaning of schooling, knowledge and social mobility as paths toward (and perhaps spaces of) collective Black freedom. I have to give a "shout-out" here to Robin D.G. Kelley, whose concept of "the Black radical imagination" in his book *Freedom Dreams* (2002) inspired this search for a way to conceptually frame inquiry on the visions of freedom imagined and advanced by Black folks working in and on education. Following Kelley, I believe that it is important to focus our attention not so much on whether such efforts succeeded or failed (and how is this to be determined in any absolute sense?), but instead to "recover ideas—visions fashioned mainly by…marginalized Black activists who proposed a different way out of our constrictions" (2002, p. xii).

Research on the Black educational imagination seeks to interrogate the full range of discourses on Black education within Black communities and various cultural and political

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[3] In his 1915 text, *The Negro*, W.E.B. DuBois offered an historical analysis of European and US interaction with Black peoples throughout the African diaspora. For white people the world over, he argued, the very presence of Black folks creates a dilemma: how shall we relate to this race of people we regard as inferior to our own? This is, in short, the essence of what was commonly referred to as *The Negro Problem*. Proposed solutions to the "problem" shifted throughout the late 19th and into 20th century, as chattel slavery came to an end in the Americas, and former slaveowners and colonizers sought to make sense of, and capitalize on the presence of large numbers of newly liberated—and still "problematic"—Black peoples.

spaces, and theorizes how this imagination of education becomes translated into educational activism, cultural practices and everyday pedagogies. Given that the formation and implementation of school desegregation policies and practices are inextricably connected to the material and ideological meaning of race, and particularly, Blackness, it becomes important to think about school desegregation not simply as a 20th century school reform, or an element of civil-rights era jurisprudence, but as part of a much longer trajectory of the Black educational imagination, one struggle in a much broader effort to uplift the race (Dougherty, 2004).

My conceptualization of the Black educational imagination is rooted theoretically in political philosopher Nancy Fraser's notion of the *subaltern counterpublic*, which political scientist Michael Dawson expounds on in his discussion of the *Black counterpublic*. Fraser contends that in highly stratified societies like ours, discourse does not take place in a single public sphere. Rather, there are parallel discursive spaces in which subordinated groups—the subaltern—construct oppositional interpretations of history, politics and daily life. The Black counterpublic, as Dawson makes clear, emerged not only because Black people were excluded from the broader public discourse and from other counterpublics (e.g., feminist and class/labor-based organizations), but also because Black people came to desire and believe in the need for alternative spaces in which to advance specific Black political ideologies, and wrestle with questions of Black liberation outside of the gaze and influence of whites. Thus, the Black counterpublic becomes a space in which the imagination of school desegregation is not confined by the public discourse, and questions about the souls of Black children, the future of Black neighborhoods, and intra-racial class politics (for example) all come to the fore and inform the meaning of school desegregation.

Overview of the study

This study is an historical ethnography of the post-civil rights imagination of school desegregation in an urban Black community. Specifically, I aim to capture how Black leaders, educators and activists in the city of Seattle have imagined and engaged school desegregation from the late 1970s to the present. School desegregation becomes a fitting focus for this study because it was the most prominent and contentious issue in Black education throughout most of the 20th century, and especially since the 1970s, when the federal courts finally began to threaten action against school districts (particularly those in the north) which maintained segregated facilities in violation of the 1954 *Brown* decision (Orfield & Eaton). Relying primarily on in-depth interviews with over 30 leaders, educators and activists, and analysis of archival data, this project provides an empirical and theoretical space to explore how Black social actors make meaning of education policy within the space of a Black counterpublic.

Anthropologists John and Jean Comaroff assert that the aim of historical ethnography is to "interrogate the production, in imaginative and material practice, of those compound political, economic, and cultural forms by which human beings create community and locality and identity" (2002, p. 290). Such an interrogation, I would argue, requires the use of, and a commitment to critical social theory. A critical social theory, Nancy Fraser contends, "frames its research program and its conceptual framework with an eye to the aims and activities of those oppositional social movements with which it has a partisan though not uncritical identification" (1985, p. 97). In my work and in my own life, I *identify with* Black cultural and political struggle in general, and social movements centered on Black education in particular (I address this in more depth in the next chapter, as part of a broader discussion

on theory, method and positionality). At the same time, I believe that my partisan commitments come with a responsibility to maintain a critical gaze, not only on the "fields of forces" (Weis & Fine, 2004, p. xxi) which act against Black freedom, but also on the discourses and actions of Black social actors in response to power and oppression. My research questions, therefore, reflect this understanding of criticality.

My use of critical theory is also consistent with the Comaroffs' emphasis on the cultural production of meaning in specific spaces and within the context of specific historical trajectories. As critical social theorist Zeus Leonardo rightly states, "the critic must be resistant to theory that attempts to universalize its insights outside of the specificities of the history that interpolates it and to which the theory responds" (2004, p. 12). Following from this, I ascribe to a kind of "on-the-job" theorizing that does its work at the site of lived experience, engaged cultural politics and historical memory.

My investigation is guided by the following *empirical* questions:

1. How have Black leaders, educators and activists in Seattle imagined the impact of school desegregation on the lived experiences and life chances of Black people?
2. How have political, economic and cultural transformations informed the shift in Black support away from school desegregation in Seattle?

Equally important, I am also guided by the following *theoretical* questions, which emerged in my fieldnotes over a period of about a year, as I reflected on the ethnographic interviews and archival data in light of the work of Nancy Fraser, Michael Dawson and other critical theorists:

1. To what extent is it (still) useful or meaningful to speak of a Black educational imagination? That is, what makes a given educational imagination a *Black* imagination?
2. Are there limits to the efficacy of translating "counterpublic concerns" into public policy? Put another way, how should Black people understand the responsibility of the state in addressing racial inequities in education? How does this compare or contrast with the importance of "culturally-based" remedies—those that require we "do it for ourselves"?

These empirical and theoretical questions are inspired by Jean Anyon's (2006) call for education research which contributes to the development of political power in low-income urban communities. She writes, "If we do not take up the task of trying to increase power in poor neighborhoods, if we do not take up the task of assisting educators, youth, parents, and communities struggling for opportunity, we are at risk of a strategic failure of enormous proportions" (p. 25). In my research, I have attempted to ask the questions that are of greatest interest to the Black folks I interviewed in Seattle, all of whom had great insights to offer, and at the same time, consistently voiced some uncertainty about what we needed to do now and what a new movement might look like.

Robin Kelley has written that it is "in the poetics of struggle and lived experience, in the utterances of ordinary folk… in the reflections of activists [that] we discover the many different cognitive maps of the future, of the world not yet born" (2002, p. 10). This dissertation is an effort to document and analyze the counterpublic narratives of Black people who have imagined what education might mean in Black life, and who have, on their own terms, sought to influence policies that they believed would impact educational opportunities

for Black children. As an *historical* ethnography, it is an account of the "poetics of struggle" over a period of time, and the political, economic and cultural factors that shaped this trajectory of struggle. And, as Kelley suggests, the promise of this work is that we might discover in the stories of these Black leaders, educators and activists insight into how we might envision and put into place the kind of education policies and practices that our communities need in the years ahead.

Are there Black people in Seattle?

When I tell people—in and out of the academy—about my research, I am often met with a quizzical expression and then the question: "Are there Black people in Seattle?" Traditionally, researchers have focused their attention either on so-called Chocolate Cities like Washington, DC, Newark and Detroit, or on famed Black communities such as Harlem and Chicago's South Side. Other research has centered on spaces of historic Black-white conflict around education: the school strikes in Ocean Hill-Brownsville in New York, the vehement, violent white opposition to busing in Boston, and any number of struggles in cities throughout the South. In general, very little attention has been directed west of the Mississippi, and research on Black education in the Pacific Northwest is virtually non-existent.

Certainly, Seattle does not provide an archetype of urban Black life in the United States. The Black population has never been more than ten percent, and the latest data suggest that this is dropping as the historically Black Central District becomes increasingly gentrified and many Black families move further to the south—often outside of the city altogether—in search of more affordable housing. Currently, the city is 8.4% Black, somewhat below the national average of 12-13% and paltry compared to the percentage of

Black residents in New York City (25%) or Philadelphia (44.7%), for example. Interestingly, though, the percentage of Black residents in Seattle is greater than that in San Francisco (7.8%), a city that is widely regarded as racially and ethnically diverse. And so it is, with its substantial numbers of Asian and Latino residents. What sets Seattle apart is not simply its small population of Black people, but its overwhelming percentage of white people. About 70% of the city's residents are white, slightly under the national average of 75%, but somewhat atypical for cosmopolitan US cities, in which increasingly no racial/ethnic group claims a plurality.[4]

However, I would argue that because of its demographics, Seattle becomes a useful place to study Black education. We simply do not have much information on the dynamics of race in education politics in predominantly white contexts. I would also suggest that given Seattle's generally liberal politics, we have an opportunity to examine the dynamics of Black education in an urban city in which there are seemingly few overtly racist intentions on the part of elected officials or the public, and in fact, an ideological (if not material) commitment to ideals of tolerance, equity and diversity.

Finally, although Seattle may not offer a representative case study of US Black experience (or more precisely, the popular imagination of it), it is not anomalous in terms of the economic and social condition of its Black residents. Unemployment in Seattle stands at around 11% for Black residents, more than any other group, and more than twice the percentage of white unemployment. Nineteen percent of Seattle's Black residents live in poverty, compared with around six percent of whites. With regard to incarceration, although the State of Washington is only three percent Black, nearly 14% of both adult and juvenile

[4] Asian residents, a diverse group to be sure, comprise about 13% of Seattle's population, and Latinos hover at just over five percent.

felons are African American (State of Washington Sentencing Guidelines Commission, 2005). Fifteen percent of all people living with HIV/AIDS in the state are Black, again, in a state that is only three percent Black (Washington State Department of Health, 2007). And in another indicator of health disparities, Black children in the metropolitan Seattle area are more likely than any other racial/ethnic group to be born prematurely and/or with low birth weight (National Center for Health Statistics, 2003).

Post-civil rights as temporal frame

It is largely because of these persistent inequities that the civil rights movement maintains its symbolic significance in, and immeasurable influence on Black politics and the Black imagination in the United States. Indeed, this study is temporally situated in relation to that movement and is focused on the Black imagination of school desegregation, one of the movement's signature triumphs. But what does it mean to suggest that we are in a *post*-civil rights historical moment?

Historian Nikhil Singh (2004) has compared the post-civil rights era to the period shortly after the Civil War, when whites exhausted from the divisive battle began to chastise activist Blacks for impeding national reconciliation. "Blacks, it was said, were free," Singh explains, "now they needed to get *back* to work" (p. 33, italics added). In effect, the signification of *post-* in the *public* construct of the post-civil rights era discursively situates as *in the past* a trajectory of racial and economic domination and exploitation that proceeds to and through civil rights into the current historical moment. More cruelly, persistent racial inequities are now cast as the fault of Black people themselves, who, through their own refusal to participate in the public sphere and adopt universal 'American' values, have stunted our ability to unite as one ('American') people. Singh reminds us that it was

acclaimed scholar Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., in his 1992 missive, *The Disuniting of America,* who "[expressed] a widely-held view… that race-conscious Blacks, 'nourishing prejudice, magnifying difference, and stirring up antagonism,' have come to represent a significant threat to the defining ethos of American nationhood" (2004, p. 33).

In the area of urban school reform, where 'urban' clearly signifies *raced and classed* students and communities, the *post-* is evidenced by the national retreat from school desegregation, the ongoing struggle for even a modicum of school finance equity, and the ideological shift from a belief in educational opportunity for the social good toward a politics which privileges individual choice. These transformations in policy and political will are rationalized largely by a neoliberal post-civil rights logic that asserts that disenfranchised groups are now recognized equally by the nation-state, an 'America' whose democratic principles were reaffirmed by the passage of civil rights laws that, presumably, welcomed Black people and others into what Singh calls the "national 'we.'" This 'American' state, as the myth goes, provides universal access to education, and at the same time, frees members of oppressed *groups* to become *individuals* who can then compete equally in the marketplace of educational options, with only their consumer savvy and inherent ability standing between them and excellent schools.[5]

[5] See also Mullings (2005) for a discussion of the relationship between racism and neoliberalism in the post-civil rights period. She argues that hegemonic constructions of race are consistent with neoliberalism's advancement of unfettered markets and a limited state role in addressing economic maldistribution. Importantly, Mullings points out, dominant racial discourses delegitimize racial protest, at least in part by appropriating the language of multiculturalism and equality, such that the goals of freedom and justice become achievable (only) through individual effort and market logics. Those who advocate collective racial struggle—even those who suggest a relationship between race and class inequities—become recast as the new agents of racism and intolerance.

Relations within Black communities have also shifted drastically in this period. Manning Marable and Leith Mullings (1994), in their discussion of the "divided mind of Black America," argue that in this new historical era, we are witness to "the intensification of race and class inequities in our cities, the social class polarization within the African-American community, the fragmentation and confusion of Black leadership, [and] the quiet contempt for Black interests expressed by both major parties" (p. 66). The authors also note a growing cultural schism amongst Black folk in the post-Civil Rights era, what they characterize as "a deepening division of culture, values and social relations." They write, "To a real extent, the cultural clash is intergenerational, symbolized by the radical differences in discourse, political experiences and social expectations between those African –Americans born before 1964 and those who were born after the great legislative victories of the Civil Rights Movement" (p. 64).

The challenge in the post-civil rights period is that the political, economic and cultural transformations in the nation and around the world have also served to complicate the meaning of Blackness, whether we are thinking of it in terms of identity, community or performance (Jackson, 2001). Black people have the right to live in places they could not before. Black people have access to political power and economic resources that were unthinkable even in the early 1950s. Blackness is now "celebrated" (or, we might argue, commodified and appropriated) in ways it would not and could not have been in times past. Importantly, however, as Marable and Mullings point out, all of these Civil Rights-identified victories are accompanied by growing class and ideological polarization in Black communities. All Blacks have not benefited, or at least have not benefited equally from the political gains of the 1950s and 1960s (Wilson, 1978, 1987, 1996). More, our worldviews

are, increasingly, some would argue, mediated by class, generation, sexuality, gender, religion and other differences that many of us have come to see as salient as the shared experience of living in Black bodies (Dent, 1992; Jackson, 2001, 2005; Mullings, 1997). *Post-* civil rights, then, the very notion of a Black collective politic or imagination (even one that is polyvocal) becomes necessarily characterized by fluidity and uncertainty, and for some, becomes inherently suspect. In this historical moment, critical social theory offers a space to challenge the essentialism of certain oppressive forms of identity politics, even as it insists, as Stuart Hall does, "that there *is* a [Black] politics to be struggled for" (Hall, 1992, p. 32; italics in original).

Review of the literature

My dissertation sits at the nexus of two bodies of literature. First, it is a response to prominent research documenting the benefits of school desegregation. I do not take issue with the findings of these studies, and frankly, I am less interested in their validity and more interested in the discursive construction of their arguments. In this regard, I contend that they are lamentably silent about the kind of Black counterpublic questions I identified earlier, and therefore provide an incomplete and perhaps simplistic assessment of the value of school desegregation for Black youth and communities.

Second, my study aims to make a contribution to research that seeks to capture the racial politics of school reform (Anyon, 1997, 2005; Apple, 2003; Apple & Pedroni, 2005; Henig, Hula, Orr & Pedescleaux, 1999; Lipman, 2004; Orr, 1999). These studies focus on the political and economic contexts of education policy formation and implementation, and explore how racial (and inevitably, class) dynamics shape how the state, policymakers and communities represent and defend their interests. Although much of this work centers on

Black folks' access to educational opportunity, it either does not take into account the broader Black educational imagination, or focuses primarily on systemic processes with little attention to the agency exercised by Black social actors.

At this point, I want to say something more about each of these literatures, highlighting specific works that have informed my own project.

The benefits of school desegregation

Advocates of school desegregation often point to benefits documented in the scholarly literature. Namely, they point to: 1) higher test scores and greater social mobility and college-degree attainment for students of color in majority-white schools, and 2) improved social interaction between students of different racial/ethnic groups. Although some studies reveal only modest measurable advantages, in general, there seems to be agreement among a number of scholars (Hoschschild, 1997; Orfield & Eaton, 1996; Orfield & Lee, 2004; Wells, 1995) that school desegregation improved the lives of Black students.

Much of the evidence for the benefits of school desegregation is based on case studies which document quantitatively-measured academic improvements and qualitative accounts of social interactions which, we are told, succeeded in reducing the racial prejudice of white students and students of color. With regard to academic achievement, Gary Orfield (1996) concedes that critics may be correct that school desegregation has not led to a drastic improvement in test scores for Black students. However, he argues that a better measure of desegregation's benefit for students of color is the extent to which integrated schools increase their life chances by placing them in closer proximity to middle-class students, which thereby exposes these presumably poor and socially-isolated children to the kind of values and opportunity structures necessary for social mobility.

Here, Orfield refers to the findings of Amy Stuart Wells (1995), whose work on perpetuation theory suggests that Black students who experience desegregated education are more likely to enroll in integrated colleges and advance in integrated professional work settings than those who attended racially-segregated schools. In summarizing research on Black student achievement, Wells concludes that Black students who attend integrated schools actually have higher occupational aspirations than those in segregated schools, and that even where students in segregated schools have high aspirations, the aspirations of students from integrated schools are more realistically achievable, due to their relatively greater access to white social networks, which often determine who advances and who does not. These kind of "life chances" benefits, Wells argues, are not revealed by short-range research on test scores.

In addition to these material benefits, desegregation researchers track what they see as the social benefit of integration—in short, the potential of desegregation to reduce racial prejudice. In this research, that Black graduates would choose to live or work in integrated rather than Black settings is a sign of desegregation's promise, not only because this indicates some amount of economic mobility, but also because it is seen to contribute to the goal of reducing prejudice, which in turn is understood to signify that we are moving closer to realizing the promise of multiracial democracy.

From a Black counterpublic perspective, this discourse of desegregation's benefit is troubling on at least two levels. First, it seems to trivialize the historical evidence of successful segregated Black institutions in which Black students not only had high aspirations, but also went on to make impressive contributions to society as a whole and, perhaps more importantly, used their education and training to aid in the political, economic

and cultural enfranchisement of Black communities (see, for example, Cross, 2003; Foster, 1998; and Walker, 1996). In the celebration of integrated—that is, majority-white—schools and communities, researchers neglect the material and symbolic importance of Black cultural and political spaces. Certainly, we might acknowledge that racially segregated Black neighborhoods do not enjoy the access to resources (including better schools) that one might find in neighborhoods with a higher percentage of white residents. However, as philosopher Stephen Haymes (1995) explains, it is precisely because of racist economic policies that many poor and working-class Black people "have no other alternative than to struggle for the transformation of their places on the margin into spaces of cultural resistance" (p. 113). Although integration might offer the opportunity for individual Black people to escape the 'hood, Black political ideology—at least historically—has placed a higher value on those remedies for injustice which are consistent with the (nationalist) belief that the fate of all Black people is linked (Dawson, 1994, 2001). This study and other recent scholarship (see, for example, Cohen, 1999) suggest some fractures in that collective imagination; still, I believe that desegregation research must be more reflective about the tensions between integration and the nurturing of Black communal spaces.

Second, the analysis of prejudice reduction—a laudable goal, to be sure—flattens the difference between Black and white racial attitudes, such that very little distinction is made between legitimate Black bias against white persons and institutions, on the one hand, and white support for institutional and ideological white supremacy on the other. The problem with this reductive conception of racial conflict is that it fails to fully account for the psychological and emotional harm that Black children may face when thrust into decidedly white environments. As DuBois noted in 1934, even though a Black father might recognize

the injustice of segregated education, “this Black man has no right, after he has made this academic pronouncement, to send his own helpless immature child into school where white children kick, cuff or abuse him, or where teachers openly and persistently neglect or hurt or dwarf its soul. If he does, he must not be surprised if the boy lands in the gutter or penitentiary” (1934, March, p. 85). To be clear, I am not suggesting that it is immoral for Black parents to send their children to white schools; my point here is that it is problematic for researchers to remain silent about the racial trauma that potentially awaits Black children in such environments.

More recently, a number of researchers have offered more clear-eyed accounts of the possibilities and limitations of school desegregation, and have taken more seriously the range of Black counterpublic narratives. Wells and her colleagues (Wells, Holme, Atanda & Revilla, 2005), in a qualitative study of graduates of four high schools from across the country, conclude that the goals of desegregation were undermined by a number of obstacles, including white opposition to busing and the limitations of achieving integration in a society still divided by residential segregation and growing gaps between rich and poor. Still, they contend, the graduates’ experience of desegregation made a positive impact on their lives, even though, admittedly, it did not have the desired societal impact. Specifically, white graduates reported a greater appreciation for diversity, and a higher level of comfort with people of color than their white peers who did not have the advantage of an integrated education. Graduates of color revealed that attending integrated schools helped them develop a level of comfort and skill in navigating integrated occupational and social spaces. Interestingly, though, white respondents were not as committed to sending their own children to integrated schools, and the respondents of color often chose to send their children to

private schools. In both cases, parents seemed to agree that diversity was less important than academic preparation.

Although Wells et al lament that school desegregation was not more successful, they display a nuanced sensitivity to the limitations of integration in a political and cultural climate that is increasingly ambivalent about, if not hostile to, the goals of diversity and access. For example, they note sympathetically that one Black parent, a graduate of an integrated high school, declined to enroll her daughter in a school in which she would have few Black peers. This more complex, thick analysis of school desegregation begins to speak to, and create a space for subaltern discourses, and corrects some of the problems in earlier work.

This complication of desegregation is also evident in recent work by Michelle Fine (2004), who offers an insightful analysis of narratives of Black and white elders who had fought for school desegregation over the past 50 years. The *Brown* decision, Fine reminds us, was radical in its intent. However, she states, theorists and activists interested in social justice must not only interrupt oppression; they also must act to "sustain justice." She cautions, "We can have no illusions that these are the same" (p. 509). Fine's piece is also instructive, as is Wells et al, in pointing to the significance of the post-civil rights era as an historical moment. In both of their work, we find a warning about the rightward tilt of social and economic policy, and the cultural backlash against redistributive and recognition politics. "After 50 years," Fine concludes, "it is essential that social scientists theorize the project of sustainability and anticipate the now-predictable threats to sustainability, the *seeds of undoing justice*" (p. 509, italics added). My study is intended to contribute to this broader project.

The racial politics of school reform

Research on the racial politics of school reform has been conducted by those operating from several diverse disciplinary and interdisciplinary paradigms. I have been drawn to studies that can be generally categorized as offering a political-economic analysis of education reform in particularly "raced" urban contexts, because such work helps us complicate the relationship between structural educational inequality and the formation of Black political subjectivities. Most prominently, the work of Jean Anyon (1997, 2005) has been seminal in this area. Anyon's primary argument is that meaningful education reform requires a radical re-imagining of broader urban social policies that address such issues as housing, jobs, transportation, and taxation. In her historical political economy of Newark, New Jersey, Anyon demonstrates that anti-Black racism informed the implementation of education policies that ultimately had a devastating effect, not only on Black children in the state, but also on the communities in which they lived. For example, the intentional *de jure* concentration of poor Blacks in a few urban centers made these populations vulnerable in the political sphere. As Anyon explains, "The isolation of the minority poor and their children would impact significantly on decisions made by legislators who appeared to feel that urban Black and Latino students were 'other people's children' for whom suburbanites had no responsibility" (1997, p. 134).

Coupling her "deep-structural" analysis with an equally aggressive policy proposal, Anyon states, "To really improve ghetto children's chances… in school and out, we must (in addition to pursuing school-based reforms) increase their social and economic well-being and status before and while they are students…. We must eliminate the ghetto school by eliminating the underlying causes of ghettoization."

What Anyon implies in her earlier work she makes more explicit in her recently published *Radical Possibilities*: these social changes will not come without political contention (Anyon, 2005). Here, she devotes considerable attention to examining policies that might hold promise for improving the life chances of urban children and communities. However, she also analyzes the early Civil Rights Movement to find out what makes people become involved in political activism. Her analysis highlights the importance of ideological and organizational processes that then become the impetus for the creation of new identities and new ways of making meaning of inequitable material circumstances. Anyon paints a picture of a new social movement very much inspired by, and inclusive of a range of counterpublic imaginations. Although she doesn't make a case for framing education activism solely in terms of race, her research does suggest that building a new social movement with education at the center would necessarily engage specific subaltern counterpublics, and more broadly, would need to be attentive to the cultural production of political imaginations.

Other education research that makes connections between race, political economy and Black community engagement of school policy include recent work by Pauline Lipman (2003) and Michael Apple (2003). Lipman's study, based in the city of Chicago, is a critical policy analysis of the links between macro-level political-economic processes and micro-level experiences and perceptions of school reform in Black and Latino communities and schools. Lipman highlights how specific education policies impact residents of Black communities. For example, the city of Chicago, in a convergence of state and market interests, decided to locate military high schools on the South Side, while areas being primed for urban renewal—that is, inhabitation by the white middle-class—were slated for

construction of new college-preparatory high schools. Although Lipman provides a critical analysis of this policy decision, and argues for critical pedagogies so that urban students can more critically engage urban social policy, we don't learn much about how members of the Black community made meaning of the decision, or what ways they sought to mobilize opposition to it.

In terms of making connections between global and local political economies and the life chances of poor urban people of color, Lipman echoes much of what Anyon has written. However, in also addressing the power of dominant racial discourses in shaping education policy and everyday experiences with and in schools, Lipman illuminates our understanding of the context within which a Black educational imagination is produced. Where the strength of Anyon's work is its historical trajectory, the strength of Lipman's study is its attentiveness to racial-ideological discourses. Anyon's study of Newark (1997) and even her recent text (2005) would benefit from an analysis of the power of discourse, something that is outside the scope of her research. Likewise, Lipman's work is rooted in a critical race perspective, which is inherently concerned with interrogating the language of power; however, we miss the kind of historical trajectory of racial discourse that would help us understand the rearticulation of powerful ideologies over time. This is not a fault of either study; it simply highlights the need for historical-ethnographic analyses.

I have also been drawn to Henig et al's (1999) study of race and school politics in four Black-led cities. What I find useful about the study—which examines the significance of race in shaping the course of education reform in Atlanta, Washington, DC, Baltimore and Detroit—is the way in which these cities contrast with Seattle and other predominantly white urban centers in the United States. Most significantly, as the authors point out, many Black

residents believed that once Blacks had leadership of the cities and their schools, they would be able to improve the educational achievement of Black students. In Seattle, this theme does emerge in various education narratives, for example, in Stokely Carmichael's speech in 1967 and again in the late 1980s with the planning for what would become Seattle's K-8 African American Academy. And, of course, Seattle's Black elected officials—some of whom I interviewed—felt, and often have taken on, a special responsibility to address the education needs of the Black community. However, no one would ever imagine it possible to have Black control over such a predominantly white city. So, how then is the Black educational imagination necessarily different in a city like Seattle?

More generally, Henig et al provide evidence for their argument that "understanding race *helps* to explain the nature of local school-reform politics; it does not *serve* as an explanation on its own terms" (p. 15, italics in original). The authors point to the challenges of organizing communities, stemming political patronage, and mediating the interests of business owners, preachers and other community stakeholders as just some of the factors that are informed by race (or perhaps more accurately, the cultural production of racial meanings), but cannot be reduced to race alone.

Michael Apple (2003) provides a useful analysis of a Milwaukee-based Black education organization's decision to accept funding from a neo-conservative foundation and to support neo-liberal and neo-conservative education reform initiatives. His analysis is instructive in complicating our understanding of how Black activists, leaders and educators make meaning of education policy. Although Apple is concerned, even alarmed by this alliance between Black activists and advocates for school privatization, he understands that disenfranchised groups are increasingly coming to believe that by forming "strategic

alliances" with powerful interests, they may be able to improve educational opportunities for at least some children in their communities. Many of these activists—among whom Apple counts an increasing number of Black folks—challenge their progressive and liberal critics with the argument that these alliances are a necessary first step, and certainly a better approach to improving education than doing nothing at all. While sympathetic, Apple makes a strong case for opposing these kinds of partnerships. However, what I'm most interested in here is his analysis of how the mission statement of one such Black organization, the Black Alliance for Education Options (BAEO), blends neo-liberal and neo-conservative ideology with Black nationalist themes:

> The language of neo-liberalism (choice, parental empowerment, accountability, individual freedom) is re-appropriated and sutured together with ideas of collective Black freedom and a deep concern for the community's children. This creates something of a 'hybrid' discourse that blends together meanings from multiple political sources and agendas. In some ways, this is similar to the long history of critical cultural analyses that demonstrate that people form bricolages in their daily lives and can employ language and commodities in ways undreamed of by the original producers of the language and products. (2003, p. 52)

Apple's analysis speaks to the problem of simple readings of the Black educational imagination in which one might assume a linear trajectory between ideology and imagination. That is, Black education narratives do not necessarily follow from any one (or two or three) political commitments, and most often sit in a space where social actors must negotiate the relationship between their political ideals, their communal affiliations and the educational needs of their children.

In a more recent, related article, Apple and Pedroni (2005) explain it is the perceived failure of school desegregation that has largely contributed to tactical Black alliances with neoliberal and neoconservative forces. However, the authors point out, if these alliances are "a response to the failure of the post-*Brown* era to sufficiently deliver upon *Brown*'s promise

of democratic access and control, the question still remains as to whether it is an effective response" (2005, p. 2074). Although the current study is not intended, in the main, as an analysis or critique of Black susceptibility to right-wing co-optation, I *am* interested in how Black subjects make meaning of the long-term effects of their past and present approaches to education politics, and the degree to which they understand themselves as part of a Black counterpublic which thinks and acts collectively (although not uniformly or unanimously) in the interest of all, and not simply a few select, Black children.

If, as Apple and Pedroni assert, neoliberal conceptions of democracy privilege an understanding of the citizen as mere consumer and reduce democratic practice to the exercise of individual choice, what does this mean for the future of Black social movements around education. The authors warn:

> Although short-term support for neoliberal and neoconservative policies may in fact generate short-term mobilizations, we remain deeply worried about what will happen over time. It is the long-term implications of individuating processes and ideologies, and their effects on the necessity of larger and constantly growing social mobilizations that aim toward substantive transformations within the public sphere, that need to be of concern as well. (p. 2096)

In other words, we might wonder—and worry—about the viability of a Black educational imagination in a political context in which Black activists are focused (however understandably) on short-term responses to a long history of injustice. What I take away from Apple and Pedroni's work for my own study is the importance of historical memory in the production of education narratives, and the complex discursive relationship between articulation of educational desires in Black life and deliberation in the broader public sphere.

Together, the literature on school desegregation (particularly the more recent studies) and the literature on the racial politics of school reform suggest the need for further critical studies, in a range of contexts, which offer a way to make sense of how various

counterpublics—the foundation of social movements—are (re-)imagining the struggle for educational equity. Traditionally, I would argue, we have investigated education policy either from above, focusing on systems and not human agency, or deeply entrenched within the discourse and priorities of policy analysis, where we are immersed in our own ideas about policy, our own (theorized) imaginations of what is and should be. However, what Renato Rosaldo (1989) noted of anthropology is also true of education policy research: "Social analysis," he said, "must now grapple with the realization that its objects of analysis are also analyzing subjects who critically interrogate ethnographers—their writings, their ethics, and their politics" (p. 21).

Structure of the dissertation

As reflected in the research questions above, this study aims to make both an empirical and theoretical intervention. I have organized the dissertation in a way that allows me to pursue these tasks simultaneously, so that I might tell the story of the "analyzing subjects" at the center of my inquiry in Seattle, and at the same time, continually engage in my own critical analysis of their theorizing about, and political engagement of school desegregation. Each chapter, then, seeks to build the story and the analysis from the previous chapter, and revisit the theoretical research questions.

In Chapter II, I employ the work of Nancy Fraser and Michael Dawson to consider what it means to conceptualize a Black counterpublic sphere in the post-civil rights era. I ultimately agree with Dawson that, since the early 1970s, Black counterpublic *institutions* have been brutally undermined and fragmented; however, I suggest that we might still locate a counterpublic *imagination*, which gives witness to (albeit divergent) dreams of Black freedom. I then examine the significance of education in the broader Black counterpublic

narrative of Black life and liberation in the United States. I identify two aims of this narrative, aims that were sometimes complementary, but often in tension: gaining recognition and enfranchisement in the 'American' public sphere, on the one hand, and on the other, sustaining Black political and cultural institutions and traditions.

Chapter III provides an explanation of historical ethnography as a methodology, and also details the specific methods utilized in the study. I discuss the project as a strategically-situated single-site ethnography, in which I attempt to keep an eye on broader theoretical, spatial and temporal terrains. That is, even though my research is empirically focused on a specific struggle around education in a specific time and place, I always have in mind a "multi-sited imaginary" (Marcus, 1998) that transcends the local. I argue that the Black educational imagination works similarly, and suggest that my research participants share with me a practice of theorizing education and a desire to know more than we presently do about the dialogic between Blackness and education.

Chapter IV is the first of three chapters that attempt to narrate the story of school desegregation in Seattle. This chapter focuses on explicating the structural context of school desegregation in Seattle. I achieve this by applying the analytical lens of cultural political economy. What emerges here is an understanding of the institutional and cultural forces that informed the implementation and *non*-implementation of desegregation policies and practices. More broadly, my aim here is to offer some explanation of the structural bases for growing Black disillusionment and frustration with the trajectory of Black educational opportunity.

In Chapter V, I turn my attention to exploring the agential narratives of Black leaders, educators and activists. I draw on the work of anthropologist Janet Hart, who has argued that

in oral historiography, political actors emplot their narratives in very specific ways, and for specific purposes. I focus here on identifying ontological and mobilizational themes in my participants' narratives, in an attempt to flesh out how political actors in Seattle theorize their own lives and meaning-making processes related to school desegregation and the significance of sitting next to white children. I suggest that these narrators might be regarded as co-authors of a number of "chapters" in a larger text on the Black educational imagination in the post-civil rights years.

Chapter VI uses entertainer Bill Cosby's missive on the cultural and educational deficiencies of poor and working-class Black youth and families as a starting point to explore tensions in the Black educational imagination. I note that several of the people I spoke with in Seattle either mentioned Cosby's speech favorably, or offered a Cosby-esque critique. This troubled me throughout my time in the field and initially led me to assume it was simply a reflection of a generational or class divide, and the result of the growing influence of conservative ideologies in Black communities. Although these certainly may be factors, I argue that the trajectory of school desegregation and its failure to improve educational opportunities and achievement for Black children informs increasing Black skepticism of liberal social policies, including school desegregation and other state-directed social and economic reforms. In search of new and better remedies, Black social actors engage other ideologies, although never totally abandoning liberalism. What results is a complicated and sometimes contradictory imagination of the historical trajectory of school desegregation (and Black education more generally), and some amount of uncertainty about the way forward from here.

Finally, in Chapter VII, I suggest implications of this study for the development of both a public and counterpublic Black education politics. We are in an era in which the new conservative majority of the Supreme Court has determined that race can no longer be used as a factor in school assignment, but the majority of Black people still believe that being Black strongly informs their experience in and with public schools. And while the Court has suggested that the ideal society is one that is color-blind, I found at least some evidence that Black leaders, educators and activists believe that Black people need to *re*-commit to a decidedly race-conscious cultural and political project. I conclude by exploring what the Black educational imagination might look like in these new times.

On behalf of brown babies

"Mother Wanda" Johnson started the Garvey Revival Academic Cultural Education (GRACE) Academy out of her home in the Central District about six years ago, after becoming alarmed that so many Black boys were languishing in special education "with their spirits broken." Over the doorway leading from her kitchen into the livingroom/classroom, is a worn piece of paper taped to the wall. On it is a quote attributed to Black education scholar Asa Hilliard: "If other people raise our children," it says, "they will not be our children."

A retired schoolteacher with more than 30 years' experience in the public schools, Mother Wanda believes she has a responsibility to keep working. "Can we talk about 'special education?' 'Emotionally disturbed?' Those kind of categories that are just waiting to be filled by our children!" She took me to see the garden in her backyard, where, in between history and algebra lessons, the boys learn how to harvest collard greens, tomatoes, peppers—even grapes. She tells me she wants to cry when she sees how many Black men are incarcerated, and insists that Black people, Black institutions must act on behalf of our

children. “Right now, we’re broken,” she says, “and that brokenness is being expressed by our children, and it won’t get better until we find a way to put some of these pieces back together. And we can’t think about institutions outside of ourselves to do this—this is our job, these are our children, and there are lots of folks who like myself have had a long career, and could come back and grow some geniuses…or grow a really good gardener.”

Often, before the students share a poem or explain how they came to a certain answer on a math problem, Mother Wanda or Jamal Farr, a local hip hop artist and educator who also teaches at GRACE, will remind them to “stand up tall and proud, speak up clear and loud.” Almost immediately, backs get a little straighter, heads tilt a little higher, words meet the air with a deeper resonance. Mother Wanda tells me the phrase is from an old Mahalia Jackson song, “Brown Baby.” “I sing that to the boys,” she explains, “and they sing it to each other.”

Researching the song, I discovered that it was written by Oscar Brown, Jr. (1960), who sang it to his own newborn son for several months before he recorded it. When his version first hit the airwaves in 1961, it was considered too radical for many radio stations, and djs were told to remove it from rotation.

As years go by I want you to go with your head up high
I want you to live by the justice code
And I want you to walk down freedom's road
You little brown baby…
It makes me glad you gonna have things that I never had
When out of men’s hearts all hate is hurled
Sweetie, you gonna live in a better world
Brown baby, brown baby, brown baby

As I spoke to Black leaders, educators and activists, and even brothers and sisters on the street or at community festivals, I heard time and time again that what folks hoped my work would do is help us come together as Black people and try to figure out how to save our

children. One elder even dubbed me a member of the "Talented Tenth," which made me cringe just a bit, given the elitist assumptions of this early DuBoisian construct. However, I understood his larger point, which is that we are in an historical moment in which we have realized the promise of our most recent social movement, and also witnessed its limitations. To save our brown babies, we will need to take a critical look at our history and use what we learn from that to imagine education policies and a cultural politics that help us move a little further down freedom's road.

CHAPTER II

THEORIZING THE BLACK EDUCATIONAL IMAGINATION

Following the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, Black people experienced a moment of promise, as the nation moved tentatively toward acknowledging and addressing racial and economic inequities. However, this brief reprieve was soon followed by a cultural backlash against racial justice and the notion of a society collectively responsible for its social welfare. Beginning in the 1970s, we can observe the fragmenting and dissolution of Black political institutions at precisely the moment when, it might be argued, they were needed most. Political scientist Michael Dawson names a number of factors for this momentous shift, several of which I will consider later in this chapter: the decline in white support for northern (and more class-politics oriented) civil rights initiatives; the insufferable patriarchy of Black organizations; the broader implications of the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980; class fissures within Black communities; and along with that, the creation of a "buffer" class of Black leaders who discouraged and quelled social protest (Dawson, 2000).

With regard to race, historian Nikhil Singh argues, the lack *of de jure* racial discrimination and outright vilification of Black people in the post-civil rights era provided rationale for the current dominant belief that anti-Black racism is "latent rather than manifest, contingent rather than normative,…temporary, rather than permanent, a result of minoritarian commitments to race rather than endemic, racist constructions of the polity" (p. 32). It is this very assault on the idea of "minoritarian commitments" that I most want to call attention to in this chapter, because I believe it is this issue that informs many (although not all) of the challenges cited by Dawson. As the civil rights movement began to lose its popular appeal,

Black political and cultural agency became socially constructed as unnecessary and worse, divisive. Singh argues that in place of Black power (or civil rights, for that matter), liberal 'American' ideology now offers Black people the opportunity to adopt a "universal" nationalism, a kind of abstract citizenship which insists that the particularities of Black identity, expression and desire be abandoned as the price of admission into the public sphere.

In this chapter, I want to expound on the idea of the *Black counterpublic sphere*, and the Black educational imagination as a cultural production within (although not entirely of) that sphere. First, I introduce Nancy Fraser's explanation of the *subaltern counterpublic* as a challenge to Jürgen Habermas' idea of the public sphere. I then discuss how Michael Dawson has applied and extended Fraser's theory in his own work, in which he traces the emergence and eventual demise of the Black counterpublic sphere. Finally, I use the broader historical trajectory of Black education struggle in the United States, with a focus on school desegregation, to lay the foundation for a mapping of the Black educational imagination as a possible space within which we might reinvigorate the Black counterpublic sphere.

Throughout this chapter, I want to meditate on and perhaps begin to form a response to a number of questions, including: What makes a Black educational imagination 'Black'? How viable is a Black educational imagination at the beginning of this new century, taking into account Dawson's assertion about the decline of the Black counterpublic sphere? Should we even be interested in advancing a Black educational imagination at all, or is it time to imagine a more "universal" education politics, a *de*-raced or *post*-raced vision of school reform? Ultimately, this chapter is meant to serve as a theoretical bridge to the next chapters, to make clear the conceptual foundation and focus of my historical-ethnographic work in Seattle.

The subaltern counterpublic

In liberal-democratic political discourse, the public sphere is lauded as a space in which all citizens have the opportunity to contribute to the formation of national policy priorities, community values and collective opinion on matters pertaining to civil society. Habermas, in advancing the concept of the public sphere, believed we might identify a discursive space outside of and clearly differentiated from the arenas of the state and the market. In Habermas' public sphere, Fraser explains, "discussion was to be open and accessible to all; merely private interests were to be inadmissible; inequalities of status were to be bracketed; and discussants were to deliberate as peers." Through talk, citizens would come to "consensus about the common good" (Fraser, 1990, p. 59).

The *idea* of a public sphere, Fraser argues, is consistent with the aims of critical theory and crucial for democratic practice. However, "in actually existing democracy," she contends, the *form* of the public sphere Habermas envisioned becomes less than satisfactory. Fraser contends that Habermas idealized the public sphere, and challenges four assumptions in his theory. First, in assuming that differences in status and power could be bracketed during public discourse, Habermas assumes that democratic deliberation is possible without social equality. In response, Fraser points out the inherent problems in deliberating "as if" differences do not exist. Bracketing status inequalities does not make such inequalities disappear, nor lessen the effect of status in determining the form and substance of public discourse. In fact, she asserts that such bracketing usually privileges dominant groups and disadvantages less powerful ones, since it serves to mask dominating practices as socially unequal groups engage in deliberation. Fraser states that the public sphere is not a space of

"zero degree culture" (1990, p. 64). By this, she means that groups do not come to a discursive space that is neutral, with no values or established norms, or forms of capital that determine when and how communication occurs. Thus, both culture and political economy powerfully inform who speaks, and the power of those words.

Second, Habermas' theory assumes that one public sphere is necessarily superior to a multiplicity of competing deliberative spheres, and that advancing one sphere furthers the interests of democracy more than encouraging the establishment of different publics. This might be true, Fraser argues, if our society were not so highly stratified. In that case, we might all meet together equally in one space, and have a reasonable chance of being heard. However, Fraser insists, in stratified societies, it is simply not possible to have full parity in public deliberation. So, she asks, "what institutional arrangements will best help narrow the gap in participatory parity between dominant and subordinate groups?" (p. 66).

Drawing on a number of revisionist historiographies, Fraser concludes that having multiple competing publics helps move us closer to democratic ideals. The subaltern counterpublics created by subordinate groups—among whom she includes women, people of color, workers and lesbians and gay men—actually allow *greater* participation in public discourse. Fraser explains that in these "parallel discursive arenas… members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (p. 67). Although subaltern counterpublics are by definition located outside the public sphere, and out of necessity, organize separately and apart from the public, Fraser suggests that ultimately, they foster public participation rather than separatism. This is due to the dual function of subaltern counterpublics as spaces of retreat and group recognition, on the one

hand, and on the other, as "training grounds" in which subordinate groups prepare for engaging broader publics.

A third assumption in Habermas' conceptualization of the public sphere posits that public discourse should be restricted to those issues deemed to be related to the common good; "private interests" are seen as inappropriate. The problem here, as should be clear by now, is that the very determination of which are "public" and which are "private" issues depends on one's relation to power. That is, dominant groups will proclaim issues of importance to them as worthy of public discussion, and have the cultural and material means to support the "publicity" of their concerns. Meanwhile, subordinate groups' issues will be regarded as "private"; for example, think back to Singh's analysis of the (white) nationalist ideologies of the post-Civil War and post-civil rights periods, when, he argues, Black claims of injustice were proclaimed a distraction, if not a detriment. Fraser comes back to one of her central points: in stratified societies, subaltern counterpublics exist in tension with the public sphere, contesting what is offered as the official version of "the common good." As a result, Fraser argues, "democratic publicity requires positive guarantees of opportunities for minorities to convince others that what in the past was not public in the sense of being a matter of common concern should now become so" (1990, p. 71). Subaltern counterpublics necessarily disrupt the public discourse, challenging the very notion of the public-private split.

Fourth, Habermas assumes that it is preferable to have a sharp distinction between the state and civil society. In this sense, Fraser theorizes, Habermas advocates a *weak* public sphere. Weak, that is, in the sense that the purpose of the public sphere is seen as limited to forming public opinion, but that it would not take on the role of decision-making (e.g. policy

formation and implementation), since this would harm the public sphere's ability to stand apart from and critique the state. This can be contrasted with a *strong* public sphere, in which publics are "empowered to translate… 'opinion' into authoritative decisions" (p. 75). In general, Fraser is hesitant to fully embrace a weak public sphere, in which the nation-state is sovereign in matters of political action and social policy. She suggests the need for a hybridity of many different types of publics—both strong and weak—that relate to one another and to the state in different ways. Only in this way can we engage in critical discourse unfettered by state influence, and at the same time, move the state toward adopting critical perspectives in the *practice* of democracy.

Fraser highlights these four limitations to Habermas' theory in the hope that we might "push back" (1990, p. 77) against the anti-democratic tendency in the public sphere. To a great degree, this has been a primary role of US Black social movements since the end of slavery—challenging the exclusionary impulses of the various forces that govern public discourse and decision-making. Later in this chapter, I will return to the themes Fraser introduces here, in order to think about implications for conceptualizing the Black educational imagination. In order to do that bit of analysis, though, we need to spend some time making sense of the broader Black counterpublic sphere.

The Black counterpublic sphere

The Black counterpublic sphere emerged in response to the exclusion of Black folks from the public sphere. White supremacist ideology marked Black people as intellectually and morally inferior, and state-sanctioned racial order reinforced social stratification with regard to citizenship and property rights, employment and legal standing. However, I agree with Michael Dawson's assessment that Black people embraced the notion of Black

autonomy, as both an ideological stance and as an organizational tactic. In this way, then, the Black counterpublic sphere is not simply the result of forced separation from whites, but is also an agential choice to sustain spaces for Black cultural production and political solidarity.

Dawson argues that for the latter part of the nineteenth century and for the first two-thirds of the twentieth, Black oppositional movements adopted a dual strategy. On the one hand, they developed and nurtured cultural, political and economic institutions within Black communities. At the same time, they insisted on equal participation in the broader public deliberation. This approach—and the tensions between these two strategies—deeply informs the historical trajectory of Black liberation struggle in the United States and is a foundational theme in the Black educational imagination, as I will explain later in this chapter. At issue here, principally, is the extent to which Black people, and the trajectory of Black enfranchisement, can be assimilated into the triumphant moral tale of American liberalism, with its celebration of individual rights, a weak central state and private accumulation of property and wealth.

Although liberal ideas appear favorably in some Black political discourse, Dawson believes that scholars who attempt to locate the Black narrative squarely in the liberal tradition fail to capture the nonliberal and at times antiliberal imagination within Black political thought. First, these scholars tend to ignore the full range of Black political ideologies in play at any given historical moment. Thus, attention is given to Frederick Douglass' appeals for Black suffrage, but not to Marcus Garvey's or Martin Delaney's dreams of a Black state. As Dawson emphasizes throughout his work, some amount of Black nationalism is present in Black communities from the end of slavery through the present day (although less so during Reconstruction). Even those who eschew nationalist ideology are

likely to support Black churches or temples, fraternal, political and cultural organizations, scholarship funds, educational institutions and professional associations. Sharply contradicting liberal ideology, Black people have historically seen their fate as linked to the broader mythic Black community (Dawson, 1994). As Dawson explains:

> It should not be surprising that in a society stratified by race, where African Americans have been systematically excluded from the bourgeois public sphere as well as many counterpublics, where even in the twentieth century the idea that African Americans could freely choose their roles and associations in good liberal fashion seems ludicrously naïve, nonliberal theoretical perspectives which emphasize the primacy of community are prominent in the black counterpublic. (2001, p. 30)

This "primacy of community" has also dictated, at least historically, that individual Black people take political positions viewed as in the interest of the entire community. This tradition persists today, Dawson points out, even though it is no longer as easy to identify "a Black position" on any given issue, given the increasing social and economic stratification within Black communities.

Black social actors have also been more likely to support a strong, rather than weak central state. Local governments have often been less than willing to accommodate Black social justice claims, and as a result, Black people have sought recourse at the federal level. Importantly, and certainly crucial in the current study, most of that recourse has required a certain amount of force. That is, the central government has had to mandate equality. Collectively speaking, white people have rarely, if ever, voluntarily shared resources or privilege.[6]

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[6] For a detailed analysis of the permanence of white racism, see the body of work in critical race theory, and especially Derrick Bell's (1992) *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, which includes the allegorical tale, "The Space Traders," in which the United States decides to give its black population to aliens in exchange for vast amounts of gold.

If white people are surprised by antiliberal ideas in Black political thought, Dawson argues, this may be due largely to the dynamics of Black-white discourse. Basically, he contends, Black and white people tend to moderate their political stands when engaged in discourse together. Black activists, for example, are more likely to appeal to themes of citizenship, understanding and racial healing. For their part, whites are more likely to adopt conciliatory language, with frequent appeals to diversity and equality. This relatively conventional racial discourse veils the antiliberal tendencies of Black political thought, and to be frank, provides cover for the disingenuously liberal nature of much white public discourse.

Now, it is important to understand that to assert the importance of autonomy and community in Black counterpublic discourse is not to suggest that Black political thought is a struggle between the binary positions of nationalism and assimilation. This simplistic dualism, Dawson states:

> provides inadequate analytical power and impoverishes the task of attempting to understand the dialectic between a relatively autonomous, indigenous discourse within the Black counterpublic and the discourse between those within the subaltern counterpublic and the dominant public about the nature and future course of the American polity. (2001, p. 33)

I am not sure I can overstate the significance of this point for the current study. Although I will expound on this later, what I want to emphasize here is the resilience of this dialectic throughout the trajectory of Black political thought, at least through the late 1960s and into the early 1970s. However, what has happened since that time?

The undermining (and possible resuscitation) of the Black counterpublic sphere

Dawson argues that in the post-civil rights period, the Black counterpublic has been impaired by transformations in the US economy, the political system and in the Black

community itself. The growth of the Black middle class has been tied to the industrial economy and the creation of jobs in the public sector. The economic advancement of Black people ended by the mid-1970s. Following the global recession of the early 1970s, the US economy began to shift away from the kind of manufacturing jobs that had benefited a generation of Black workers. Dawson points out that this structural shift also decimated labor unions, which had historically ensured Black people better wages (at times) and protected them from some forms of racial discrimination.

Black people had also entered the middle class through the public sector, working for the state at various levels of government. However, with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, many of these jobs began to disappear, and along with them, any number of government initiatives intended to aid the poor and support education and job training. Reagan even weakened the enforcement of federal anti-discrimination statutes, reducing the budget of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and appointing future Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas as head of its civil rights division.

By the early 1970s, the Black counterpublic sphere was also feeling the pain of systematic and covert government surveillance of civil rights groups, Black student activists and community-based Black power organizations. Surveillance may be too benign a word; in fact, government operatives intended and largely succeeded in fracturing Black social movements and in many cases, destroying lives and communities in the process. Perhaps partially as a result of this frustration, many Black radical groups became preoccupied with party-building, which resulted in the creation of competing sects, who argued with one another about the “correct” way forward for Black liberation. In the end, this kind of

desperate grasping at theoretical straws was exactly what the FBI and other government agents had conspired.

As unemployment rose in Black communities, Black organizations lost much of their financial base. They also began to appear far less relevant, unable to effectively respond to the worsening economic conditions of vast numbers of Black people. White support also began to wane, Dawson notes, as Black freedom struggle came to entail not just racial recognition but also economic redistribution along racial lines. Meanwhile, the numbers of Black middle class folk grew as well, benefiting from the civil rights victories of the 1960s and the implementation of affirmative action initiatives in employment and education.

The social and economic divide between the Black middle class and Black poor and working-class folks also complicated Black political discourse. Black people increasingly disagreed about the roots of persistent racial inequality and following from that, which remedies ought to be pursued. Economically disadvantaged and spatially-isolated Black folks were more likely to embrace nationalist ideologies and organizations, and to support race-based redistribution. Although the Black middle class continued to support some economic redistribution to benefit poor Black people, they balked at some of the more radical proposals (the ones that might really make a difference) (Dawson, 1994).

Dawson contends that the Black counterpublic sphere was further undermined by the emergence of a new crop of Black elected officials who provided a "buffer class." Their role was (and is) to downplay the need for radical racial protest and to a large degree, orchestrate and control political discourse within Black communities. As Dawson states, these leaders became part of "the new ruling regime of race relations management" (2001, p. 40) Even those Black mayors, council and school board members who legitimately believed in the

power of their office to influence positive change found themselves overseeing empty municipal coffers and confronting an evaporating middle-class tax base. Desiring to stay in office, or move to a higher post, they began to realize that they would need to temper their ideology and their policies in order to stay in the good graces of skeptical white voters and corporate investors.

Increasingly in the post-civil rights period, it has become more and more difficult to articulate a "Black agenda" for social change. That is, it is less clear that the fate of Black people is linked, as Dawson would put it. By the mid-1990s, the Black counterpublic discourse was "filled with complaints about leadership vacuums [and] the lack of a common agenda…which suggests that contemporary black political ideologies may be *inadequate to provide guidance in the difficult times that face black communities*" (2001, pp. 42-43; italics added). Equally devastating, the nation has moved to the right, particularly with regard to racial and economic justice, which leaves us with fewer viable political options. What we are left with, Dawson laments, are a number of cultural and ideological divides that make it more difficult to foment social movements within Black communities or between Black communities and other counterpublics. Indeed, if one of the main roles of the subaltern counterpublic sphere is to provide a space for subordinate groups to prepare to engage broader publics, Black folks now find themselves woefully unprepared for the fight.

Dawson concludes that in order to reconstruct the Black counterpublic, we need to jettison ideologies that claim to provide a totalizing explanation of race, such as crude forms of nationalism with their narrow imaginations of Blackness. We also will not find salvation in Marxism or liberalism in and of themselves. What we need, he argues, is a *Black critical theory*. Such a theory, he contends, "has to embody a theory of the state, power, human

nature, and the good life" (2001, p. 322). This Black critical theory takes seriously the contributions of any number of ideologies and puts them to use in the service of Black freedom:

> We need a black critical theory that draws on and combines liberalism's concern with individual rights and autonomy, republican concerns with community, socialist concerns with an egalitarian society and justice for all, feminist traditions such as resistance to suppressing intragroup differences in the name of a false and oppressive unity, and blends these with recognition of the need for autonomous organization and cultural pride. (2001, p. 322)

If indeed Dawson is correct—and I believe he is—in his passionate plea for a Black critical theory as the basis for a resuscitated Black counterpublic sphere, then I propose the Black educational imagination as a discursive praxis-directed space within which to possibly foment that criticality. The rest of this chapter is dedicated to using insights from Fraser, Dawson and other critical theorists as a lens through which to examine the Black educational imagination, as it has been and as it could be.

Historicizing Black education discourses

In Chapter I, I introduced the Black educational imagination as a theoretical concept denoting the polyvocal cultural processes through which Black political actors make meaning of schooling, knowledge and social mobility as paths toward (and perhaps spaces of) collective Black freedom. I also suggested than school desegregation should be viewed within the context of this broader imagination, and not simply as a victory of twentieth century civil rights efforts. The problem with a civil-rights centered interpretation of school desegregation, as I have suggested so far in this chapter, is that it problematically situates Black political struggle within a heart-warming narrative of American liberalism. Instead, it is more true to say that the battle for school desegregation is part of a much longer, unfinished struggle, one that is certainly about educational opportunity and equality, but

more importantly, about Black freedom. As historian Jack Dougherty states, summing up his own research on Black education struggle in Milwaukee: “Contrary to the popular impressions conveyed by national-level narratives of *Brown*, there is no steady historical march of progress for jobs, integration, black power, or choice. Rather, …black education reform is best understood as an overlapping series of evolving struggles to gain power to uplift the race through improving schools.... a process of creative adaptation" (2004, p. 202).

I would argue, and I believe Dougherty would agree, that this “creative adaptation” entails, at least in part, adapting to new forms of racist ideology and practice, or what critical race theorists would describe as the permanence of racism (Bell, 1987; Crenshaw et al, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Thinking about the Black educational imagination in terms of adaptation, and keeping in mind the theoretical work on the counterpublic sphere, what I want to call attention to is the discursive processes through which Black people “work out” amongst themselves an understanding of the dialectic between Blackness, education and the shifting material and ideological faces of racism.

My reference to Black people “working it out” is suggestive of what Paul Willis (1981) means to include within the scope of *cultural production*. Here, Willis seeks to “investigate the form of living collective cultural productions that occur on the determinate and contradictory ground of what is inherited and what is currently suffered through imposition, but *in a way which is nevertheless creative and active*” (1981, p. 49, italics added).

Inherent in this counterpublic discourse is a concern among Black subaltern subjects about how to engage broader publics, both in terms of self-representation (that is, asserting the humanity and worth of Black people in relation to schooling and education, broadly

conceived) and in terms of seeking redress for maldistribution of educational resources. Thus, any analysis of the Black educational imagination must point to this tension: On the one hand, Black people have historically demonstrated an antiliberal commitment to the survival of Black educational institutions and forms of social and cultural development of Black children that sustain Black culture and communities.[7] At the same time, they have sought to influence social and educational policies within the nation-state that extend opportunities for individual Black people to achieve their highest potential.

Dawson's work raises some questions about how we might characterize shifts in this tension in the post-civil rights period, and that is much of the work of this study. However, for now, since I have argued that school desegregation should be understood within the context of a broader trajectory of the Black educational imagination, I think it is important to offer a sense of some of these historical discourses. However, I am not necessarily interested in rehearsing the entire history of Black education in the United States. Instead, what I have chosen to do is highlight a number of discursive moments in the cultural production of the Black educational imagination. By providing a critical analysis of these moments, I aim to: 1) demonstrate the persistence of various themes across time and place; 2) flesh out what it means to theorize education in Black life; and 3) move toward sketching a theoretical map of

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[7] I want to suggest, though, that when black people and other subordinate groups are criticized in public discourse for being "racist" or "radical" for their primary commitment to each other, the charge is somewhat hypocritical and disingenuous. Dominant groups also advocate for their own interests above, and often against the interests of others. It is simply that, as Fraser has made clear, their interests are articulated as "public" concerns, even though they alone are the main beneficiaries. A number of scholars have made the case that black people in particular are marked as intrinsically dangerous and unworthy (on a host of levels), and that this aspect of our cultural misrecognition heightens the indignation expressed in the public sphere when black collectives make social justice claims, or act in their own collective interest (see, for example, Gordon, 1997, 2000;Haymes, 1995; Kelley, 1997).

the terrain of the Black educational imagination. I am not suggesting these are *the* seminal moments; rather, I chose each of the moments to provide diversity of ideology and context. I have also chosen moments that connect to the theme of school desegregation and the idea(l) of racial integration in general. This serves the added goal of providing a sense of the discourse on this issue from the late 1800s to the mid-1970s, which is where my study engages the story.

Finally, to offer a *critical* analysis of the Black educational imagination at this historical moment is to acknowledge what Stuart Hall has called "the end of the innocence of the black subject" (1992, p. 32). That is to say, we have no guarantee that just because something is 'Black,' that it is also inherently good or politically progressive. It is also to say that it is not enough, it is not a viable politics of freedom simply to *be* 'Black.' As filmmaker Isaac Julien has said, "What does that black subject *do*, how does it act, how does it think politically… being black isn't really good enough for me: I want to know what your cultural politics are" (quoted in Hall, 1992, p. 32; italics added).

As Julien suggests, all Black cultural production is not inherently liberatory. Willis' own conceptualization of cultural production is, by his own admission, both pessimistic and optimistic. Thus far I've emphasized the *promise* of Black agency, that is, the potential of Black people resisting their own subjugation by envisioning and demanding education in the collective interest of Black people. Willis, however, argues that ideology acts against "penetrations" of dominant knowledges and social practices. "Powerful ideologies," he contends, "no matter what their content, always have the gift of formality, publicness and explicit statement. They can work within the scope of consensus and consent because nothing

in oppositional cultural processes can displace their level of action and effectiveness" (1977, p. 166).

This speaks to why Nancy Fraser insists, as I noted in Chapter I, that our commitments to social movements can be partisan but not uncritical. Although my analysis of these moments celebrates the "freedom dreams" of Black social actors, I also attend to how powerful ideologies inform the Black educational imagination in ways that militate against Black liberation.

Casting down our buckets

On September 18, 1895, Booker T. Washington gave his famous "Atlanta Compromise" speech before a white audience at the Cotton States and International Exposition. He had been invited to speak in order to demonstrate to Northern visitors that the South had made great racial progress (Spring, 1993). He was perhaps the perfect, if not only tolerable choice, if one had to have a Black speaker. The president of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, Washington firmly believed that Black social advancement in the United States would come as a result of improving the economic strength and moral development of Black people, and not as a result of making political or legal demands. Most significantly, he emphasized that Black people should learn the kind of skills that would make them indispensable in the increasingly industrial South, as opposed to competing with whites in the learning of arts and letters. Washington reasoned that a classically-educated Black population would only alienate whites, and spark a backlash that would undermine the advancement of the race. Further, Washington argued, it simply made no sense to learn something for which no jobs (for Black people) were available.

In the speech, Washington offered an allegorical tale in which a ship lost at sea is finally spotted by another vessel. The lost crew immediately complained of their thirst and requested water. "Cast down your buckets where you are," came the response from the other ship. Doing so, the crew found fresh water, and quenched their thirst. In like manner, Washington suggested, Black people should "cast down their buckets" with southern whites and with the industrial economy of the South, not seeking to advance too quickly, or advance beyond the position of whites. If they followed his plan, he suggested, they would be rewarded with untold economic opportunities. "Whatever other sins the South may be called to bear," Washington told the audience, "when it comes to business, pure and simple, it is in the South that the Negro is given a man's chance in the commercial world."

To use Fraser's term, Washington imagined that Black people could participate in the southern economy "as if" they had political equality. Although he did not seem naïve about the horrors of racism, he seemed to believe that Black southerners could rely on the mercy and graciousness of whites, who would be so moved by their devotion to the South and lack of ambition, that they would put an end to the bloodshed and subjugation.

Washington's message to whites was to cast their buckets down with the Black people they knew and loved rather than with new European immigrants, who had already shown a penchant for labor organizing and otherwise demanding tolerance of their "strange tongue and habits." If southern whites did this, he said, Black people would "stand by you [whites] with a devotion that no foreigner can approach, ready to lay down our lives, if need be, in defense of yours, interlacing our industrial, commercial, civil, and religious life with yours in a way that shall make the interests of both races one." That said, Washington quickly added what would become perhaps the most famous line of the speech, and the one

of most interest to me here: "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress."

Here, Washington spoke not only of social segregation of the races; more importantly, he proposed a racialized *educational* separation, ensuring whites that Black folks would not encroach on their intellectual property. Nor would Black people assume they were the equals of whites in matters of political discourse. As he explained, "The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest folly…. The opportunity to earn a dollar in a factory just now is worth infinitely more than the opportunity to spend a dollar in an opera-house." Besides, he added, Black people simply weren't mature enough to be full citizens so soon after slavery. Speaking of the relative political strength of Black people during the years of Reconstruction, Washington offered:

> Ignorant and inexperienced, it is not strange that in the first years of our new life we began at the top instead of at the bottom; that a seat in Congress or the state legislature was more sought than real estate or industrial skill; that the political convention or stump speaking had more attractions than starting a dairy farm or truck garden.

Undoubtedly, much of Washington's rhetoric was a bit more than hyperbolic; it is hard to imagine, nor is there historical evidence to support the assertion that a vast number of poor southern Black laborers left the fields to pursue careers in politics. However, what is important here is that in Washington's narrative, receiving a classical education—the learning of languages, philosophy and literatures—is not only impractical for Black people, it also assumes the right to be regarded as equals in the polity.

Washington was critiqued most famously by W.E.B. DuBois, who wrote in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), "In the history of nearly all other races and peoples the doctrine preached at such crises has been that manly self-respect is worth more than lands and houses,

and that a people who voluntarily surrender such respect, or cease striving for it, are not worth civilizing." DuBois called Washington to task for asking Black people to give up political power, the pursuit of civil rights, and higher education for Black youth, when history indicated that this would only result in political disfranchisement, fewer rights and reduced funds for Black education. DuBois simply could not see how this strategy would benefit the race at all, and pointed out that earlier leaders, such as Frederick Douglass, in times that were strikingly less hopeful, insisted on "assimilation *through* self-assertion, and on no other terms" (italics in original). Educational equality—the opportunity for Black youth to go as far as their abilities could take them—was for DuBois a crucial part of this self-assertion, and he firmly believed that it was impossible for Black people to ever participate in the public sphere without access to the same levels of education as whites.

DuBois contended that Washington's tactical-ideological stance upset two large groups within the Black counterpublic, for different reasons. First, his stance angered the Black nationalists, those who had imagined a Black state far from the US shores, but witnessing the cruelty of US colonialism around the globe (e.g., Hawaii, The Philippines, the Caribbean), had come to realize there were no safe shores upon which to settle. This group, though, stood firm in its hatred of the South and distrust of whites, generally, and reasoned that if we must stay here, like Nat Turner and John Brown, our politics must draw upon a tradition of "revolt and revenge."

Second, Washington's so-called Atlanta Compromise frustrated the "thinking classes of American Negroes" (as if nationalists do not think!), those who acknowledged his achievements on many accounts, and who were generally in favor of some form of

assimilation. What upset this group was his acquiescence of the public sphere. DuBois explained this group's point of view regarding education:

> They advocate, with Mr. Washington, a broad system of Negro common schools supplemented by thorough industrial training; but they are surprised that a man of Mr. Washington's insight cannot see that no such educational system ever has rested or can rest on any other basis than that of the well-equipped college and university, and they insist that there is a demand for a few such institutions throughout the South to train the best of the Negro youth as teachers, professional men, and leaders.

For this group, and for DuBois, forced educational segregation—that is, the separation of Black people from higher academic pursuits—was contrary to the goal of Black freedom. In material terms, it would mean that not enough Black leaders would be able to lead or teach, even in the industrial schools that Washington advocated. In political-ideological terms, it reinforced the idea that Black people and Black interests should be relegated to the private sphere. Finally, in existential and perhaps spiritual terms, it gave power to the widely-held belief that Black people were not fully human, not fully worthy of ontological and teleological significance.

If we take these two groups' concerns together, we begin to get a picture of a Black educational imagination characterized by a spirit of resistance to physical domination, political subordination, and cultural dehumanization. However, I do not wish to dismiss Washington's approach out of hand, since there were many who held to his view then and even now, at least in this sense: They believe(d) that Black education should focus on preparing Black children for vocations understood (at least in their minds) to be realistically attainable, and that the economic mobility of Black people will precipitate their political strength. Importantly, in this view, political power or consciousness is not viewed as a necessary precursor to economic empowerment; in fact, it might even be regarded as a

distraction (in the sense that political consciousness has no market value) and an impediment (given that Black political power is perceived as a threat to potential white benefactors).

Segregation revisited

By the 1930s, Washington had long passed, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), co-founded by DuBois, had ascended to its position as the leading "voice" of the Black counterpublic. Although there were divergent positions within Black communities on any number of issues, the NAACP was entrusted, to a great degree, with the responsibility of determining the priorities of the race, and articulating them to those in power. Certainly, integration was one of the issues upon which the NAACP had long settled its position: there could be no compromise, no concession. How alarmed the group's leaders must have been, when, at the beginning of 1934, that position was called into question in one of their own publications, and by no less a prominent figure than DuBois himself.

"This year we are going to discuss Segregation," W.E.B. DuBois (1934a) announced in the February 1934 issue of *The Crisis*, "and seek not dogma but enlightenment," DuBois begins by reminding readers of the NAACP's purpose, as it appeared in the first annual report in 1911: "To uplift the colored men and women of this country by securing to them the full enjoyment of their rights as citizens, justice in all courts, and equality of opportunity everywhere" (p. 52). And then in another declaration, written by DuBois himself for the annual report of 1915, the Board affirmed its mission "to be the completion of the work which the great Emancipator began. It proposes to make a group of ten million Americans free from the lingering shackles of past slavery, physically free from peonage, mentally free

from ignorance, politically free from disenfranchisement, and socially free from insult" (p. 52).

DuBois then pointed out that neither of these bold statements mentioned the issue of segregation. He acknowledged that the organization stood firmly against discrimination in transportation, government departments and other public accommodations, but "expressed no opinion as to whether it might not be a feasible and advisable thing for colored people to establish their own residential sections... and certainly there was nothing expressed nor implied that Negroes should not organize for promoting their own interests in industry, literature or art" (p. 52). He continued in perhaps a statement quite bold for his day: "The NAACP has never officially opposed separate Negro organizations.... It has never denied the recurrent necessity of united separate action on the part of Negroes for self-defense and self-development....That race pride and race loyalty, Negro ideals and Negro unity have a place and function today, the NAACP never has denied and never can deny" (p. 53).

The organization, DuBois was quite clear, stood firmly against discrimination based on race and against the propagation of more racially segregated institutions, based on a shared understanding that segregation was evil. That said, DuBois proceeded to argue that it made no sense to oppose segregation where Black people either seemed to accept it as beneficial or necessary. "No matter what we may wish to say," he argued, "the vast majority of the Negroes in the United States are born in colored homes, educated in separate colored schools, attend separate colored churches, marry colored mates, and find their amusement in colored YMCA's and YWCA's... It would be idiotic simply to sit on the side lines and yell: 'No segregation' in an increasingly segregated world" (p. 53).

Responding in the March issue of *The Crisis*, NAACP board secretary Walter White was unbending: “It is no longer possible to create or imagine separate racial, national or other compartments of human thought and endeavor. The Negro must, without yielding, continue the grim struggle *for* integration and *against* segregation for his own physical, moral and spiritual well-being and for that of white America and of the world at large” (1934, p. 81). For White then, the struggle for integration was about the soul of the nation—indeed, the salvation of the world. He was not concerned with the practical realities or the fact of existing segregation. To acquiesce in even the least measure is to give up the ghost, to sell one’s soul to the evil of segregation.

DuBois, in that same issue, dismissed the pleas of White and others like Leslie Pinckney Hill, president of the Cheyney Training School for Teachers, who passionately argued that segregation “brings a spiritual impoverishment upon the land” (Hill, 1934, p. 81) Admittedly not a religious man, DuBois offered a spiritual argument based on intellectual reason: “The only effective defense that the segregated and despised group has against complete spiritual and physical disaster, is internal self-organization for self-respect and self-defense” (DuBois, 1934b, p. 85).

He provided a hypothetical example of a Black man in South Carolina who “has a right to complain that any public school system separated by artificial race and class lines is needlessly expensive, socially dangerous, and spiritually degrading.” However, DuBois stated, “That black man will send his child to a Negro school, and he will see to it, if he is really a man, that this Negro school is the best possible school; that is decently housed and effectively taught by well-trained teachers. He will demand a voice in its control, finances

and curriculum, and any action of his that asks for less than that will mark him as an idiot or a coward" (p. 85).

Similarly, a Black man in Boston "has a right to oppose any separation of schools by color, race or class.... But this black man has no right, after he has made this academic pronouncement to send his own helpless immature child into school where white children kick, cuff or abuse him, or where teachers openly and persistently neglect or hurt or dwarf its soul. If he does, he must not be surprised if the boy lands in the gutter or penitentiary" (p. 85). Principled spirituality, in DuBois' estimation, was no justification for blind faith. In some cases, it might be necessary to segregate the soul to save it.

On April 9, 1934, at the monthly meeting of the NAACP Board of Directors, the following resolution was adopted after lengthy discussion: "The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is opposed both to the principle and the practice of enforced segregation of human beings on the basis of race and color. Enforced segregation by its very existence carries with it the implication of a superior and inferior group and invariably results in the imposition of a lower status on the group deemed inferior. Thus both principle and practice necessitate unyielding opposition to any and every form of enforced segregation." (NAACP Board minutes, 1934a) The Board then authorized the chair to appoint an committee to "study the various aspects of segregation." DuBois was one of several named to that committee.

Meanwhile, on the pages of *The Crisis*, another writer, David Pierce of Cleveland, Ohio, criticized DuBois for changing his position on integration since the forming of the NAACP. DuBois responded, somewhat condescendingly, "I am not worried about being inconsistent. What worries me is the Truth. I am talking about conditions in 1934 and not in

1910. I do not care what I said in 1910 or 1810 or in BC 700" (1934c, p. 115). DuBois believed that in fact, the Depression had made matters more urgent. "When we were living in times of prosperity; when we were making post-war incomes; when our labor was in demand, we perhaps could afford to wait. But today, faced by starvation and economic upheaval, and by the question of being able to survive at all in this land... it is ridiculous not to see, and criminal not to tell, the colored people that they can not base their salvation upon the empty reiteration of a slogan" (p. 115).

For DuBois, it was time for Black people to organize themselves for social, economic and political power, even if this involved segregation. "Segregation may be compulsory by law," he argued, "or it may be compulsory by economic or social condition, or it may be a matter of free choice. At any rate, it is the separation of human beings and separation despite the will to humanity. Such separation is evil... and yes it is... in this world inevitable.... without it, the American Negro will suffer evils greater than any possible evil of separation; we would suffer the loss of self-respect, the lack of faith in ourselves, the lack of knowledge about ourselves, the lack of ability to make a decent living by our own efforts and not by philanthropy" (p. 116).

DuBois once again declared emphatically that he was ready to accept the evil of segregation if it meant the spiritual and physical salvation of Black people. He then went further, and for the first time in the discussion on segregation, supported segregation not simply as a means toward Black empowerment and survival, but also as justified by white racism. "When my room-mate gets too noisy and dirty, I leave him; when my neighbors get too annoying or insulting I seek another home; when white Americans refuse to treat me as a man, I will cut my intercourse with white Americans to the minimum demanded by decent

living" (p. 117). Characteristically dismissive of his political opponents, DuBois opined that "to accept opposition without united counter opposition is the program of fools" (p. 117).

At its May 14 meeting, the NAACP Board a decisive step to reclaim its role as authoritative voice, at least as far as *The Crisis* was concerned. A resolution was passed affirming that the magazine was an "organ" of the NAACP and that "no salaried officer of the Association shall criticize the policy, work or officers of the Association in the pages of *The Crisis*" (NAACP Board, 1934b). DuBois was not in attendance at this meeting, and only found out about the resolution after he had already put the June issue to print. DuBois responded on June 1, 1934 with a forceful but civil letter of resignation from all positions he held with the organization. In the months following his resignation, the whole subject of segregation was summarily dropped.

The contention over desegregation in the pages of *The Crisis* provides an example of what Michael Dawson has described as the complicated relationship between American liberalism and Black freedom struggle. DuBois, consistent with his disagreement with Booker T. Washington, maintained his emphasis on Black solidarity. What seems to have shifted, though, is his insistence that Black people build and place trust in their own institutions, *first and foremost*. Certainly, in the debate with Washington, DuBois conceded the need for separate Black institutions. Here, he seems to go a step further, to actually *advocate* intentional, purposeful segregation from whites. DuBois made the case that as "evil" as separation may be, without it Black people would not have a space to develop respect and love for their own people and for their own history and ideas. Further—and this point becomes very important throughout this study—DuBois believed that if Black children were sent into educational environments in which they clearly were not wanted, they would

inevitably suffer psychological and emotional damage that would also have a deleterious effect on their life chances. In this sense, DuBois imagined the counterpublic as a sphere in which the most vulnerable might be protected from the full effects of racial "evil."

Walter White and other prominent Black leaders were reasonably worried that influential elected officials and the NAACP's white benefactors might be offended by DuBois' challenge to integration. They knew that the position DuBois asserted contradicted the ideology of American liberalism. Despite what individual Black leaders may have believed in private, the *public* NAACP strategy was to situate Black enfranchisement in a narrative which affirmed the nation's self-avowed natural and inevitable bend toward justice. Thus, the group's every effort aimed at inclusion in the public sphere. Although it might have been true that most Black people supported separate institutions, and largely lived their lives surrounded by other Black people, such Black spaces were regarded as private, with no legitimate relationship to, or influence on the public sphere. They were not spaces for whites to fear. However, to the extent that DuBois began to articulate something very close to Fraser's understanding of a subaltern counterpublic sphere, these spaces might indeed become a potential threat to white dominance, and therefore a problem for the NAACP.

Although DuBois may have been unsuccessful in shifting the official strategy of the NAACP, he did stimulate a debate that highlighted an enduring Black counterpublic discourse on school desegregation. In Chapter I, I articulated this as a set of questions: What will be better about the education *our* children receive in integrated schools? How will the souls of our children be nurtured in integrated schools? To what extent can whites be trusted to treat our children fairly and share resources equitably? How will integration, and specifically integrated schools, help us as a [Black] people? Although the answers to these

questions certainly differ within the Black counterpublic, the questions seem to remain roughly the same. As shall become clear, however, the questions of importance to Black people are not necessarily the ones deemed important in the public sphere; as Black people began to exercise some influence in the public sphere, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, attention turned away from grappling with these complicated questions and toward asserting a unified public front in the struggle for school desegregation.

Dolls like me

When NAACP attorney Thurgood Marshall heard of Kenneth and Mamie Clark's doll experiments, he knew they were just the evidence he needed to convince the Supreme Court to rule in his favor. In 1947, the Clarks—both experimental psychologists—published a report of their study on the racial self-concept of Black children. More specifically, their work aimed to measure racial identity by focusing on the racial preferences of Black children (Cross, 1991). Their now famous Doll Test involved presenting Black children with nearly-identical Black and white dolls, and asking them to respond to a series of prompts meant to assess their thoughts and feelings about each doll. The prompts included the following:

> Give me the doll that is a nice doll.
> Give me the doll that looks bad.
> Give me the doll that is a nice color.
> Give me the doll that looks like a White child…
> Give me the doll that looks like a Negro child.
> Give me the doll that looks like you. (quoted in Cross, 1991, p 25)

The Clarks reported that Black children exhibited a preference for the white doll, and expressed negative attitudes about the Black doll. However, they reported, children age seven and older were increasingly more likely to prefer the Black doll. In all, children in the north were more likely to express a preference for the white doll. The Clarks concluded that for

Black children, it was the cultural bias against having darker skin that caused them to hate themselves. I will come back to this issue in a moment.

For Marshall, the Clarks' Doll Test offered evidence that Black children were psychologically damaged by the stigma of racial segregation. Many of the NAACP legal staff scoffed at the Clarks' experiments, openly ridiculing the psychologists' analysis of Black self-hatred (Holley, 2005). Marshall, however, seemed worried less about its veracity and more about its utility:

> I told the staff that had to try this case just like any other one in which you would try to prove damages to your client….If your car ran over my client, you'd have to pay up, and my function as an attorney would be to put experts on the stand to testify to how much damage was done. We needed exactly that kind of evidence in the school cases. (quoted in Cross, 1991)

In the end, Marshall's use of the Doll Test experiment proved shrewd and decisive. In his ruling in the *Brown* case, Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote that separating Black children from white children on the basis of race "generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect the children's hearts and minds in a way unlikely to ever be undone" (Holley, 2005, p. B04).

Interestingly, Warren's argument is nearly the opposite of what DuBois had claimed two decades earlier. While DuBois had worried about the negative effects of integration, Marshall had convinced Warren that it was in fact segregation that harmed Black children's souls! It is the difference between these two political logics that provides a window into understanding two very different imaginations of the Black counterpublic and the Black educational imagination. For DuBois, certain forms of racial separation allowed Black people to nurture and sustain their cultural identity, which for DuBois was an important element of Black political strength; although Marshall most undoubtedly agreed with DuBois about the

importance of collective Black politics, he also knew that the court would more likely be swayed by an argument which emphasized the need to protect Black people as citizens, protected by the constitutional promise of equality in the eyes of the law. It is not that these two logics need be contradictory, except that American liberalism leaves little space for DuBois' imagination of a strong Black counterpublic.

This brings us back to the Clarks' racial politics and their ideas about healthy Black child development, which would not be so important except for the fact that their work was so influential, if not in Black communities, then in the broader public discourse on Black education and school desegregation. Psychologist William Cross (1991) has argued that, contrary to popular belief, the Clarks were not theorists of Black racial identity. In fact, they eschewed the whole notion of racial identification. As Cross explains, they "never really advocated collective Negro enterprise or group (cultural) solidarity as a countermeasure and proactive strategy for Negroes living in America because, ultimately, they saw no possibility in Negro culture" (p. 47). For the Clarks, Blackness (or "Negroness," as they would have termed it at the time) was a stigma, and therefore had only negative implications. Their vision for the eradication of racism was to encourage the government, social agencies, parents and others to counter the prejudice against darker skin; they did not advocate racial pride, and would eventually be dismayed in the 1960s and 1970s, when cultural movements emerged which encouraged Black people to take pride in Black culture, and in their own physical beauty.

No, the Clarks, along with sociologist E. Franklin Frazier and other contemporaries, supported the notion that slavery and racism had left Black people culturally and psychologically crippled. Although their own research provided evidence that most Black

children actually had a positive identification with Blackness by the time they were six or seven, the Clarks focused on the minority of cases and anecdotal evidence from their clinical practice, in which they could point to disturbing examples of pathological racial self-hatred. Cross, although alarmed by the impact the Clarks' work would have for years to come, seems to express a certain degree of understanding of how they might have come to believe so strongly in their hypotheses. Since a number of other influential researchers were coming to similar conclusions about Black life and identity, they had little reason to explore other explanations, even if they had been so inclined. As Cross points out, between 1940 and 1965, "researchers who tried to depict *any* portion of Negro life as a reflection of strength and a unique culture were simply labeled 'romantics'" (1991, p. 35; italics in original).

The Clarks' position was further supported when Thurgood Marshall invited Kenneth Clark to present their findings before the Supreme Court, and included their research pape in the brief that the NAACP Legal Defense Fund submitted to the court. "With the fame that followed," Cross states, "and the apparent 'correctness' of their views, it is doubtful whether Kenneth or Mamie Clark would have reexamined the early findings" (p. 36). Although their work helped bring an end to school segregation, it also informed decades of research on Black life. Rather than critical, complex analyses of racism, what would emerge was a singular interpretation focused on a seemingly inherent Black inferiority complex, with the sad figure of the self-hating Negro at the center.

Clearly, the Clarks' imagination of the Black counterpublic and Black education was contested by several other Black political actors, including Thurgood Marshall's staff as early as 1950, and in the 1960s and 1970s by any number of proponents of Black community organizing. Therefore, it would be a mistake to suggest that Black public opinion ever

coalesced around the notion of Black self-hatred. However, I would argue that in the broader liberal imagination, integration became situated *against* the need for a Black counterpublic; not only would integration correct Black folks' sense of their own inferiority, the reasoning went, it also would help to negate the very rationale for thinking about race at all. Therefore, there would be no need for multiple publics; those who held to advocating separate spaces for Black folks could be accused of, well, separatism. Separatism, in this logic, is not only un-American, it also encourages Black children to adopt a self-hating, self-destructive identity. In this way, the relatively lower academic achievement of Black children could be explained by their pathological impulse to identify with other Black children. In fact, this is a central thesis of Shelby Steele's 1991 missive, *The Content of Our Character*, Dinesh D'Souza's *The End of Racism* (1995), and more recently, John McWhorter's (2000) ominously-titled *Losing the Race*. In these texts and countless others, critics with no background in racial identity theory or analysis proffer cultural explanations for racial inequities, naively and in some cases arrogantly ignorant of the political and economic dimensions of race and racism in the United States, and woefully silent about or dismissive of successful efforts by Black people to uplift the race through—and not in spite of—appeals to racial identification and solidarity.[8]

Kenneth Clark lived long enough to see the cultural and political backlash against school desegregation, and the nation's general retreat from the goals of racial justice. "I believed in the 1950s that a significant percentage of Americans were looking for a way out

[8] In the field of education, a counter-argument is convincingly made by Carla O'Connor (1997), who provides ethnographic evidence to show how some successful black students draw strength from their race-consciousness, rather than from adopting "race-less" personae. For these students, understanding education as a site of cultural struggle provides inspiration for their educational resilience.

of the morass of segregation," Clark said in 1984, a year after his wife had passed. "It was wishful thinking. It took me 10 to 15 years to realize that I seriously underestimated the depth and complexity of Northern racism" (Holley, 2005, p. B04). I wonder if Clark had had a different understanding of racism, if he might have then embraced a more political, intentional Black identity. At very least, in his later years, he acknowledged some blind spots in his thinking. "I look back and I shudder and I say, 'Oh my God, you really were as naïve as some people said you were,'" Clark said in 1990. "My life has been a series of glorious defeats" (Holley, 2005, p. B04).

Black on a yellow bus…

In the hit 1970s comedy *Good Times*, producer Norman Lear brings us the daily lives and laughs of a poor Black family in the projects who seem to remain cheery no matter what injustices befall them. School desegregation becomes the topic for an episode that aired during the 1974-75 season. Twelve-year-old Michael Evans has just skipped school for the second day, choosing instead to join a picket line at the Chicago School Board to protest the lack of academic resources—and heat—at his ghetto school on the city's predominantly Black and poor South Side. Michael—dubbed by his family "the militant midget"—enters the small apartment he shares with his mother, father, and older sister and brother and takes off his green army jacket with the large red, black and green fist emblazoned across the back.

Michael explains to his anxious mother that conditions are so poor at his school that it has become difficult, if not impossible, to learn. His older sister, Thelma, nods and recounts her own experience at the school, especially noting the lack of enough textbooks to go around. Older brother JJ suggests that most of the teachers wouldn't even be able to read

Michael's picket sign, which said: "If you can read this sign, you didn't go to Harding Elementary."

A short while later, the Evans family get a visit from Michael's principal, Mr. Pearson. He has come to voice his surprise that Mr. and Mrs. Evans, in response to a parent questionnaire, had expressed such vociferous opposition to the district's voluntary busing program. In moments, it becomes clear that it was Michael, and not his parents, who had written on the questionnaire such statements as "Black ain't beautiful on a yellow bus."

Mr. Pearson is happy to report that Michael has the opportunity to be bused to a school in Rogers Park, an affluent white neighborhood, where he will get a superior education to that available at the local ghetto school. Michael insists that he doesn't want to go to a school where he isn't wanted, in a neighborhood that wouldn't allow Black folks to move in. Further, he argues, busing a few select kids out of the ghetto is the system's "way of buying us off."

Despite Mrs. Evans' concerns for her "baby," Michael is told by his father that for his own advancement—to reach his dream of becoming a Supreme Court justice one day—he must get on the bus the next morning. Although seriously worried about attending the white school across town, Michael is on the bus early the next morning. The next afternoon, he returns home grinning and reports to his family that the only cross-cultural misunderstanding was his white classmates' confusion about fatback (an ingredient in traditional soul food cuisine).

This may only be an episode (Baskin & Shulman, 1974) of a television show, but it serves as a powerful narrative on Black education as mythologized and packaged by Hollywood at a specific historical moment. The nation was experiencing an economic

recession. Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty had been largely dismantled by Congress, and decimated by the following president, Richard Nixon. Benefiting from the civil rights and anti-poverty legislation of the 1960s, an increasing number of Black folks had enrolled in college and/or found employment (largely in the public sector), and entered the middle class. The Black Power Movement had also begun to lose influence.

Michael Evans' argument that busing would undermine Black political unity and ultimately have little lasting effect on Black educational opportunity contrasted with the perspective of his principal and parents, who believed that Michael should take advantage of the opportunity to improve his own social mobility. Once he secured a certain level of education and economic stability, it was believed, he could return and help his people if he so desired. In just 22 minutes, Michael's socialist-nationalist critique is dismissed as child's folly, replaced by fervent faith in the liberal state that had recently "given" Black people their civil rights.

In their 1967 manifesto, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*, Stokely Carmichael (later known as Kwame Ture) and Charles Hamilton state that "Black Power rests on a fundamental premise: Before a group can enter the open society, it must first close ranks" (1967/1992, p. 44). Drawing on examples of European immigrants, the authors explain that in nearly every case, specific ethnic groups have developed their own institutions, shared resources amongst themselves, and chosen representatives from within to bring their grievances to the larger public. Black people, they argue, must do the same. In this sense, then, Black Power can be understood as a radical nationalist vision of the Black counterpublic sphere.

Carmichael and Hamilton share Michael Evans' concern that the danger of racial integration is a loss of collective Black identity.[9] Comparing Black people in the United States to those colonized around the globe, the authors suggest that individual Black people who strive to adapt to "mainstream" society are offered a marginal kind of citizenship, in which they are seen as above the rest of their group, but still not socially or politically equal to whites. In many cases, they are anointed as the "leaders" of the race, providing the buffer class of race managers that Dawson has noted in his work.

With regard to school desegregation specifically, Carmichael and Hamilton argue, Black Power becomes the only choice left to secure any chance that the masses of Black children will receive a quality education. They note that in the decade that had passed since the *Brown* decision, most urban districts had failed to desegregate in any meaningful way. Busing large numbers of Black youth to white schools, they insist, is not the answer:

> Implicit is the idea that the closer you get to whiteness, the better you are. Another problem is that it makes the majority of black youth expendable. Probably the maximum number of blacks who could transfer from ghetto schools to white schools, given the overcrowded conditions of city schools anyway, is about 20 percent. The 80 percent left behind are therefore expendable. (p. 157)

They conclude, as DuBois did so many years before, that quality education is more important than integration.

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[9] Although Black Power is often accused of advancing narrow, essentialist notions of black identity, Carmichael and Hamilton warned against this from the start. For example, they emphasized that simply electing any black person to office would not do. "Black visibility is not Black Power," they explained (p. 46), sounding reminiscent of Isaac Julien's comment about the importance of what a black subject *does*, not just who she is. Of course, as an ideology becomes widely adopted, the political *practice* often falls short of the way it was originally imagined. This is not to suggest that the anti-essentialist critique is unfounded; it is merely to suggest that black activists of the period were not totally naïve about the problematics of identity politics.

Now, proponents of school desegregation have been vehement in their rebuttal of the notion that they are suggesting that white schools are better or that white children are more intelligent. As Gary Orfield explains, "the theory is not one of white racial superiority but a theory about the opportunity networks that historic discrimination has attached to white middle-class schools and about the advantages that come from breaking into those mobility networks" (Orfield & Eaton, 1996, p. 344). However, what Orfield seems to ignore is the possibility (and at the time of his writing, the evidence) that only a limited number of Black children will benefit from the resources of middle-class white schools. This may accord with liberal American ideology, but, as Dawson makes clear, conflicts with the group orientation of the Black counterpublic. Further, even if busing did bring individual Black children closer to resources, from a Black Power perspective, desegregation proponents would still need to demonstrate that the policies they advocate do not have a negative effect on Black collective identity and politics.

The *Good Times* episode, and Michael Evans' articulation of the Black Power position on school busing, are evidence of the influence of Black nationalism in the area of education in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Across the nation, Black activists demanded and often were successful in gaining community control of neighborhood schools. For a period of time, these local school councils offered a mechanism through which Black people actively influenced hiring practices, curricula and school-community relations (see, for example, Perlstein, 2005). However, as I have shared from Dawson's work, Black community power is undermined in the 1970s by a host of factors, including the global recession, the growth and mobility of the Black middle class and the shift in public support away from racial justice. Increasingly, what the community was left to "control" were shrinking budgets,

skyrocketing poverty and crumbling facilities. That the nationalist position becomes the object of ridicule in this episode of *Good Times* demonstrates the power of liberalism in setting the terms for deliberation in the public discourse on Black education. Although I would never argue that any popular-cultural production offers an accurate reflection of theorizing in the Black counterpublic, what this episode does put forth is the ideological bases of contention between contrasting imaginations of education and its role in racial uplift.

Mapping the Black educational imagination

In this chapter, I have used existing theory to demonstrate the importance of maintaining and strengthening the Black counterpublic sphere. I have offered some sense of the range of discourses which inform the Black educational imagination, which I have posited as a cultural production of the Black counterpublic sphere, even as I have emphasized the powerful, although not determining, influence of broader cultural, political and economic transformations on this deliberative process. I have suggested that school desegregation, and more generally, integrated education, is a central theme in the Black educational imagination. I have also provided historical evidence to suggest the persistence of this theme in Black political thought from the late-nineteenth century to the present.

Perhaps most importantly, I have pointed out the tension between the liberal ideals of the public sphere and the generally anti-liberal commitments of the Black counterpublic. In the public discourse on integration and school desegregation, I would argue, the focus is on how to reconcile the nation's values of inclusion and equality with persistent racial disproportionality in access to educational resources and academic achievement outcomes. The counterpublic discourse centers on how to balance a desire to operationalize liberal values of inclusion and equality, while also making sure that education policies and practices

are consistent with a racial politics that is necessarily attentive to the survival and cultural recognition of Black people as a *people*, and not simply as individuals. The tension in Black education politics can be summed up in this way: How do or should Black political actors interject the "private" discourse on Black subjectivity into the "public" deliberation on education *without shifting the focus—or to put it another way, killing the soul—of that counterpublic discourse*?

If we understand the struggle over school desegregation as perhaps the most significant test of this tension in the past century, how do we analyze what has happened in this field of deliberation in the post-civil rights years, when, as Michael Dawson has explained, we have seen an undermining of the Black counterpublic sphere? What does it mean to theorize the meaning of school desegregation in the Black educational imagination at this historical moment? Again, Dawson provides some direction, in his call for a Black critical theory to serve in our exploration of Black political agency. As he suggests, such a theory needs to embody analyses of the state, power, human nature, and the good life. Indeed, if we consider the historical moments in Black education that I have highlighted in this chapter, we can identify in each of them some conceptualization of each of these four areas of a Black critical theory.

In the next chapter, I turn my attention to the methodology and methods employed in my study. It will become clear that my methodology exists in a dialectic relationship with this notion of a Black critical theory, and more narrowly, the Black educational imagination as a counterpublic space within which that theory becomes operationalized through discourse and political action.

I do not mean to suggest that Seattle's Black political actors are all heroically critical in their analyses; rather, I would argue that as they imagine and engage school desegregation, we discover in their narratives some concern about, and some analyses of the state, power, human nature and the good life. It follows then, that inquiry on school desegregation in the Black educational imagination casts a critical ethnographic gaze on these narratives, as they move back and forth between counterpublic spaces and public deliberation. Recall the questions I posed in Chapter I, questions which I suggested emerge time and time again in Black cultural and political spaces: What will be better about the education *our* children receive in integrated schools? How will the souls of our children be nurtured in integrated schools? To what extent can whites be trusted to treat our children fairly and share resources equitably? How will integration, and specifically integrated schools, help us as a [Black] people? It is in those moments that Black leaders, educators and activists grapple with the tensions inherent in these questions that we begin to locate the Black educational imagination, and in so doing, identify sites of possibility within which we might resuscitate a much-needed Black counterpublic sphere.

CHAPTER III

IN THE FIELD: HISTORICAL ETHNOGRAPHY AS A WAY OF KNOWING

My understanding of historical ethnography has been influenced heavily by the anthropological tradition. Historical anthropology evolved from a place of dissatisfaction with the way traditional anthropology and history had framed research questions, particularly in colonial and postcolonial societies. In this new field, scholars take to task the approach of simply studying a particular group of people in a particular place at a particular time. Brian Axel (2002) explains: "What is at stake in historical anthropology is explaining the production of a people and the production of space and time. This orientation engenders a critical interest in seeking to understand the politics of living the ongoing connections or disjunctures of futures and pasts in heterogenous presents." In other words, historical ethnography helps us to understand the production of history, to discover how people construct their own cultural and political subjectivity within the context of a world in which, as Karl Marx might say, they make and are made by history.

Rather than a mere interdisciplinary amalgam, a bit of history attached to a bit of anthropology, historical ethnography is actually a new approach to the study of the cultural production of lives, of knowledge, and the exercise of power. John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff (in Axel, 2002) argue that the challenge in historical ethnography is to:

> interrogate the production, in imaginative and material practice, of those compound political, economic, and cultural forms by which human beings create community and locality and identity—in terms of which they fabricate social realities and power relations and impose themselves upon their lived environments, through which, space and time are made and remade, and the boundaries of the local and the global (of here, there, elsewhere and everywhere) are actualized. (p. 290)

They continue:

> Even the most overdetermined, most potent, most complex, most inchoate of world-historical forces… take shape in sociocultural processes that come to rest at particular places during particular periods in particular personae. Without human agents, without specified locations and moments and actions, realities are not realized, objects are not objectified, nothing 'takes place,' the social is not socialized, the present has no presence. (2002, p. 290)

Thus, historical ethnography as a methodology is ideally suited for studies that aim to examine how social actors make meaning of and engage in political struggle over time. Work in this area explores the dialogics between personal and collective agency and material constraints, between identities and hegemonies, between cultural practices and political-economic structurations—all while keeping an eye on the *historical trajectory* of these dialogics on the terrain of the lived experience of political contention, or what we might call spheres of *counter/public deliberation*.[10]

In this chapter, I wish to do three things: First, I want to lay out what I see as the promise of historical ethnography for critical inquiry on the Black educational imagination. George Marcus' (1998) ideas about multi-sited ethnography provide some illumination on this. Second, I explain the specific methods and design of the study, and offer a general description of the research participants and how they came to be a part of the project. Third and finally, I draw on anthropologist Kamala Visweswaran's (1991) notion of "identifying ethnography" in order to complicate my own positionality within this work.

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[10] I will use the term *counter/public deliberation* to denote discourse at the tension of the counterpublic and public spheres. As I noted throughout Chapter II, subaltern discourses serve as a counternarrative to hegemonic expressions of justice, identity, community and everyday life. At the same time, they seek to do more than simply contest material and ideological power—such discourses are also intended to shift the relations of power and the construction of "common sense" *in the broader public* through persistent if not combative political engagement. Thus, the space of counter/public deliberation can be understood as the site of tactical negotiation between (albeit unequally empowered) competing interests.

I am aware that in some dissertations, and indeed, in some book-length ethnographies, the discussion of methodology and methods is reserved for an appendix. I have decided to include this chapter as a central piece of the dissertation and not as an appendix because in my study, I am asking the same kind of questions that my research participants are asking (Marcus, 1998). That is to say, the Black educational imagination is, in part, a practice of theorizing and social inquiry. Although it is problematic to flatten the difference between my position as a researcher, and the positions of research participants, I would argue that we share a commitment to imagining a better way forward for Black youth and communities. For this reason, I believe it is important to keep my imagination in the emplotment of the dissertation along with the imaginations of the participants.

Historical ethnography and the Black educational imagination

The current study is perhaps unique as an historical ethnography in that I focus on a period that is both present and past. That is, most historical ethnographies are situated entirely in the past, as in Vanessa Siddle Walker's (1996) study of a Black school in segregated rural North Carolina. In telling the story of the Caswell County Training School, which operated from 1934 to 1969, Walker describes what happened in and around the school over the course of 35 years, and explores the meaning of these events in the lives of Black people in the local community. Her work is decidedly *not* intended as a comment on contemporary debates over school desegregation, nor is it intended as a critique of civil rights efforts to dismantle segregated schools. Rather, Walker's approach to historical ethnography leads her to use empirical data to explain why Black folks in one small town so loved their own (segregated) school. To the extent that her work informs the present, it is meant to complicate how we retrospectively assess the value of segregated schools, so that we

appreciate their cultural benefits even as we note the political repression that made such schools necessary (and ultimately, unequal).

In contrast, my work in Seattle is very much intended as a critique of persistent education inequities, and the failure of desegregation reforms to actually improve educational opportunities for the vast majority of Black poor and working-class students. However, this study is *historical* in the sense that my research questions are focused on the material and ideological trajectories that led us to this moment in Black education. It is *ethnographic* in that I am interested in the cultural production of meaning—in this case, the educational imagination—that has shaped discourse within Black counterpublic spaces and spaces of counter/public deliberation.

The anthropological tradition in (historical) ethnography informs how I have come to define the "site" of this research project, the terrain of the Black educational imagination. Actually, it may be more accurate to say that it is the complexity of locating the Black educational imagination that drew me to anthropological methodology.[11] The Black educational imagination is neither temporally nor geographically bound, which is to say that any discursive expression of this imagination is always and also connected to a range of historical referents and collective memories of events that have taken place throughout the Black diaspora, and within any space in which there is political or cultural contention over Black education.

Revisiting the quote from the Comaroffs in the beginning paragraphs of this chapter, I am drawn to their attention to the production of imaginations through and in practice, the

[11] I did not enter the field as a "disciplined" ethnographer, a devotee of any particular social science tradition; rather, my choice of methodology followed from my political and intellectual interest in Black education.

relations between political-economic and cultural transformations and the development of community and identity, and perhaps most of all to the idea that human collectives "fabricate social realities and power relations." Here, to fabricate is to suture together, to sew the *fabric* of a life, of meaning, of experiences. In this sense, historical ethnography attends to the textures, the interwoven threads of social meaning.

We might also point to the denotation of fabricate which suggests something concocted or dreamt up—that which is fictive, created by the imagination. Which is not to say that it is untrue. Rather, it is to say that we have culturally produced these meanings. That which is fictive is very real to us: love, kinship, property, power—all are fictive and yet all have very specific material and ideological dimensions which impact our very lives.

Now, if we acknowledge that the fabrication of social realities and power relations is based on (fictive) notions that are culturally produced, it does us well to attend to the historicity of that production, because we necessarily understand that what is has not always been so. More to the point, our imaginations reflect the political, economic and cultural contexts within which they are fabricated, and thus, our (individual and collective) imaginations are inherently fluid, temporary, indeterminant. We must also be open to moving between sites, metaphorically and/or physically, in search of the complex fabrications—that is, the social formations and forces—which contribute to, in this case, the cultural production of the Black educational imagination.

The multi-sitedness of the Black educational imagination

The kind of "traveling" required in this study is characteristic of the practice of *multi-sited ethnography*. Anthropologist George Marcus has described multi-sited ethnography as "an exercise in mapping terrain" (1998, p. 83). The goal is not to attempt to represent the

entire world system that impacts a given cultural milieu; rather, it is to emphasize that cultural formations are products of broader global and local forces, and therefore "cannot be understood only in terms of the conventional single-site mise-en-scène of ethnographic research" (p. 83). Of course, Marcus is quick to add, the need for a multi-sited approach may not be necessary if one's aim is primarily to describe the specific conditions of people in a particular site. However, if our object of study is a particular cultural formation, we open up the field to consider the various sites within which that formation has developed. In other words, such an approach calls us to "[follow] the thread of cultural process itself" (p. 80). To be clear, this is more than simply offering "context" (i.e., historical, cultural, political-economic); more, it is about centering the study precisely at the tension(s) of the systemic, the global and the cultural production of human subjects.

Just as I have argued that research on the Black educational imagination requires that we situate our inquiry at sites of counter/public deliberation—spaces within and between various publics—in multi-sited ethnography, a key focus is on comparative analysis between various sites, particularly those that extant research and theory have not yet connected to one another. As Marcus explains:

> Comparison reenters the very act of ethnographic specification by a research design of juxtapositions in which the global is collapsed into and made an integral part of parallel, related local situations rather than something monolithic or external to them. This move toward comparison… stimulates accounts of cultures composed in a landscape for which there is as yet no developed theoretical conception or descriptive model. (p. 86)

This is consistent with what I have argued about the Black educational imagination: It offers us a way to explore the dialogic between Blackness and education in ways we have not done to date. And, as Marcus suggests, a multi-sited approach allows us to create theory from the

conditions of everyday life, and to more richly capture the textures of that life, as it is informed by cultural formations not bound by temporal or spatial strictures.

How realistic is it to pursue a multi-sited ethnographic project as a dissertation? Marcus suggests that the institutional constraints at this level mean that for most of us, a single-site study is still most appropriate. However, he states, "while a multi-sited project may not be literally pursued at the dissertation level, every project should be *imagined* in this way" (1998, p. 14, italics added). Reading this for the first time, I remember thinking it fitting that I would be drawn to a methodological framework that emphasizes the importance of imagining fields beyond that which we might most immediately be able to identify. Similarly, the Black educational imagination, in practice, is a "methodological" effort to make meaning of connections between this space and that, between Blackness as collective identity and politics and the sphere of schooling, knowledge and social mobility.

Using Paul Willis' classic ethnography, *Learning to Labor* (1977), as an example, Marcus suggests that even if we do not literally travel to a number of sites, we can construct what he calls a "strategically-situated single-site ethnography." Willis, while focusing his attention on the lives of working-class boys in schools, reaches beyond this to present an imagination of their future lives on the shop floor. In his work, he not only captures the "lads' " imaginations of working-class identity and life, he also keeps in his own critical ethnographic imagination the relationship between schools and factories, and to a (far) lesser extent, provides some illumination of the connection between schooling as a social formation and the social constructions of gender, class and race.

The strategically-situated single-site ethnography is, Marcus suggests, "only local circumstantially" (1998, p. 95). That is, it "attempts to understand something broadly about

the system in ethnographic terms as much as it does its local subjects" (p. 95). This is why I would suggest that my work may disappoint if understood as a story about what happened around school desegregation in a Black community in Seattle in the post-civil rights era. It (hopefully) succeeds much more as a critical analysis of discourses and practices at the intersections of systemic forces and the cultural production of meaning in everyday life. As I have noted before, my interest in school desegregation is, to use Marcus' word, circumstantial.

In this single site (e.g., Black contention over school desegregation in Seattle), I am searching for empirical evidence of what Marcus calls "system awareness." That is, how do Black leaders, educators and activists express consciousness of the system in their everyday lives and activities? "This is not an abstract theoretical awareness such as a social scientist might seek," Marcus explains, "but a sensed, partially articulated awareness of specific other sites and agents to which particular subjects have (not always tangible) relationships" (p. 96). For example, as Stokely Carmichael pointed out at the beginning of Chapter I, Black subjects might reasonably see connections between under-funded urban schools and heavily-funded military campaigns against people of color thousands of miles away. The empirical focus, at least for this study, is how this system-awareness informs how Black subjects imagine and engage school desegregation as an education reform policy. As should be clear by now, however, theoretically we are after something much more ambitious.

Methodologically, this study is, as I have said, a mapping of a particular terrain, which I have identified as the Black educational imagination. In a very true sense, I am the cartographer here, but as a researcher, I am most interested in how Black subjects themselves draw this map, how they navigate the discursive and material terrain of political and cultural

struggle, the explanations they offer of how we got to this place from there, and their yearning questions about how to get from this place to another. Indeed, Marcus contends that in multi-sited ethnography, "the most important form of local knowledge… is that which parallels the ethnographer's own interest—in mapping itself" (p. 97).

Throughout my time in Seattle, I found no shortage of Black folks willing to offer their knowledge in this regard; more poignantly, I found many who suggested that we, that they are lost, and need some help to find our way. Marcus is worth quoting on this point:

> …[M]oving between public and private spheres of activity, from official to subaltern contexts, the ethnographer is bound to encounter discourses that overlap with his or her own…. there are always others…who know (or want to know) what the ethnographer knows, albeit from a different subject position, or who want to know what the ethnographer wants to know. (p. 97)

Again, I found this to be very true in my work—Blacks leaders, educators and activists in Seattle were keenly interested not only in *documenting* the past, but also in *making sense* of the whole terrain of struggle, so that we could more strategically plan for the future. They wanted to know what I knew, as much as I wanted to know what they knew. And they made me promise to return once I had found or created new knowledge. I will return to this theme of "knowing" in the final section of this chapter, after a discussion of the specific methods and design of the study.

Research methods and design

The primary methods used in this study are semi-structured ethnographic interviews and archival research. Thirty such interviews were conducted over a period of six months in the summer and fall of 2006. The vast majority of these were one-on-one, although a few were conducted with two, three or four individuals in attendance, for one reason or another. In some cases, I had intended to interview one person, but her or his spouse also sat in and

contributed thoughts and experiences. In one case, four members of the same organization invited me to record a conversation with them over tea. And in at least three other cases, I interviewed pairs of educators together, who either worked together currently or had worked together in the past. Interviews lasted from two to four hours, and were conducted at a location of the interviewee's choosing. I met most of my participants at their place of employment or at their home, although in a few less-than-ideal situations, I conducted interviews over coffee or a meal. Except in two cases, all interviews were digitally recorded.

Archival materials included biographical and autobiographical data, including oral history accounts; daily and weekly newspapers; organizational minutes and flyers; recordings of community forums and school board meetings; and assorted other documents. These were accessed from a number of sources: the University of Washington Special Collections archives, the Seattle School District Archives, the Seattle Room at the Central Public Library and from a number of the interviewees' own personal records.

In the field

My first exploratory trip to Seattle occurred in October 2005. At this time, I did some reading in the Seattle School District Archives, and met with UW historian Quintard Taylor, who has written a book on the history of the Central District from the late 1800s through the Civil Rights Movement (Taylor, 1994). I also had an informative meeting with UW education professor (and now undergraduate dean and associate provost) Ed Taylor, who is very involved in contemporary policy discussions with school district leaders, and is familiar with a number of Black educators in the city, particularly those who have been active for years, if not decades. On my own, I also began to read *The Seattle Times* online most days, to begin to get acquainted with some of the current issues in school reform. This also helped me

become familiar with some of the Black organizations and activists who were active in shaping public discourse around a broad range of community concerns, including education.

It was during this first trip and in the months that followed that I began to identify likely participants in the project, and specific archival materials that I might need to track down, although I was not sure at this time who would be available, or what resources I might have access to. Of course, since I grew up in the community I chose to study, certain names were already known to me. For example, I had met former mayor Norm Rice when he was first elected to office in 1989, defeating anti-busing candidate Doug Jewett. As the first (and only) Black mayor of Seattle, Rice was one of the first Black officials nationally to be elected by a predominantly white electorate. I also knew of Dr. Samuel B. McKinney, the pastor (now emeritus) of Mount Zion Baptist Church. McKinney, a classmate of Martin Luther King, Jr. at Morehouse College, has been an activist for civil rights and Black empowerment in Seattle since 1957. Mona Bailey I did not know personally, but she had been very influential in my mother's life as a counselor at Garfield High School, at the time the school was predominantly Black. Although I was interested in interviewing her for this reason alone, I then discovered that she had gone on to serve as a school leader and eventually assistant superintendent of Seattle Schools, during the time that the debate over desegregation had escalated.

At this early stage in the process, I did not fully appreciate that identifying leaders, educators and activists in the traditional way would result in a primarily middle- and upper-middle class group of participants. It soon became clear that most of the established Black leadership, then and now, are firmly middle-class. Since I grew up in a poor family, I was not part of these elite circles, and had little idea how closed and removed from my life these

networks were. Once I moved into the field, I began to seek out those whose names may not have come up in a Google search or a random perusing of articles on desegregation, but who, nonetheless, had been and/or continued to be passionately active around Black education issues. I also asked participants to suggest other people I might speak to, with intention to "oversample" for class diversity. This led me to a broader range of social class representation as well. Still, of the 30 participants, fully two-thirds could reasonably be considered middle- to upper-middle class, while the rest could be classified as working-class.

In terms of gender, participants included roughly the same number of women as men, although most of those in senior leadership positions were men. Finally, the vast majority of participants were over the age of 50 (and many were in their 70s and 80s), because I was attempting to speak to people who had been active in imagining and engaging school desegregation policy. Since it has now been a decade since that policy was abandoned, most of the people who were active in shaping it were already in their 30s (or older) by the late 1970s, when mandatory busing was implemented. The few I interviewed who were younger are all in their mid- to late-30s, and are current educators or leaders around issues of Black education in Seattle.

I contacted prospective interviewees first by phone or email. I introduced myself as an African American[12] graduate student, originally from Seattle, doing research on school

[12] The choice of how to self-identify is still a contentious issue within Black communities, although it could be argued that there is now an impasse between 'Black' and 'African American,' with both being regarded as acceptable. Some are likely to prefer, or use, one term more than the other. Although I personally identify as 'Black,' I am not offended enough by the term 'African American' to object to it. On some level, this latter term is probably more politically neutral (read: less radical), although that can be debated. I used it in my phone conversations for a rather utilitarian reason: it is syllabically longer, which makes it easier for the person on the other end of the line, who might be hard of hearing, to gather that I am indeed, well, Black.

desegregation and Black education in Seattle. I then would let them know how I had heard of them, and that I hoped to interview them for my project. Most immediately agreed, and many were curious to know who my people were and where they went to school and when. Some who had missed my reference to being Black actually asked if I was, in fact, Black. I am not sure they would have declined participation had I not been Black but when I did confirm that I was, they seemed to express more interest and excitement; those who had been more guarded became noticeably less so.

In this project, all the participants agreed with my request to use their actual names rather than pseudonyms. As I state in the consent form letter (see Appendix 1) which I gave to each participant prior to the interview, "I ask you to allow me to use your real name… since my work is also meant to serve as an historical record of Black life in Seattle, and I want to acknowledge your role in that history." However, the letter also notes that if they chose not to allow me to use their names, I would choose pseudonyms for them and conceal details that might make their identities apparent. Several participants actually scoffed at the notion of being anonymous, noting that at their advanced years, they didn't care what anyone thought about what they had to say. Others, particularly those who had lived very public lives, suggested that they were familiar and comfortable with speaking "on the record." Even so, throughout the text, if I believe that something said in an interview might potentially harm the speaker politically or emotionally, I have made the choice to mask that participant's identity in relation to that specific quotation.

Although I have referred to the time I spent together with participants as "interviews," and have called them "interviewees," it might be more accurate to say that I initiated a series of conversations with Black people about Black education in Seattle. I asked them about their

life stories, and in most cases, they asked me about mine. In the midst of our conversations, I would ask about their specific involvement in schools, the community, and/or local politics as it related to desegregation and Black education. Then, almost inevitably, we would end by talking about where we are now as a (Black) people, as a community, and as a city and nation around issues of race and education.

I use archival research as a means of triangulation (i.e., confirming or completing the narratives gathered through interviews and other sources) and in order to uncover stories of past events and people who passed on without leaving oral histories. It is important to note that historical documents are not necessarily more "true" than oral accounts, and are certainly not representative of the full range of imaginations that might be found within the Black community, or even amongst Black leaders, educators and activists. As I examined documents at the various archives in Seattle, it was clear that there are major silences and omissions. Also, what is there needs to be read critically, as reflecting editorial choices, selective reporting of facts and opinions, and biases of the archivists and/or original writers. That said, archival data is invaluable in at least revealing a number of discourses on school desegregation, identifying some (though not all) key social actors, providing details about various city and school policies, and tracing regional political and economic changes in the residential and employment options of Seattle's Black residents.

Mapping as interpretive analysis

As an historical ethnography, this study is intended to make an interpretive argument, or perhaps a set of interpretive arguments. Interpretive arguments, sociologist Robert Alford (1998) explains, "focus on the symbolic meanings of human behavior as expressed in cultural assumptions, ideologies of conformity or resistance, and dominant or repressed discourses"

(p. 72). The Black educational imagination, as I have theorized it, is operationalized through political and cultural discourses, ideologies and practices which together serve as attempts by social actors to develop and articulate system-awareness of the dialogic between Blackness and education. Methodologically, then, the task is to collect and analyze data that provide evidence to support arguments which might be made about this interpretive process and the influence of systemic forces on this process of meaning-making that I call the Black educational imagination. Meaning, in this study, is inferred from critical content analyses of archival texts and from ethnographic interviews, in which I "interrogate individuals about the way in which they interpret their experiences and social relations" (Alford, 1998, p. 85). Ultimately, the mapping of the Black educational imagination *is* the interpretive analysis offered in this study.

'Identifying' with Black folks:

Wanting to know what we/they know

I always feel a bit disingenuous referring to Black people in the third person. It suggests I know less than I do, and perhaps at the same time, more. Less, in that it positions me as an outsider, observing, seeking to understand a tongue I do not speak, to hear stories of which I have no memory. And more, because by *not* identifying as "they," the Other, I reaffirm my position as compassionate but detached researcher, moved but not intimately affected or effected by Black experience, and therefore immune from the "irrationality" of rage and sadness which might color (indeed!) my analysis of Black life.

Anthropologist Kamala Visweswaran (1994) has noted that those of us who do research within our own (post-colonized) communities often bring to the field of inquiry an "identifying" politics that locates us in a "hybrid subject position" strikingly similar to those

we are studying. That is to say, we find ourselves navigating the tension within such hyphenated identities as, in her case, Indian-American, or in mine, Black-American. To the extent that we resist the assimilationist impulse which constructs and then bridges the hyphen, we embrace a politics which situates us on the side of our (native) people, pushing back against colonizing forces.[13] At the same time, we occupy professional positions as scholars that allow us to contribute to the analysis of our people in mainstream public discourse, where most of those we encounter do not "identify" as we do, nor know what we know.

"Those of us engaged in identifying ethnography," Visweswaran explains, "may be moved by different sets of questions concerning power, domination and representation; how we ourselves may be positioned (and not always by choice) in opposition to dominant discourses and structures of power" (p. 140). This is consistent with my argument in Chapter I, in which I made clear that the very questions being asked about school desegregation in Black communities may be different than those being asked by mainstream researchers. Here, what I want to note is that identifying ethnographers may enter the field with a keen, felt—that is, experienced—awareness of oppositional questions. We cannot pretend not to know. We also may feel in the flesh the desire to represent, to speak collective community knowledge, or as we are counseled in Black vernacular, "You better *act* like you know."

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[13] I am not suggesting that Black people in the United States are/were colonized in the same way as those in the global empires established by European powers. However, Pan-Africanism, Afrocentrism and various other forms of Black nationalisms, to varying degrees, rely on an understanding of constructs of colonialism to "demonstrate the continuity of *racial* oppression from its origins in the *national* oppression prevailing in colonialism's heyday" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 37, italics in original). Such nationalist approaches call for the organization of the "colonized" so they may develop their own cultural and political agendas, and develop clearer distinctions between themselves and the "colonizers."

However, as Michele Foster reminds us, "no one commands the power to know all things" (1994, p. 144). In her own ethnographic work on education in Black communities, Foster found that her insider status was negotiated, tested during her interactions with Black educators. In truth, as a Northerner, as a woman, as a person considerably younger than most of her research participants, there was much she could not know of the experiences of others, even though they might also "identify" as Black people. Certainly, we are simultaneously and multiply identified and identifying. Even so, Visweswaran cautions against an understanding of hybridity which flattens the difference between all identities. As she states, this kind of generalized hybridity "runs the risk of inaugurating, once again, the freely choosing modal subject that is at once everywhere and nowhere" (1994, p. 132). Although identities are fluid and always complex, she contends, "not all identities are equally hybrid, for some have little choice about the political processes determining their hybridization" (p. 132). Thus, in identifying ethnography, it is not so much a matter of knowing more or less, but of knowing *differently*.

For Foster, this means that although research about Black people conducted by Black people does not promise an inherently richer or more truthful account, it does offer an opportunity to rethink, even re-imagine, how and what we know as data, as evidence, as analysis. Identifying with her Black subjects, Foster notes, "There were many times…that I heard my own voice in theirs, voices that had waged a continuing struggle against an analysis of their lives imposed by outsiders; voices that had struggled to be heard among the echoes of dissonant interpretive frames seeking to reorder their realities to conform to an external agenda" (p. 145).

Knowing with others in our home communities does not assume an essentialized notion of identity, but one that is, as Visweswaran suggests, "conjunctural…continually in process, as much a matter of becoming as being" (p. 139). Identifying, and by extension, identifying ethnography could be conceptualized as a form of mapping, as Marcus has described it, which is markedly different than an essentialist construction of identity, which is more akin to staking out a fixed point on a map. It is a process, rather than a position. For Visweswaran, it is one of "negotiating political affinity and alliances, of coming to terms with whom I owe allegiance, and where my accountabilities lie" (p. 139). Identity formation is also informed by a range of political deliberations related to representation of, in her case, colonial and post-colonial Asian and South Asian subjectivities, and her identities as a woman of color and "Third World Woman." For me, what have been and continue to be important in shaping my identity are a number of emergent discourses about Black, African American and Pan-African diasporic identities, as these converge and conflict with classed and gendered constructions of Black manhood and post-civil rights/post-soul Blackness.[14]

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[14] Mark Anthony Neal has used the term "post-soul" to refer to the political, social and cultural life of Black folks after the civil rights and Black Power movements. In his analysis of this period, he focuses attention on those Black folk "who came to maturity in the age of Reaganomics and experienced the change from urban industrialism to deindustrialism, from segregation to desegregation, from essential notions of blackness to metanarratives on blackness, without any allegiance to the past… but firmly in grasp of the existential concerns of this brave new world." For Neal, the post-soul era is marked by "a radical re-imagining of the African-American experience, attempting to liberate contemporary interpretations of that experience from sensibilities that were formalized and institutionalized during earlier social paradigms" (2002, p. 3). Although I would challenge Neal's somewhat idealized notion of a "brave new world" in which history and historical allegiances no longer matter, he does accurately point to the emergence of an historical moment in which Black identity is complicated in new and mysterious ways. Part of this counterpublic post-soul "identifying" process has included Black feminist/womanist challenges to Black patriarchy, and new formations of, and sense-making about class conflict in Black communities (Dawson, 1994, 2001; Dyson, 2005).

But I want to say this another way, in another voice. More than the discursive, beyond the socially constructive, there is the Black boy growing up in Seattle, and the Black man who has returned in search of a map of our collective (Black) knowing. I need to say something about him, about me, about that. Visweswaran asserts that our own autobiographies are "not a mere reflection of self, but another entry point into history, of community refracted through self" (p. 137). However, it seems important to me that the autobiographical not be a distraction from the empirical and theoretical aims of research.

Writing about what she calls "vulnerable ethnography," anthropologist Ruth Behar notes, "It is far from easy to think up interesting ways to locate onself in one's own text" (1996, p. 13). She cautions:

> To assert that one is a 'white middle class woman' or a 'black gay man'…is only interesting if one is able to draw deeper connections between one's personal experience and the subject under study. This doesn't require a full-length autobiography, but it does require a keen understanding of what aspects of the self are the most important filters through which one perceives the world and, more particularly, the topic being studied…. Vulnerability doesn't mean that anything personal goes. The exposure of the self who is also a spectator has to take us somewhere we couldn't otherwise get to. (1996, pp. 13, 14)

To write vulnerably means that I introduce myself into the text purposefully, and not merely to evoke emotion or assert authority. My own autobiography, and specifically my experience as a Black child growing up in Seattle in the 1970s and 1980s served as part of the basis of establishing connection with Black leaders, educators and activists in the field. They wanted to know what I remembered and how I feel now about having participated in Seattle Public Schools' mandatory busing program in the early 1980s. Many of them expressed pride that I had now returned to document "our" story, that I represent someone who has "made it," and that I have done so (that is, succeeded and returned) as a young Black male when, as it is commonly said, so many of our young people have gone astray.

But this is not vulnerability, these heroic moral tales they spin about my life, and particularly, my life in integrated schools. Simply sharing these bits of autobiography does not, in Behar's words, "take us somewhere we couldn't otherwise get to." My own memories of my experience are more bitter than they want to imagine. White teachers were often condescending or just plain dismissive. No one ever adequately explained why it was that I was the only Black male in most of my (honors-level) classes, and to the extent that they did, it always involved me being an exception, or better off as a result of my distance from Black and proximity to white. In middle school, I expressed my frustration by acting out, which landed me in Saturday detention with other kids from the neighborhood. Together, we rode the bus from our mostly poor and working-class Black neighborhood to serve our sentences at the school, located in an affluent white neighborhood on the other end of town. On Saturdays, we would be the only ones in the building. But it was not our school, never our school. On regular school days, the buses carrying all the Black kids, and the poor Asian refugee kids who had just moved in, pulled up to the building just ten minutes before homeroom. At the end of the day, the buses pulled off just ten minutes after the final bell. White kids hung around leisurely at their lockers, laughing and talking, as we grabbed our coats and books and ignored the posted signs: *No running in the halls*. It was not our school.

But there are other memories, sweeter memories. Standing in line early that September morning on the first day of first grade, I remember turning to the Asian boy standing behind me and asking, "Are you Chinese?"

"No," he replied, smiling. "I'm Filipino." I do not recall what I said after that, but I do know that Roger and I became friends. And throughout my years in integrated Seattle schools, I would continue to meet people across the racial/ethnic spectrum. Having known

them, I became a better human being, with evidence of and experience with "others" as protection against the coming onslaught of racial ignorance and hatred.

On Martin Luther King Day, my white fourth-grade teacher made us sing "We *Have* Overcome." However naïve she may have been, I still have fond memories of her, because she was the one who told my mother that my behavior problems in class were a result of my boredom with the curriculum. That is not usually the way the disruptive actions of Black boys are explained (Ferguson, 2000). Together, the two of them made arrangements to transfer me into the gifted program.

Several years later, I remember Mrs. Thomas leading us in a discussion of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, which we had just read for her 11th grade honors English class. Mrs. Thomas was the only Black teacher I ever had in an advanced-track course. And here she was, with that slight smile on her face, as I, responding to one of her probing questions, stumbled through a literary analysis of some element of the plot. As in most of my other honors courses, I was one of very few Black students, but this time, just this once, there was a *sista* in charge. Just by being there, Mrs. Thomas helped me survive the year.

My autobiography—these memories both bitter and sweet—lead me to a more vulnerable place in my interactions with other Black people in the field. Although I experienced much pain in these schools, I understand that those who fought for us to be bused desired the best for us. While I may have struggled to maintain my own sense of humanity and happiness in integrated schools, many of them were working behind the scenes, knowing we were suffering, but believing their efforts were making it better for all of us. And perhaps because of the moments of joy in the midst of it all, I can honor the wisdom

and vision that guided them, even as I subject their educational imaginations to fierce political and cultural critique.

CHAPTER IV

A CULTURAL POLITICAL ECONOMY

OF SCHOOL DESEGREGATION IN SEATTLE

Dorothy Hollingsworth was ready to vote. “The day has come when everybody wants to desegregate, but nobody wants to move [on a plan]” (Angelos, 1977, December 13). In the 15 years since the Seattle School District had implemented the so-called Voluntary Transfer Program (VTP) in 1963, the vast majority of those who had participated in the program had been Black. Even as late as 1975, when the district served 62,884 students, only 1,476 were in the VTP. Of these, 1,109 were Black and 349 white (18 were otherwise classified) (Rice, 1977). To place this in perspective, this means that about 1 in 10 of the district’s 10,568 Black students volunteered; they were joined in their efforts by less than one percent of the district’s 44,773 white students. Although Black civil rights leaders had initially praised the voluntary program, and had urged members of the Black community to enroll their children in schools across town, they gradually came to believe that only a mandatory policy would effectively integrate the city’s schools.

When Hollingsworth, an accomplished social worker, was first elected to the Seattle School Board in 1975, the position of most Black leaders was clear. “They were pushing for desegregation,” Hollingsworth, now 86, recalls. “And when I announced I was going to run for the board, the community said to me—or some of them—now Dorothy, this is what we expect—desegregation. And whatever it takes for us to help you, we’re there to do it.”

She acknowledges that although the formal Black leadership had anointed her as the voice of the Black community on the board, there were divisions within the community. Some activists and parents believed that busing Black children to white schools presented a

high level of social and cultural risks, and dubious educational benefits. On the street, doubts persisted. “Parents would stop me and ask, ‘Do you think that by our children going over there, they’ll learn any more?’” Hollingsworth says she would reply, “No, but when the kid from the Central Area or the Southend [where nearly all Black residents lived at the time] is on the bus, they may see something going through town that may motivate them or inspire them, so it may be an opportunity.”

Hollingsworth insists that the aim of school desegregation was not to improve the academic achievement of Black children, but to increase their access to educational resources and people who were different from them. “We didn’t think they were going to do better because they were with white people. We didn’t think that! But it was widening the opportunity.”

Shortly after 2 pm on December 14, 1977, Hollingsworth got her own opportunity to fulfill her pledge to the Black leadership and the community, adding her “aye” vote in support of a new city-wide mandatory school desegregation policy, what would become known as The Seattle Plan for the Elimination of Racial Imbalance (Siqueland, 1981). After the motion passed, Hollingsworth and others congratulated the board, various organizations and the community for their patience and support of the new plan, which made Seattle the first major city to desegregate schools without a court order. “It can work, it is exciting,” Hollingsworth told the 150 or so people in the auditorium after the vote. “I am sure we are committed as a board in order to try to provide the resources.” Addressing the parents in the room, she added, “To some of you I said I know that you are mad. Go to it; but we [the board] are able to understand the problems and, I hope you will recognize the considerations

that each of us had to make for all the school children in this District" (Seattle School Board, 1977, December 14).

However, it was Board President Dan Olson who gave voice to the reason it was necessary to implement a city-wide desegregation plan in the first place, and what would remain the very real problem at the root of the political and economic challenges ahead. "I would like to address these comments to the City officials, to the federal officials, and to real estate people," said Olson, who had won his seat over an anti-busing candidate and whose son was one of the white students who had participated in the voluntary busing program (Siqueland, 1981):

> Now that the School District has acted within its power to rectify a situation that has been created by segregated housing patterns we look now to the city government to do those kinds of things that can help alleviate this situation. We look to the federal government to do those kinds of things that can help alleviate segregated housing patterns and we look thirdly to the real estate industry and to all of us who buy and sell houses as individuals to do those things that will alleviate segregation in housing patterns. We certainly can make the whole situation a lot better if we all take actions in this regard. (Seattle School Board, 1977, December 14)

The US Supreme Court affirmed the constitutionality of racially restrictive housing covenants in 1926. When new jobs in the growing manufacturing sector brought a sharp increase in Seattle's Black population in the 1930s, a significant number of the city's white homeowners began to include such covenants in their property deeds (Davis, 2005). A common phrase found in many deeds of homes on Seattle's Queen Anne Hill read, "No person or persons of Asiatic, African or Negro blood, lineage, or extraction shall be permitted to occupy a portion of said property." In the Wedgewood neighborhood, where I was later bused for middle school, one such convenant instructed that "no persons of any race other than the white race shall use or occupy any building or any lot" but graciously allowed

that “this covenant shall not prevent occupancy by domestic servants of a different race domiciled with an owner or tenant” (Gregory, 2007).

The Court officially declared racial covenants unenforceable in 1948; however, it would be another 20 years before Seattle passed an open housing law declaring such discriminatory clauses illegal. This came three months after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., as community and civic leaders intensified their calls for stronger civil rights measures, and street activists threatened another long, hot summer of social protest. Even with this new law, the damage had already been done: Confined largely to the Central District, and unable to secure loans for home improvement due to redlining, Black folks found themselves in overcrowded living conditions, in some of the oldest and most rapidly deteriorating housing stock in the city. Although some took advantage of limited opportunities to move out of the Central Area—in most cases, to the neighboring southend—racial housing discrimination continued in the city through other, more subtle (and not so subtle) means (Davis, 2005).

When Dorothy Hollingsworth suggested to Black parents that their children might be “inspired” by their ride through the city, she was actually speaking to the sharp socioeconomic contrast between the spatially-constrained Black community and the broader, whiter city. This, then, becomes part of the *political-economic* context of school desegregation reform. And given the ideological and white supremacist foundations of racially restrictive real estate practices, it is also important to make sense of how *cultural* practices help create and reproduce the inequitable material conditions that make in necessary—at least in the imaginations of many desegregation advocates—for Black children to leave their own neighborhoods in search of inspiration. I do not mean to imply that

Hollingsworth believes there is nothing of worth within Black urban spaces; however, she does seem to suggest that the life chances of Black youth are improved when they leave the community, because leaving allows them to imagine possibilities beyond what they have experienced and seen in the neighborhood. Thus, the economy of sitting next to white children is not in the superior value of whiteness, but in the envisioned worth of witnessing (and due to proximity, accessing) whites' relative social and economic advantage.

In this chapter, I put forth what might be called a *cultural political economy* of school desegregation. Cultural political economy provides an analytical framework that allows us to offer an incisive critique of the relationship(s) between cultural productions such as identity, narrative and ideology, and political-economic formations, such as the (ab)use of the state and market by certain classes to preserve their own privilege through the implementation of policies that serve to reproduce material inequities. Within the context of this study, I am interested primarily in the interplay between cultural and political-economic processes as they inform the historical trajectory of school desegregation in Seattle and more specifically, the Black educational imagination of desegregation-related policies and practices. To bring this analysis together, I begin with a theoretical overview of cultural political economy. I then discuss the historical trajectory of school desegregation policy in Seattle, attending to some of the broad cultural and political-economic dimensions of the implementation, contestation and eventual demise of busing. I offer some hints about how Black folks experienced and made sense of policy over the years, but that is really the focus of the next two chapters, which present stories and analyses of counterpublic agency and vision. This chapter is intended to explicate the structural context(s) within which Black leaders,

educators and activists made sense of the relationship between the broader cultural political economy, school desegregation and the lives and liberation of Black people.

Cultural political economy as an analytical framework

Attempts to conceptualize a "cultural political economy" seem to have emerged in the past two decades, in the UK primarily, as scholars working in the area of political economy began to acknowledge the critique of economic determinism in much Marxian analysis (Jessop & Sum, 2001), and some of those identified with the growing field of cultural studies articulated the need for a reinvigorated emphasis on economic structuration and class relations, in a field problematically fixated on the fluid, indeterminant meanings of texts and representations. Thus, cultural political economy marks a convergence in which the critical Marxist tradition in political economy takes a "cultural turn." As Jessop and Sum explain, this new approach

> …can be said to involve a critical, self-reflexive approach to the definition and methods of political economy and to the inevitable contextuality and historicity of its claims to knowledge. It rejects any universalistic, positivist account of reality, denies the subject-object duality, allows for the co-constitution of subjects and objects, and eschews reductionist approaches to the discipline (p. 94).

However, the authors make clear, "in taking the 'cultural turn', political economy should continue to emphasize the materiality of social relations and the constraints involved in processes that also operate 'behind the backs' of the relevant agents" (p. 94). Although a full explication of cultural political economy is beyond the scope of this project, I would suggest that a central theme in this work is the need to explore human subjectivity without abandoning a critical gaze on the forces which in many ways govern and direct this agency, and inform our interpretations of our selves, our actions, and our relations with others.

I invoke cultural political economy here not to add to the theoretical layering of the project, but simply as a way of thinking about and journeying through the Black educational imagination over time. If, as John and Jean Comaroff insist, identities, spaces and communities are created, however imaginatively, *through* political, economic and cultural forms, it serves us well to have at hand a framework that engages this very tension between the structural and the agential. What can we anticipate this tension might look like? For one, even though it is human beings who make decisions in the market, market forces act outside of individual determination. CPE scholar Andrew Sayer explains, "The partial autonomy of market systems from the identity of those involved in them, evident in the most extreme form in the colour-lessness and social indifference of money, provides an important reason for retaining a 'structural' concept of class as product of those systems, in addition to concepts of class in the lifeworld" (2001, p. 696). That is, while it is tempting to celebrate the agency of poor and working-class peoples, or explain "middle-classness" as a constructed and practiced identity, class is also a set of relations defined (and to some degree, determined) by systemic forces. Class is, as Stuart Hall might say, not merely a "floating signifier."

Second, we might think about the tension within what Nancy Fraser has called "perspectival dualism" (Fraser & Honneth, 2003). Here, we understand the need to "[treat] *every* practice as simultaneously economic and cultural, albeit not necessarily in equal proportions" (p. 63). Many problems that, on the surface, might be regarded as economic, or redistributive in nature, can also be framed as problems of cultural recognition. Correspondingly, those social problems that are most easily cast as cultural are accompanied by, and often precipitated or exacerbated by inequitable economic arrangements. As will become clear throughout this chapter, school desegregation has been variably conceptualized

as a remedy for racial injustice, a means toward urban (economic) revitalization, an opportunity to celebrate human diversity, and an attempt to more equally distribute educational resources.

At the center of the debate over the years is the extent to which one—that is, recognition or redistribution—must follow from or accompany the other. And, some will argue, the problem may be in pursuing and even gaining recognition (in say, the guise of multicultural curricula), and confusing that with redistribution (e.g., equal access to college-preparatory courses). Or alternatively, others will argue, a shift toward an ostensibly race-neutral redistributive politics—that is, eschewing racial balance in schools in favor of fiscal equity—naively assumes that the politics of racial *mis*recognition disappear in the valuation of newly resegregated schools. That is, a Black school, even with the same budget as a white school, is still, in the end, a Black school. A Black school is culturally understood as an undesirable school, which prompts parents (of all racial/ethnic groups) with economic resources to withdraw their children, thus leaving a school that is also overwhelmingly poor. Since schools with high numbers of poor children serve the most politically disenfranchised communities, they often have the least experienced teachers, high turnover in administrative and instructional staff, and are among the last to receive improvements to their physical plants (Fine et al, 2004). Once again, then, as Fraser argues, the economic and cultural become so interimbricated that, in political practice, it no longer makes sense to attempt to disentangle them as much as gain a clearer understanding of their entanglement.

A third tension embraced within a CPE framework centers around the complicated relationship between power and discourse. In traditional Marxian political economy, class relations and identities are determined by individuals' position in relation to capital, and

power is fixed through control of the modes of production. Once we take the "cultural turn," Jessop and Sum (2001) contend, we see that "the interests at stake in relations of power are significantly shaped by the discursive constitution of identities, modes of calculation, strategies, and tactics and not just by the so-called 'objective' position of specific agents in a given conjuncture (as if they existed outside of discourse)" (p. 93). With regard to school desegregation in Seattle—and nationally—political contention, on the surface, pitted bourgeoisie Whites against proletarian Black insurgents. However, it was never that simple. As I have already noted, the majority of Black leadership are members of the middle-class, while the vast majority of those they represent are poor and working-class. Support for school desegregation has split across axes of class at some times, but also across axes of age, ideology and even location within the metropolis. Some of these differences have assumed significance that rivals, or trumps assumed class (or race) allegiances. Discourses have emerged not only in relation to control of material resources, but also swirling around questions of property, morality, choice, and the preservation and protection of 'American' identity (or in liberal Seattle, the preservation of its libertarian individualism *and* its appreciation of cultural diversity). In an analysis informed by CPE, the substance and trajectories of these discourses are understood as constitutive of power relations and identities and politics, alongside—neither supplanted by nor supplanting—material conditions and class positionalities. Discourse, as the *representation* of power, becomes just as important as, and a form of, power itself.

The historical trajectory of school desegregation in Seattle

The Triad Plan

In 1964, the Seattle Urban League published its quickly controversial report, titled *A Proposal for Re-Organization of the Elementary Division of the Seattle Public Schools*. It would become known as the Triad Plan, because of its central recommendation to organize the district's elementary schools into attendance areas of six schools, made up of two groups of three schools with markedly different socioeconomic and racial characteristics. The plan was developed by Black leaders with the goal of achieving equal access to educational opportunity, which was widely viewed within the Black community as the means toward social mobility. Jerome Page, director of the Seattle Urban League at the time, explained that the group's education committee, which wrote the report, "talked about what to do to break the chain that keeps the Black community in poverty" (Siqueland, 1981, p. 16). Desegregated schools, in their view, were a crucial part of this effort because Black people "have to learn…to survive in the system, and you can't survive in a system that's covered with racial connotations. If you learn your basics in an isolated system, and then you are faced with the broader system in adult life, you are in trouble" (p. 16).

The isolation which most concerned the Urban League was not racial isolation, but socioeconomic isolation. Page described how Black families had migrated to Seattle from the hostile and impoverished South, with the hope of making better lives for their children. "Lo and behold, they found that housing was segregated in Seattle. The ghetto is a ghetto, not because Black folks want to live together, but because there were magic lines past which the real estate industry prevented people from moving" (pp. 16, 17). Page believed that Black parents who volunteered to send their children to schools outside the Central Area were

attempting to challenge the spatial constrictions of segregation, because they believed these geographic barriers were representative of, and actually facilitated socioeconomic barriers.

Thus, the Triad Plan, and early Black support for school desegregation must be understood as a demand for resources, rather than racial harmony. As Page noted, "If you get Black people talking about desegregation, it is basically a socioeconomic issue; for whites it is a racial issue. The Triad Plan was built on socioeconomic desegregation" (Siqueland, 1981, p. 16).

In fact, the plan includes extended discussion of the disastrous cultural effects of poverty, and seems to de-emphasize race, except to note the concentration of poverty within Black neighborhoods, and the relationship between racism and academic failure, which, the Urban League reasons, ultimately leads back to economic disfranchisement. The authors argue that an effective school desegregation plan could help alleviate the reproduction of class inequality in other spheres of life:

> There is usually a 'strain toward consistency' in society—changes in one institutional sphere are usually matched by changes in other spheres, so a new balance is restored. It is expected, therefore, that a dramatic re-shuffling in educational structure *will* promote improvements in the lot of disadvantaged adults in other areas, such as employment and housing. (Seattle Urban League, 1964, p. 20)

Racism is explained here as an economically-based institution with deleterious cultural ramifications. Reminiscent of arguments made by Kenneth and Mamie Clark, the Urban League report suggests that Black schoolchildren living in poverty and attending racially segregated schools may suffer emotionally as well:

> What may have started out essentially as monetarily motivated social structuring, i.e., segregation, evolved into attitudes of prejudice and feelings of inferiority and superiority….The minority child typically suffers not only a loss of enriching experiences, but is possessed by warped self-conception and ego-doubts. Lack of acquaintance with white children can mean a failure to know their frailties, and a perpetuation of the cruel fable of white supremacy. (p. 25)

White children similarly experience a kind of racial fiction as a result of segregation, the report goes on to say. Their isolation from Black children and other children of color may contribute to a damaging sense of racial superiority:

> Because he [sic] misperceives others, he necessarily misperceives himself and his position in society. He may have to face a disillusioning day of self-reassessment. Particularly if he is a lower class white child, his attention may be diverted from solving his own very real social problems, through his imagined superiority to and his real abuse of racial minorities. (pp. 25, 26)

Thus, in the view of the Seattle Urban League, school desegregation could foment broader social and economic justice. Although the plan was also aimed at countering the psycho-emotional dysfunctions of racism, even here the goal was to positively affect the life chances of Black youth and adults by reducing the cultural isolation that militates against economic opportunity and advancement.

Critique of The Triad Plan came swiftly and furiously, from the school board, the public and the press. Perhaps most consistently, the Urban League was accused of attempting to shift the function of schooling from education to social change. Seattle schools superintendent Ernest Campbell declared, "The public schools do not exist for the purpose of imposing broad social reforms upon the people" (quoted in Pieroth, 1979, p. 205).

Both daily newspapers, *The Seattle Times* and the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (*P-I*), rejected the plan, with the *Times* concluding that "the basic question [is] how much responsibility the schools should assume in the area of social reform" (quoted in Pieroth, 1979, p. 205). However, the Times, while opposed to the Triad Plan, did warn its readers about Black "disillusionment in a community which seems to wish well for Negroes, but seems unwilling or unable to recognize that there is a time bomb ticking away" (quoted in Pieroth, 1979, p. 467). The time bomb the *Times* referred to was the rise in civil rights and

Black Power protest in the mid- to late 1960s. As Black people and their allies in Seattle and across the nation mobilized for change, it became more acceptable in public discourse to link school desegregation to a broader civil rights agenda of social reform; however, in the public (white) imagination, this agenda was redefined as a cultural and legislative struggle for racial recognition, rather than a more equitable (and less racially-determined) redistribution of economic resources (Dyson, 2000).

The Seattle Plan and its discontents

The Triad Plan is important because it was the blueprint, in many respects, for the Seattle Plan (Pieroth, 1979; Siqueland, 1981), which also involved a complex pairing of schools in different neighborhoods. However, unlike the Triad Plan, the Seattle Plan, even though it was couched in the language of opportunity and equality, was mainly devised in order to facilitate exchange of students for the purpose of racial balance within buildings.

It is often said—sometimes pridefully—that Seattle implemented a city-wide busing program "without a court order" (Siqueland, 1981). But it also must be said that Seattle did not implement its plan willingly. Since 1963, when the district implemented its Voluntary Racial Transfer program, the board's position had generally been that the district could not and should not impose desegregation, and that in time, voluntary measures would achieve the broader goal of integrated learning. This position had been consistently supported by a broad range of municipal and business leaders, and by the editorial pages of the most prominent city newspapers (Pieroth, 1979). In early 1977, several groups, including the Church Council of Greater Seattle, the state chapter of the NAACP and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), formally threatened the school board with a federal lawsuit should the board not adopt a forceful plan to end racial segregation in the city's schools. These proponents of

desegregation believed that voluntary measures would never fully integrate the schools, and certainly would not do so with "all deliberate speed," as mandated by the US Supreme Court. In the 1976-1977 academic year, for example, of the 2,175 students who transferred schools for desegregation purposes, 1,528 of these—over 70% were Black, while 621 (less than 30%) were white and 26 (7%) were classified as Asian. Twice as many schools were classified as racially isolated in 1977 than in 1967. (Siqueland, 1981).

In the years since the *Brown* decision, the US Supreme Court had expressed some dissatisfaction with local implementation of school desegregation, and sought to lay out conditions under which a school district's policies, or lack of policies, might be declared illegal. In *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* (1968), the Court ruled that school districts cannot operate separate school systems for white and Black students, even if Black students are given freedom to transfer to white schools. Districts were hereafter ordered to operate "unitary" school systems. Although this ruling did not have a direct impact on Seattle schools, it perhaps sent a symbolic message that the court would not tolerate creative attempts to sidestep integration. Three years later, in the case of *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenberg Board of Education,* the court declared "racially neutral" student assignment as unconstitutional, if it relied on existing patterns of residential segregation. *Swann* reinforced the idea that race should be used to desegregate schools, if it had been used historically to segregate neighborhoods. It was in *Swann* that the Justices approved busing as a means to achieve that end.

In 1973, the Court issued a decision in *Keyes v. Denver School District No. 1*, the first case related to desegregation outside of the South. Here, the Justices ruled that school districts could be held liable for policies which resulted in segregated schools, and found that

if part of a school district was intentionally segregated, the whole district could be ruled in violation of the law. This is perhaps the ruling that created the most consternation in Seattle, since the likely plaintiffs in a lawsuit against the school board had identified several examples of persistent, intentional school segregation throughout the city (Hanawalt & Williams, 1981; Siqueland, 1981).[15]

By the fall of 1977, the Seattle School Board had to admit that they stood a good chance of losing in court, should they not act. Losing could prove costly, not only in legal fees, but also in the loss of local control in determining desegregation policy, and in the damaged reputation of the city, as was the case in Boston just a few years prior, when international media carried the horrific images of white parents threatening the lives of Black children who had arrived on buses to integrate schools in white neighborhoods. Seattle's civic and business leaders feared that any desegregation plan could prompt a precipitous decline in the city's economic situation, largely due to the ripple effects of white flight. However, a plan imposed by a court-appointed administrator was even more risky, since local leaders would have less influence in its implementation, and an outside administrator might be less sympathetic to their political and economic interests (Siqueland, 1981).

A group called Citizens for Voluntary Integration Committee (CiVIC) led city-wide opposition to the new Seattle Plan. Although the group was predominantly white, Al Winston, one of the CiVIC board's directors, was Black, and sought to organize opposition to mandatory desegregation within the Black community. In August 1978, as the school

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[15] Although *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974) marked the first major legal setback for desegregation, it held little relevance for Seattle. *Milliken* blocked efforts to pursue metropolitan solutions to school segregation, effectively ending attempts to achieve integration through urban-suburban partnerships. Seattle was and remains a predominantly white city, so desegregating urban schools never relied on participation from white suburban districts.

district prepared to begin the massive busing program, Winston met with members of the education task force of the pro-desegregation group, Black Clergy United for Action (BCUA). He presented the ministers with copies of Initiative 350, the anti-busing measure that CiVIC had worked to place on the state-wide fall ballot. Initiative 350 asked voters, "Shall public educational authorities be prohibited from assigning students to other than the nearest or next nearest school with limited exceptions?" (Angelos, 1978, August 24, p. A9). Winston argued that Black people should support the initiative, so that "our children are not pawned off to a losing situation" (p. A9).

"Now that's something we can't support," replied Fred Stephens, pastor of First African Methodist Episcopal Church. "That's mandatory segregation" (p. A9). To Winston's suggestion that voluntary measures should be given a chance to work, Stephens countered that most white residents would not voluntarily bus their children to schools in the Central Area. "They're prejudiced and they're racists," he explained.

Winston failed to win the BCUA members to his cause. "We haven't chosen you to speak for us," chided Otis Moore of Prince of Peace Baptist Church (p. A9).

However, Initiative 350 did win at the ballot box in November by a two-to-one margin. The Seattle School District (along with two other districts) filed suit against the state. The final ruling against Initiative 350 came in June 1982, when the US Supreme Court declared the initiative unconstitutional, because it targeted race as the only reason schools could not bus students, while allowing the districts to bus students for other reasons. During that fourth year of the Seattle Plan, about a quarter of the 46,000 students in the district participated in the busing program (Katz & Angelos, 1982, June 30).

White fears and the fear of white flight

Even with the defeat of Initiative 350 in the courts, it was clear that a significant number of white parents were unhappy with the mandatory busing program, even though a much smaller percentage and number of white children were bused, when compared to Black children. Ellen Roe, the school board member who cast the lone "nay" vote against the Seattle Plan, had warned her colleagues that forcing desegregation might lead to white flight from the public schools, which would also reduce the likelihood that whites would continue to support local school levies, which were crucial for supplementing the declining level of financial support for education from the state government (Kohn, 1996; Seattle School Board, 1977). In truth, white enrollment in the Seattle Public Schools had declined precipitously since the beginning of busing. In 1970, white students accounted for 80 percent of the district's enrollment; by 1980, that number had declined to only 56 percent. By 1985, that number would slip below 50 percent and by 2005, nearly a decade after the end of mandatory busing, would hover around 41 percent (Kohn, 1996; Seattle Public Schools, 2005). In 1970, only 13 percent of Seattle's children attended private schools; by 1980, that share was 20 percent, and had risen to 23 percent by 1984, five years into the Seattle Plan (Noble, 1986, April 9). By 2004, more than half of Seattle's white school-age children attended private schools (Bhatt, 2004, May 9).[16]

Some analysts caution that other factors besides opposition to busing contributed to this flight from urban schools. Suburban areas offered options for families looking for affordable housing and more room. New freeway construction allowed for easier commuting

[16] About 25 to 30 percent of schoolchildren in Seattle attend private schools (Bach, 2005, October 25), which is substantially higher than the national average, which is about ten percent (US Census, 2001).

into the city. Following their workforce and tax breaks, corporations increasingly shifted operations from urban centers to less expensive outlying locations. Rising crime in urban centers, and the influx of immigrants from Asia and Latin America are also cited as factors making cities less desirable to the middle class. In fact, some cities without massive school desegregation—Chicago, Kansas City and Baltimore—also experienced white flight during this period (Kohn, 1996).

Even so, survey research suggests that the increasing likelihood of having to sit next to children of color did influence white flight, either from public to private schools, or from the city altogether. For example, education policy analyst Laura Kohn (1996) describes a 1990 survey of Seattle parents which found that about 50 percent of those who had transferred from public to private schools did so in part because their child was bused to a school not of their choosing. The same percentage indicated that they left public schools in order to have more control over the school their child would attend. A slightly larger percentage cited that they were unhappy with the support offered to their child, or were concerned that their child receive an "academic education." Although one might argue that these issues have nothing to do with race, as Kohn states, "these phrases might reflect concerns by white parents that students of color in their children's classrooms would harm academic quality" (p. 49). Thus Black bodies were ascribed a "negative worth" in the analysis of many white parents.

School officials and even desegregation proponents realized that white parents would not send their children to schools in the Central Area or southend without some enticement. Most often, these lures came in the form of special academic magnet programs, which offered opportunities for advanced learning in specific areas of study. From 1968 to 1972, for

example, Garfield High School had a fine arts magnet program, which was created to attract white students to the Central Area school, which by the late 1960s was predominantly Black. In the mid-1970s, Advanced Placement (AP) courses were added, and soon, Garfield became the receiving high school for the Accelerated Progress Program (APP), an exclusive K-8 academic track serving only one percent of the district's students. The vast majority of students in AP and APP were (and still are) white. This served to create what one weekly Seattle newspaper would call "a tale of two schools" in which "the education you get depends on your color" (Holly-Gottlieb, 2000, April 27).

We must critically reflect on the cultural political-economic significance of creating special educational programs to appeal to white students. In fact, the reality is even more problematic (or perhaps *racist* is the word I am searching for here)—the district not only intended these programs for white students, they placed them in Black schools, thereby sending three ideologically-loaded messages: first, that Black students do not deserve or are not culturally or genetically fit for specialized and advanced learning; second, that it is morally acceptable and necessary to "compensate" white students for the "burden" of going to school with Black people; and third, that racially integrated education need not mean that white students actually interact with Black students *as intellectual peers*. As I will explain in the next section of this chapter, none of these messages escaped the attention of Black educators, students, parents and community members.

In addition to these cultural-ideological messages, magnet programs also involved an economic bargain with middle-class white residents. In a majority-white city in which education improvements are funded largely by school levies, the district needed to ensure that white parents would still claim the public schools as their own. During the debate over

desegregation in the mid-1970s, two school levies failed, a reflection, at least in part, of white voter anger over the impending policy shift. As the Seattle Plan went into effect, it was important for the district to maintain the numbers of white students, and improve the "customer satisfaction" of white parents. Although surely many white parents saw the value of having their children receive a multicultural education, they worried that the quality of education might suffer in racially- (and therefore also economically-) diverse schools. Magnet programs not only provided the quality of educational programs that whites demanded, they effectively guaranteed that, at least in the classroom, white students would interact mainly with those whom they might expect to be their peers at a private school—but at public expense! I do not mean to suggest that most white parents consciously sought racially segregated classrooms for their children. Rather, I am suggesting that they were complicit with, and benefited from a system in which the school district feared the loss of capital that middle-class whites provided. The collective political-economic power of Seattle's white population created the context in which everyday district policies and practices served to maintain largely segregated elite academic tracks, even as the district aimed to comply with federal desegregation law and their own multicultural education objectives.

The rise in Black critique

By the mid-1980s, a growing number of Black leaders, educators and activists began to critique busing as a policy, and more broadly, school desegregation as a political goal. Most cited persistent and increasing Black underachievement as the primary reason for opposing busing, and proposed that improving neighborhood schools, hiring more Black teachers, and providing Black mentors for Black children would be more effective than the

current desegregation policy. These ideas echo those articulated in the late 1960s and early 1970s by Black Power activists and others influenced by Black nationalist thought (Blair, 2005). In Chapter VI, I devote more attention to exploring Black Power and Black nationalist thought, as part of a broader discussion of school desegregation and political ideologies within Black communities. Here, I simply want to note the resurgence of these ideas in the 1980s, amid a new focus on Afrocentric or Black-centered educational strategies.

In 1984, Michael Preston—one of three Black members of the Seattle School Board—publicly parted ways on the issue of desegregation with many of the civil-rights era leaders who had supported his election. He sponsored a proposal which dramatically changed the "racial-balance" formula the district used to determine if a school was adequately integrated. Under the guidelines used before Preston's measure, the non-white racial balance of a school could not deviate more than 15 percentage points from the district's overall racial demographic. At the time, white students comprised about 51 percent of the students in the district, which meant that a school was deemed unlawfully segregated if the percentage of non-white students exceeded about 64 percent. However—and this was an element Preston described as a double standard—an all-*white* school could be regarded as racially-balanced.

Under Preston's new "plus-or-minus-20" rule, schools could be regarded as racially-balanced if they were within 20 percent of the district's average. This more lenient policy meant that fewer students would need to be bused. For Preston, this offered much-needed relief for Black parents, while also offering some relief for the white parents the district was so desperately attempting to woo. "We're talking about parents in the Central Area, the southeast area, minority parents, Black parents, who will no longer have to get up at 6 o'clock in the morning and have their children bused," Preston stated in defense of his

proposal. “I think it opens up the system to people who might otherwise make a different choice, a choice of choosing the Seattle Public Schools” (Ervin, 1984, April 18). This last statement was directed primarily at white parents; if fewer of their children were needed to desegregate schools to the south, they might be more likely to *choose* to support the city’s schools. As he had said more directly just a few weeks prior, “This is in no way an attempt to do away with the Seattle Plan… but it should send a message to the public, *especially to the white kids* who opt out of the system now, that they wouldn’t have to move around as much” (‘Racial balance,’ 1984, March 28, A5, emphasis added) For most Black youth, this choice simply wasn’t available; not only could their parents not afford private schools, the district had not built adequate classroom space in the south end of the city, so far more young people were bused to the northend simply in search of a seat, let alone racial balance. Still, in Preston’s thinking, more choices for white parents translated into greater educational opportunities for Black children, since whites made it possible to have enough capital to provide the resources needed by poorer communities of color.

For TJ Vassar, another Black school board member, Preston’s approach represented a dangerous step backward in the struggle for civil rights. “I remember why we began the struggle for desegregation, and that’s why I’m not going to back away from it” (‘Racial balance,’ 1984, March 28, A5). Vassar stated, “We shouldn’t give the appearance… that we are backing away from desegregation, particularly when we have a school system that works and works well” (p. A5).

Whether the system was working well seemed to depend greatly on how one defined the purpose of the system. For an informal group of Black educators who took a critical look at busing in 1985, the policy was a failure because it failed to produce an improvement in

Black academic performance (Tang, 1985, December 4). In response to their calls for a renewed examination of possible negative effects of busing, board member Michael Preston requested data from the district comparing student achievement before and after busing. This data showed that although all students showed improvement in that timeframe, Black students failed to improve at the rate of other racial/ethnic groups.

Preston concluded that although busing had improved racial tolerance in the city, it had accomplished little for the education of Black folks. The findings confirmed what he had argued in 1984: "Desegregation has had more of a positive effect on the quality of life in Seattle as whole than on the educational process per se, if you look at it from a strictly academic standpoint…. [D]esegregation has opened up the city and made it safe for all people to be in any part of the city any time of night…. [P]eople began to see that people are just people" (Ervin, 1984, p. 16).

Colin Williams, the Black director of the district's integrations services office, echoed Preston's and Hollingsworth's argument about the intagible benefits of desegregation: "When the desegregation plan was created, lots of liberals dreamed that it would solve all the problems facing Black children…. What today's kids get is the opportunity to be educated with kids of other races, which my generation didn't have. You can't measure the importance of something like that by scores" (Tang, 1985, December 4, p. 22). While chastising what he might describe as liberal naivety, Williams seems to suggest that Black parents need to look beyond the quantifiable benefits of desegregation to uphold the vision of those who struggled against segregation. However, as I will discuss in Chapter VI, many were increasingly looking to an alternative Black vision, informed by nationalist themes like "cultural preservation" and "closing ranks." This would not be an inherently radical or "throwback"

vision, and would incorporate more contemporary neoliberal and neoconservative cultural and political-economic ideas (Apple, 2001, 2003; Apple & Pedroni, 2005).

One example of this ideological shift was the push for creating what would become the African American Academy (AAA). One of several public schools created by the district to improve academic achievement, AAA's mission is to "meet the needs of African American and all children, providing them with an academic and African-centered education" (AAA Parent Handbook, 1999). The principles of Nguzo Saba, as set forth by Kwanzaa creator Maulana Karenga, are invoked as the "catalyst for the rebirth of our ancentral heritage and the renaissance of our rich and regal history." AAA, which would become a K-8 school, was regarded by many in the community as the means to re-establish some control over the education of Black children, and to provide an example for the rest of the district of how to improve the achievement of Black children. Planners intended to create a council of elders, and to emphasize nurturing relationships and discipline. Equally significant, AAA would follow a curriculum informed by Afrocentrism: "The emphasis in the curriculum," said Michael Preston, a supporter of AAA on the school board, "will be on the unique accomplishments of African Americans. The curriculum will be different" (Moody, 1990, October 17).

Within the context of a cultural political economy, it is important to note that the formation of AAA converged with a national public and counterpublic discourse on Afrocentrism, sparked in part by the publication of such books as Molefi Asante's *The Afrocentric Id*ea (1987), and work by educator Asa Hilliard and others (Hilliard, 1986; Hale-Benson & Hilliard, 1986). A mass-market paperback version of Malcolm X's autobiography was also released in 1987. On television, *The Cosby Show* and even more pointedly, its spin-

off, the Black-college situated sitcom, *A Different World*, provided a fictive portrayal of Black people living and learning, achieving educationally, culturally and economically in their own spaces. And on wax, Public Enemy sent out the message:

> You spend a buck in the 80's - whatcha get is a preacher
> Forgivin' this torture of the system that brought 'cha
> I'm on a mission and you got that right
> Addin' fuel to the fire - punch to the fight
> Many have forgotten what we came here for
> Never knew or had a clue - so you're on the floor
> Just growin not knowin about your past
> now you're lookin' pretty stupid while you're shakin' your ass
> …. I'm sayin things that they say I'm not supposed to
> Give you pride that you may not find
> If you're blind about your past then I'll point behind
> Kings, Queens, warriors, lovers
> People proud - sisters and brothers
> Their biggest fear - suckers get tears
> When we can top their best idea (1987)

These nationalist cultural-ideological discourses moved us away from the civil-rights emphasis on access to white institutions, and suggested that integration—our proximity to whiteness—had contributed to our own demise as a people. This is a valid and useful critique, in my view.

However, as anthropologist Leith Mullings has noted, similarly to the cultural turn in political economy, the Afrocentric turn may have blunted or distracted us from critique of institutions and economic processes that are both fueled by and fuel racial domination. She writes, "As we are reminded every day—by the hundreds of thousands of homeless, unemployed African Americans, by nearly six in ten African American children growing up in poverty, by every African American imprisoned and executed by the state…—at the foundation of racism is a system of savagely unequal economic and political relations" (2000, p. 214).

In the case of the African American Academy, this has translated into the challenge of providing education to a student body in which a disproportionately high percentage of students are poor. Even the school's sprawling $19.3 million new building, which many thought would provide a psychological lift for students used to attending crumbling, overcrowded schools, can not serve as a substitute for economic justice. And without economic justice—whether in integrated or Black-centered schools—it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to realize educational equity (Anyon, 1997, 2005; Lipman, 2003).

The election of Norm Rice and the retreat from mandatory busing

In 1988, Seattle Schools superintendent William Kendrick proposed a "controlled-choice" plan to replace mandatory busing. Under this new plan, which the school board passed unanimously, students were able to indicate their attendance preferences from a list constructed by the district. The idea was to quell white unrest by offering a greater amount of choice, while still complying with desegregation goals. Controlled-choice policies instructed district administrators to give as many students as possible their first choice; however, students making "desegregation-positive" choices were more likely to avoid a mandatory assignment, because once a specific school had a certain percentage of its most dominant racial group, the remaining assignments were made using what was called a "racial tiebreaker." The effect of the racial tiebreaker was that white students who wished to attend one of the district's more highly-regarded schools—most, although not all of which are in predominantly white neighborhoods—found themselves competing for scarce seats with other white students, while students of color who lived in the same neighborhood or who were bused from the south end of the city were able to move higher on the list. A white student who, for example, requested Rainier Beach or Cleveland high schools—both of

which are primarily Black, Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander—as their first choice would have undoubtedly had no problem getting in. However, for any middle-class parent, these low-performing, high-poverty south end schools would hardly have been considered an option.

Although 68% of students received their first choice of school (and another 10% their second choice), this new plan failed to appease many white parents in the north end of the city, who wanted an end to busing altogether (Kohn, 1996). They formed an anti-busing group called Save Our Schools (SOS), and threw their support behind the mayoral campaign of Doug Jewett, who ran on an anti-busing platform. SOS also placed the anti-busing Initiative 34 on the fall 1989 ballot, which mandated an open enrollment policy throughout the district and the end of mandatory busing. It also set aside monies for magnet programs and other voluntary desegregation efforts, but ordered that if the school district did not end busing, these funds would be held in escrow until the district did so.

City councilmember Norm Rice, although open to a shift in desegregation policy, believed that SOS, Jewett and Initiative 34 helped create a climate in which the discussion of race and education in Seattle took an unfortunately bitter and caustic tone. The former newscaster and bank executive had previously dismissed those who urged him to enter the race to become Seattle's first Black mayor. However, as the campaign went on, he found a reason to step forward. "[The debate] degenerated into race and got very nasty," he tells me as we sit in his office at the University of Washington, where he is now on the faculty of the public-affairs school. "I was waiting for some of the candidates to challenge this initiative and say that it was wrong. One candidate—Doug Jewett—ran with this [anti-busing] mantra. The rest stayed away and said, 'Well, schools don't belong to the city, and therefore, we

aren't going to say anything. I thought that was a cop-out." Rice explains to me that he thought it was a cop-out because the other candidates were afraid to address this divisive issue, fearing it might cost them votes.

"One of my colleagues who was running for the position came into my office and said 'We've got to do something about this. We've got to get this off the front pages. We need somebody to galvanize the community and get this moving in the right direction.' And I said, 'That seems like a good idea.' And he was kind of thinking out loud and he said, 'Who could that be?' And he said, 'Well, it couldn't be you, because you're Black.'"

Rice pauses; I just smile and shake my head. He continues, "I got *so* angry… I just seethed." Rice decided to center his campaign around the issue of education. "I said, 'We're going to bring this city together; [the conversation] had gotten too divisive and too shrill." Rice filed his campaign papers on the last possible day, and went on to win the election.

However, Initiative 34 also passed. The school board narrowly voted to reject the measure, despite the offer of funding for voluntary desegregation measures. Thus, the initiative had little direct effect on policy; indirectly, however, it shifted the discourse on busing in Seattle, making it clear that whites in Seattle could effectively mobilize opposition should the district not change course. Many white residents would have had to vote for Norm Rice and *also* for Initiative 34, which might seem a paradox. However, Rice was the Democratic nominee in an overwhelmingly Democratic city, was never strongly identified with the Black civil rights leadership of the city, and had given clear signs that he was not exactly pro-busing. His belief—and I believe this probably appealed to many white voters—was to shift the conversation from race to quality education for all. This resonated, not only because middle-class whites could see their interests reflected in the call for quality

education, but also because for many liberal white Seattleites, attention to race was (and is) regarded as inherently counterproductive. And even though many liberal whites were still open to "race talk," race-conscious (that is, racially-redistributive) *policies* were decidedly anathema.

The demise of busing and the introduction of the weighted-student formula

In his posthumously published book, *Victory in Our Schools* (1999), John Stanford describes working late one night in 1995, during his first months as the superintendent of Seattle Public Schools. Three school board members came to visit him, and asked him to find a way to end busing, arguing that it was unfair to send children to schools outside of their neighborhood. Although Stanford doesn't name the board members, it is reasonable to conclude that Michael Preston would have been among them, to make the case that it was not only unfair to white children, but to Black children as well.

Indeed, when Stanford set out to study the issue, the first person he spoke to (according to his account) was a fourth-grader that he calls "Jamal." Although Jamal is never racially identified in Stanford's story, such a Black-identified name (and not "Kevin" or "James," for example) allows Jamal (if that was his real name) to represent, to stand in as a signifier of the archetypal Black child. When Stanford asked him how he felt about being bused so far to school, Jamal replied, "I hate it… I hate getting up that early. Man, I get up at six-thirty! Do you know how early that is? I should be asleep!" (Stanford, 1999, p. 182). Stanford goes on to say that Jamal rarely eats breakfast at home and often falls asleep during class. Stanford concluded, "The decades-old experiment was not producing the results it had been designed to achieve. Children of color were being bused in disproportionate numbers: Because white families fled the district rather than have their children bused, 95 percent of

the children on buses were minorities" (p. 182). He determined then that it was time to bring busing to an end: "The decision to end busing was not a racial issue but an educational one" (p. 185).

Nearly everyone seems to agree that John Stanford was a dynamic figure, although opinions are mixed on the policies he pursued as the first Black superintendent of Seattle Schools from 1995 until 1998, when he tragically died of leukemia. A former military officer and county executive for Fulton County, Georgia, Stanford had no experience as a school administrator or educator. He came in aiming to decentralize school administration, by placing more authority and responsibility with principals, whom he regarded as CEOs. Community activist Don Alexander, in his discussion with me, remembers asking Stanford how students should be regarded in this corporate analogy. "'As widgets,'" Alexander says angrily, mocking Stanford's reply. In so many words, Alexander told Stanford never to say that again.

Like Rice, Stanford was not strongly identified with the traditional civil rights leadership. However, Rice suggests to me, the fact that both he and Stanford were Black may have contributed to the freedom they had to shift education policy away from desegregation without suffering critique from established Black leaders. "I think the legacy of my administration is that it gave the district Stanford," Rice notes. "And I think that having an African American mayor, having an African American superintendent—somehow I think people felt the legacy was being adhered to…the torch would not be dropped." As leaders—as *Black* leaders—Rice argues, invoking a religious analogy, the two were able to renew the faith of *all* city residents in the public schools at a time of great uncertainty and intergroup resentment.

Although Rice became mayor while I was still living in Seattle, Stanford arrived after I had moved away. Returning to the city some nine years after his death, I noted that Stanford's name graced not only a school in the northend, but also the district's main administration building! I found a great number of people—primarily white people—singing his praises and lamenting that the superintendents who followed him did not possess his ability to inspire. In fact, the current mayor, Gregory Nickels, a protégé and former staffer of Norm Rice, had recently tapped Rice to possibly become the next superintendent, in order to bring back some of this public support for the city's schools that had flowed so freely during Stanford's term (Once Nickels' intentions became known, the board rebuffed his efforts as an infringement on their authority, and reaffirmed their decision to conduct a national search).

The Alliance for Education, a private non-profit business-supported public-education fundraising group, was founded about the same time as Stanford's arrival in Seattle in 1995. By 2007, the group had raised over $90 million for Seattle Public Schools, from such prominent sources as The Boeing Company, The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Washington Mutual Bank. The Alliance counted Stanford as an invaluable partner in their effort to serve as a "catalyst" for change in the public schools. It is beyond the scope of my analysis here to offer a critique of the Alliance's influence over the direction of public school policy; I simply want to note that they have had, and continue to exercise influence, as a result of the millions of dollars they raise to supplement the inadequate funding the state provides.

One of the major policies supported by the Alliance was Stanford's introduction of the weighted-student formula (WSF) of school budget allocation. What makes the WSF so important to the story of school desegregation in Seattle is that it provided the rationale for

ending busing and returning to what would inevitably be more racially segregated neighborhood schools. In essence, the WSF changed the school-budget formula by acknowledging that some students are more expensive to educate than others. Therefore, rather than allocate monies simply based on the number of students in a building, the WSF takes into account socioeconomic factors that the district had identified as presenting a challenge to academic achievement. Namely, for each student who is deemed low-income (based on qualification for free or reduced lunch), or in need of bilingual or special education, the school receives an additional amount of money in addition to base funding. In effect, then, given the high number of Black students who are either low-income or in special education, and the high number of new Asian and African immigrants who are both poor and in bilingual education, schools in the southend could expect to receive more funds to address the relatively higher needs of their students.

"Over the long term," Stanford wrote in his book, "we hope to close the achievement gap between minority students and whites. We also hope that ending busing will bring large numbers of middle-class students into our district as they realize that they can attend their neighborhood schools, and that those schools are as strong, as challenging, and as achievement-oriented as their private and suburban counterparts" (1999, p. 191). And indeed, over the past several years, schools in the northend—shed of their poor-performing (and just simply poor) children of color—have succeeded in recruiting and retaining affluent families who are able to supplement the school's budget with their own fundraising prowess.

This issue came up at a 2004 community forum at Rainier Beach High School, in the southend. Caprice Hollins, the district's new director of equity and race relations, was responding to questions about inequities between Roosevelt High in the northend and

Cleveland High in the southend. "The issue with the resourcing," she explained, "the allocation of where resourcing is going into programs is definitely something that the district needs to look at…. If we're talking about closing the achievement gap, we have to think about how our dollars are being spent and where they're being spent.

"But the issue of southend versus northend and what schools have at one end and what schools don't have on another end—a lot of the funding that comes into the northend schools comes from the parents." Hollins noted that Washington State was among the lowest in education funding. "The northend schools' parents make up for that," she told the audience. "So schools don't have enough money to get dictionaries or they want another teacher or we need a jungle gym or—and their fundraiser looks a lot different than a fundraiser that might occur on the southend."[17]

A vivid example of the disparities is the vast difference between the supplementary funds at Ballard High in the northend, and Chief Sealth High, my alma mater in the southend. At Ballard, funds from parents, alumi and community leaders supported the creation of a Maritime Academy ($35,000), athletic facilities ($93,000), new microscopes and other science supplies ($32,000), a new law class ($5,500) and even new decorative banners for the halls ($2,000). Meanwhile, at Chief Sealth, the principal had to lay off a music teacher, a library aide, and a high-level administrator. He did not even bother to ask the parents' group for help, because they were having a hard enough time meeting their commitment to raise $5000 (Vin, 2004, January 11).

District data for 2003 show that the student enrollment at Ballard was nearly 60 percent white and less than 10 percent Black, in a district where only 40 percent of students

[17] For a more detailed analysis of this case, and the cultural and political-economic dimensions of school funding in Seattle, see Dumas (forthcoming).

are white and nearly a quarter are Black. At Chief Sealth, 29 percent of the students are white, and Black students are about 20 percent, while Latino students made up 23 percent of the student body, more than double their representation at any other school in the city, including Ballard. Over half of Sealth's students qualified for free or reduced lunch, more than at any other high school except Rainier Beach. At Ballard, only about 22 percent of students were eligible. Although I do not present adequate evidence here to attribute these inequities to the WSF (and again, such is beyond the scope of this project), it is not hard to see how the policy creates racially and economically segregated schools that, despite the district's attempts to provide supplementary funding, perpetuate an educational caste system in which Black students and other poor children of color are relegated, once again, to schools that are politically marginalized, culturally devalued (in the broader public sphere), and economically fragile. As a response to busing, then, it might be argued that the WSF exchanged "integrated and unequal" for "separate and even more unequal."

In their 2003 publication, *Tradition to Transformation: How Seattle is Reinventing its Public Schools* (Cameron, 2003), the Alliance for Education provides a description of Stanford's impact that is particularly revealing, from a critical perspective:

> Stanford wooed and won the hearts of Seattle residents, making them believe once again in the future of their public schools. After years of busing, bickering [and] decline…here was an outsider, an African-American, a former Army General, talking about how children deserved great schools and promising to lead the way. He would lead, he said, with love. (p. 18)

After noting the persistent political and economic challenges of school reform, the report goes on to say:

> But one thing seems changed for good. Stanford guided Seattle beyond racial politics that permeated the school system for three decades. He could say what no other superintendent in the history of Seattle could say: 'I don't have to sit next to a white person to learn.' …. Race still matters, but the conversation about race, particularly

> about how to narrow the persistent achievement gap, is fundamentally different today. (p. 19)

What the Alliance report fails to acknowledge is the enduring connection between race and the political-economic dimension of the achievement gap. They are correct that the conversation has shifted such that the discourse on race—*how* race matters—now centers on interpersonal awareness and cultural sensitivity training (Dumas, forthcoming). However, with Black students at the bottom of nearly every indicator of academic achievement *and* largely removed from affluent northend schools, how do we talk about race only as a matter of cultural understanding and not in terms of economic (mal)distribution?

The racial tiebreaker as last resort

The US Supreme Court recently issued a decision in the most recent, and perhaps the last remaining controversy related to desegregation in Seattle. On Thursday, June 28, 2007, in the case of *Parents Involved in Community Schools v Seattle School District No. 1*, the justices declared as unconstitutional the district's use of race as a factor in school assignment for the purpose of creating racially-balanced learning environments. The 5-4 ruling was a vindication for those who believe that the US should be a "color-blind" society, and is widely regarded as a landmark case—in some sense, ushering in a post-*Brown* climate, in which school districts face possible legal challenges if they even attempt to be intentional about countering racial (re)segregation. Culturally, the court sent the message that despite the nation's history of conscious racial segregation and subjugation, the best way to address the problem of race now is to not address it.

The so-called "racial tiebreaker" policy had been used only for assignment to oversubscribed schools—that is, schools where more students wish to attend than there are spots available, and gave a preference to students whose enrollment contributed toward

bringing a given school closer to the district average of 40 percent white students and 60 percent students of color. Since the district now has open enrollment, students may apply to attend any school in the city, although transportation is only provided to those schools in their given cluster. At the high-school level, especially, competition is high for admission to such schools as the aforementioned Ballard and Garfield, and Roosevelt, while schools like Rainier Beach, Chief Sealth and Cleveland are not competitive at all, and typically have hundreds of empty seats.

A number of white parents formed Parents Involved in Community Schools after their children were denied their first choice of high school. In their 2001 lawsuit, they alleged that the racial tiebreaker policy violates the state's anti-affirmation action law, which the voters approved through Initiative 200 in 1998. The Washington State Supreme Court argued that the law disallows the use of race in certain circumstances—that is, when a less-qualified individual of one racial group might be chosen over a more highly-qualified person of another. However, since the school district's policy is racially neutral—that is, it does not on the surface seek to benefit one race over another—then the policy represents a legal use of race. The Ninth District Court of Appeals concurred, ruling in 2005 that "the district has a compelling interest in securing the educational and social benefits of racial (and ethnic) diversity" (quoted in Koons, 2006).

The Supreme Court which took up the racial-tiebreaker case in 2007 was an increasingly right-leaning court; the conservative president, George W. Bush, had made three appointments to the court over the past six years. In early questioning of attorneys for the school district, it was clear that the justices were likely to apply the strictest standards with regard to the use of race in school assignment, and were skeptical about the state's

"diversity" argument for integrated schools. Justice Anthony Kennedy suggested that the tiebreaker policy sent a message to students that "everybody can get a meal" (admission to high school) but not necessarily "dessert" (access to the most desired schools) (quoted in Sherman, 2006, December 4). And that was precisely the district's argument—each student is guaranteed access to one of the public high schools, but she/he is not entitled to enroll at the most prestigious, even if that school is closer to her/his home.

At the center of the white parents' argument—and their anger—was that they moved into certain neighborhoods specifically so that they might access these better schools; not allowing their children to enroll at these schools then becomes a sort of violation of property rights, in addition to racial discrimination. Three of the five oversubscribed schools are located in the northend, in neighborhoods that historically have not been open to most people of color. Garfield, although in the center of what has historically been the Black community (as a result of racist federal and local policy and cultural norms), basically operates as two schools, with higher tracks primarily for whites (and certain Asian groups) and lower tracks for students of color. Also, the surrounding neighborhood is quickly gentrifying, as whites with younger children move in, and Black folks move or are removed to working-class inner-ring suburbs to the south, where few schools enjoy the status of those (oversubscribed schools) available in the city. Thus, historical class and race privilege translate into middle-class white presumptions of rights to what are increasingly *market-determined* educational opportunities.

In an amicus brief submitted to the high court by 553 social scientists (including two advisors of the current study[18]), the authors, led by Harvard University's Gary Orfield,

[18] Both Jean Anyon and Michelle Fine were co-signators to the amicus brief.

articulated their support for Seattle's racial tiebreaker policy. They did not so much address the constitutionality of the policy as make the case that 1) integrated schools are better for the development of a democratic society; and 2) racially isolated schools—at least for students of color—facilitate harmful educational and social outcomes (Brief of 553 social scientists, 2006). The trajectory of school desegregation policy suggests that, as much as one might agree with these arguments, we have entered an historical moment in which it is difficult to find broad-based public support for the ideological principles of justice and social welfare behind the arguments. To be sure, a majority of people in the US might voice support for the ideals of diversity and opportunity, as reflected, for example, in Seattle's election of Norm Rice. However, as the concurrent passage of the anti-busing measure and opposition to the racial tiebreaker attest, the "public," in general, do not necessarily wish to *act* on their expressed values in ways that might sacrifice their material advantage or their cultural standing relative to others. As I explore in the next chapter, it is this disjuncture between promise and reality, between public opinion and social policy, that so strikingly informs the central themes in the narratives of Seattle's Black leaders, activists and educators.

CHAPTER V

NARRATING SCHOOL DESEGREGATION:

THE BLACK EDUCATIONAL IMAGINATION AS STORY

In her ethnographic work on women activists in the Greek resistance, Janet Hart (1996) conceptualizes oral narratives as a collection of stories we tell ourselves and others about the past. For activists, the intent of telling such stories is at once pedagogical and political, as they attempt to explain their own motivations, critique historical and present injustice, and inspire a new generation of insurgents. Throughout her book on Greece, Hart, who is African American, makes parallels between the role of narrative in the struggle against Nazism in Europe and in Black liberation struggle in the US.

I have been drawn to Hart's work, and specifically her theorizing about narrative, because she has written convincingly about the role of narrative in sustaining what she calls "imagined communities" throughout the world, including "the greater black imagined community" (1996, p. 23). In analyzing these accounts of Greek women, or reflecting on stories she heard from Black elders, Hart is less interested in their factual accuracy than she is in how narrators construct, or emplot, their stories, and how, through the recounting of stories, they produce individual and collective identities and shared understandings of social events. She explains, "Whether or not the original incidents can actually be verified is less important than the trust placed in the narrator and the narrator's ability to persuade the listener to alter or disavow certain behaviors at critical stages in life" (p. 23). [19]

[19] This is not to suggest that Hart and other narrative researchers adopt a relativistic understanding of "truth," in which no given account can be judged as more or less historically accurate than another. In fact, Hart asserts, it is precisely because of her interest in narrative that it becomes important to collect data from a number of sources and using a variety of methods. "The narrative alternative," she contends, "combines mythical influences

Hart's understanding of narrative is consistent with my own conceptualization of the Black educational imagination in its emphasis on discourse as the site at which people make meaning of changes in their social condition over time. Her own approach to narrative analysis "blends the stories of individual social actors about personal experiences, popular mythologies, and macrocausal explanations and uses them to account for the course of events in particular cases." Evidence of shifts in identity and political consciousness emerge "in the types of stories the researcher, as collaborator, 'hears' participants telling about 'the way things happened' and 'the way things are now'" (1996, p. 47).

Storying school desegregation

I want to revisit here an argument I made in Chapter II about the nature of education discourse in the Black counterpublic sphere. Following Michael Dawson, I asserted that such discourses have historically involved thinking aloud about the relationship between schooling and the collective survival, or—to use Dawson's term—the "linked fate" of Black people. These are not abstract theoretical exchanges, however, but reflections of living in and through engaged local struggle around educational opportunity and justice. The stories I hear, then, are theory in practice, as Black social actors assess how specific education policies and practices—in this case, school desegregation—affect the lived experiences and life chances of Black people in a specific space and time. At the same time, these narratives are much more personal, offering insight into how leaders, educators and activists make meaning of their own decisions and their own place in history, in shaping "the way things happened." The function of persuasion that Hart speaks of is most evident as narrators reflect on "the

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on expressions of human consciousness and perceived reality with a *commitment to understanding the material*, *complexly contingent bases of political actions*" (1996, p. 47, italics added). Identifying conflicts between narrators' stories and other historical records or sources does not invalidate the story; it simply contributes to its meaning.

way things are now." Although Black narrators often acknowledge some improvements over time (and situate themselves within, or in relation to these developments), invariably, they also emphasize the distance between the present historical moment and where Black people, or racial justice, should be now, and the work that will be required to achieve political victories in the future.

In this vein, Hart proposes that we think about each narrative, each story told by an "historical protagonist" (1996, p. 50) as having both an ontological and mobilizational sphere. The ontological, or subjective sphere, involves the "structuring of the image of the self" (p. 51). The focus here is on connecting one's own personal experiences to a larger motivation, which provides the "why" for certain actions and commitments. Thus it is not simply a point of declaring one's own individuality or being, but placing that personal identification process within the context of a metatheme. For example, Black education activists might (if they were so inclined) title a narrative as "I Took a Stand For My People" or "How My Own Experience in Segregated (or Integrated) Schools Made Me Who I Am Today" Emplotting personal narratives in this way, Hart contends, is not merely about defining the self, but also about connecting self-identity to collective political agency.

Following from this, mobilizational or intersubjective narratives aim to bring the collective to a place of solidarity and foment shared cultural values. Such narratives

> [tend] to take shape in response to present circumstances and to be deployed for specific strategic reasons, even though their content is often laced with references to the past. The basic purpose is persuasion in the context of crisis, urgent because time is at a premium: divergent tendencies must be unified before oppositional forces gain the upper hand. Selective versions must be propagated. (p. 53)

This is particularly important in the current study. Initially, I was frustrated that when I asked Black folks about their involvement in school desegregation struggle, they might begin

their story in the 1960s or '70s, but would quickly skip a few "chapters" and within moments, be talking about more contemporary concerns, such as school closures in Black neighborhoods, the gentrification of the Central District, or the effects of violence- or sex-oriented Black music. However, part of the reason I have come to argue for a decidedly counterpublic approach to conceptualizing school desegregation is because, as Hart points out, the "participant-authors" of political narratives are more fluid in their imagination of the relationship between the past, present and future. The urgency of the present, from their vantage point, demands that we look back to their lived experiences to learn—and we are back to the pedagogical function again—what worked well and should continue, where we went astray and need to return and what mistakes we made that should never be repeated, lest we place our survival at grave risk.

Now, since narrators are the protagonists of their own stories, and because the present demands firm resolve, it is uncommon, according to Hart, for participants to present themselves in an other-than-favorable light. She states, "This is particularly true of revolutionaries imbued, sometimes years later, with spiritual belief and the desire to promote their cause" (p. 52). This isn't a problem for researchers, if we simply keep this in mind in our analysis. Again, I am interested in who they *imagine* themselves to be, what they *imagine* our cultural and political plight to be, as much, or perhaps more than I am interested in an account removed from subjective and intersubjective positionality (to the extent this is even possible or desirable).[20]

[20] Again, I do not dismiss the importance of concrete historical transformations or the material consequences of certain educational policies and practices. However, I want to balance the attention I offered to documenting structural forces in the somewhat linear format of the last chapter with a more fluid narratological approach that foregrounds the stories of Black social actors as heard and (co-)constructed in the field.

With all this in mind, what I wish to do is present narratives of five Black leaders, educators and activists who shared their stories with me related to school desegregation policy and practices and the political and cultural meaning of sitting next to white children. I then offer analysis of the ontological and mobilizational themes in the narratives, and place narrators' ideas in the context of the broader Black educational imagination.

Hart notes that researchers are also collaborators in the process of story-telling; we choose how to communicate, emplot and interpret what we have heard. I have made a choice in this chapter *not* to highlight the conflicts between the various stories, but their convergences and consistencies. Although I have intentionally chosen to focus on five very different folks, with diverse experiences and perspectives, I do not claim to provide here (or anywhere in this study, for that matter) a balanced representation of opinions on school desegregation. Opinions, in my view, are not nearly as interesting or analytically useful as stories, culturally produced among social actors.

To be clear, I do not mean to flatten the differences between the narratives; rather, I want to claim this space to explore the meta-plot weaving through various stories. This choice is reflective of my political commitment to exploring the possibility of Black counterpublic solidarity and my theoretical interest in the Black educational imagination as a polyvocal process. This, then, is one of those times that I, as an "identifying ethnographer," have chosen to explicitly enter the text, and I want to acknowledge and be conscious about my decision to do so.

Roscoe Bass: The fire still

"Heeeeyy! Here comes the troublemaker." The well-dressed gray-haired brother smiles, looking up from his plate of grits and eggs to extend his hand. Roscoe Bass grins and takes it firmly in his own.

Mr. Bass introduces me to the older gentleman, who is, like himself, a retired educator. "This young brother is working on his Ph.D. in education," Mr. Bass explains, putting his hand on my shoulder. "He's doing research on the Seattle schools, on Black education." The seated brother raises his eyebrows approvingly, and shakes my hand.

"You might want to talk to him, too," Mr. Bass tells me a few moments later, as we make our way to our table next to the window at The Silver Fork Restaurant, a Black-owned diner on Rainier Avenue in Seattle's southend.

At the age of 80, Roscoe Bass has witnessed a lot of change in Seattle and the city's schools. However, he has done more than simply witness, which is why I so wanted to interview him. I had learned from my archival research that Mr. Bass had served as principal of Garfield High School in the mid-1970s, the first Black principal of the famed Central District school which had become majority-Black at a time when no other high school in the city had more than a handful of Black students, and quite a few had none. Bass was also instrumental in the implementation of the Seattle Plan. Since retiring in the early 1990s, Mr. Bass has continued to speak out about issues of equity and justice in Seattle schools. He helped organize Save Our Southend Schools (SOS), a community-based activist group which calls attention to district policies and practices that disadvantage students in poorer communities and communities of color. At school board meetings and community forums, one can often find Bass at a podium, expressing his anger over the slow pace of school

reform, and insisting that he'll keep coming back until those in power address the community's concerns.

"When are you going to stop?" he recalls asking Rev. Samuel B. McKinney the 79-year-old civil-rights activist and pastor of Seattle's Mount Zion Baptist Church, joking that at McKinney's advanced age, it might be time to take a rest from the struggle.

McKinney chuckled, and reminded Bass that between the two, the 80-year-old Bass was actually the oldest (if only by a matter of months). "I'm gonna' stop when *you* stop," he replied.

Months later, as I was writing about him and wondering how he was, Roscoe Bass called me from home, where he was recovering from surgery. Some issues were coming up in the district, he said, and he could use some of the materials he had loaned me, chronicling some of the demographic shifts in the district over the past decades. Apparently, Bass still hasn't stopped.

In the early 1970s, the Central Area schools had been successful in hiring a very diverse staff while in other parts of the city, staff and administrators of color were underrepresented. This was due in large part to the work of the Central Area School Council, created in the late 1960s as a result of demands by Black Power activists for community control. By 1975, the US Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) had determined that the concentration of teachers of schools in these schools (and their relative absence elsewhere in the city) was a violation of HEW desegregation regulations demanded that teachers of color be dispersed equally throughout the district. As principal of Garfield High, Bass took a strong stand against the HEW mandate—a stand he believes led to his forced resignation in 1977.

"Do you know about the HEW transfers?" Bass asks me, as we sit at his diningroom table one morning. "H-E-W—Health, Education and Welfare. What they said was the district was violating desegregation laws by hiring mostly minorities in the southend. Well, the reason they were hired in the southend is because they weren't hiring them in the northend! So as a result, we had an abundance of minorities. Now Roscoe was doing what I thought was right. We had just about every ethnic group you could think of in that school—I had Native American, Hispanic, Black, Latino—you name it, I had them as teachers. But what HEW did…you see, it used to be just a Black problem, but then they put them all together, which really put that school [Garfield] out of compliance. And that's the reason we had to transfer so many minorities out."

He explains that many of the Black teachers had been recently recruited to Seattle from historically Black colleges in the South. "We had just gone through that, and then you turn right around and fire them! And I was very opposed to it." For Bass, the Central Area School Council and other Black education activists, the aim had been to bring in a critical mass of effective Black teachers and provide training for white teachers who were committed to teaching in predominantly Black schools. However, the district was now attempting to re-assign Black teachers to other schools, which Bass believed would weaken schools in the Central District, just at the moment that academic achievement and community support were on the rise.

District officials allowed him to write a transfer exemption for a limited number of uniquely-qualified teachers. "What we did was write one for every one who was there", he says, chuckling. "And that really upset them…"

"So wait," I interrupt, still unclear, "you could write an exception—"

"Yes, if we thought one was particularly valuable or—"

"Oh," I say, laughing, finally getting it. "And you wrote one for—"

"Yes," he says, nodding, "every single one of them."

When that didn't work, Bass helped organize a "Concern Out," a school strike over the issue of "minority transfers," as they were being called. "We shut down the central region schools, and Garfield was the first one to go." He hands me a worn, undated article that appeared to be from one of Seattle's dailies.

"What year was that?"

"Hmm," he says, looking up toward the ceiling. "I don't know."

"Well," I offer, trying to help, "it would have had to have been between '75 and '77, because that's when you were principal."

"I'll tell you what," he says, waving his finger in the air. "It was right before '77, because that's when I was transferred."

"Yes," I agree. "This article says the students were protesting your resignation."

"There was lots and lots of protests behind that," he says, smiling. "I had received word that the community, some of the students and staff were congregating at Garfield, because, see, I was downtown negotiating with the district over some misuse of funds, and if I was going to leave, I was going to make sure they didn't misuse any more of those funds, So anyway, I had received a call, and then I was concerned. And I received a call from my brother, who was principal of Stevens.[21] Robert called me and said, before you go back to Garfield, why don't you come and see me. And I did. And he said, why don't you resign."

[21] Robert Bass (1926-2002) was Roscoe Bass' identical twin, and also a longtime Seattle educator and administrator. After serving as a principal at several schools, he became the

His brother explained to him that the district was using their anger at Bass' opposition in a way that would ultimately hurt the students. "It really wasn't about the students; it was about me," he tells me mournfully. "I went back over that afternoon and that's when I resigned from that school." However, during his years as principal, he insists, " I did what I thought a principal is supposed to be doing. We had kids going to class. We had 96% attendance when we used to be able to count the kids sitting in classrooms." Before he had become principal, he says, there were "people who'd been teachers for six or seven years, and had never had a principal come into their classroom. It's a tragedy!"

"Why was the district so upset that they pressured you to leave Garfield?" I ask.

"They wanted me out of that school!" he says, gruffly. " I'm gonna' tell you why they wanted me out of that school—they saw that we had too much power. When we had that Concern Out and those kinds of things, all those people, believe me—'You're not the kind of people,' said that fellow who died over in France—'You're not wanted in the system,' huh? You're not wanted.

"What's his name, he died over in France. Black writer, he wrote *The Fire Next Time*?"

"Oh, James Baldwin!" I answered. One of my own heroes.

"That's right, he said 'You're not wanted.' And see, when I go to a meeting, I'll speak up. Had a person say, since you and your brother left, nobody speaks up. Why? I spent 34 years in this district and I started speaking up the first day I was here.

"Our biggest resource are people like you. You must now stand up and be accountable. Some of our students, our younger generation don't understand the luxury they

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district's director for Intergroup Relations. He also served as a professor of education at the University of Washington in the 1970s.

have today to be able to walk into a McDonald's or anyplace, and sit down and eat. I didn't have that luxury. We didn't have a choice of going to another school sometime. If you don't understand something about your history you're not gonna' be able to do nothin' to change your future, and it's just gonna' keep goin' on and on and on. I don't believe in avoidance. I honestly don't believe in avoidance. Issues have to be confronted. That's the way I really feel.

"We've waited a long, long time. Now we must see some change. And I think it's going to come. I think we're seeing the greatest thing happening right now and how it's going to turn out, I don't know. We're seeing all the wars and we're losing our power so fast, that we're going to have to make some concessions. We're not the world power any longer.

"So those are the kind of changes I'm looking at as an 80-year-old man. And I'm not gonna' accept a lot of the things people want me to accept. They're gonna' hear from me. They're gonna' hear from me! And I'm gonna' keep addressing the issues—and young people are gonna' make it happen."

Louise McKinney: We were fighting for integration and forgot about education

Sitting in his office at Mount Zion, I had just asked Rev. Samuel McKinney a question that had more to do with the education of Black children than Black community politics, his own area of expertise. "I'll tell you who you should really be talking to," he said. "My wife. Now take down this number…" Although I later discovered she was an acclaimed principal, unlike her husband, a classmate of Martin Luther King, Jr. at Morehouse, Mrs. McKinney is not a nationally-known figure. And while Rev. McKinney has never really retired, neither from the pulpit nor politics, his wife has continued her work in more subtle ways in recent years, primarily attending to fundraising for the church's college scholarship

fund, and spearheading a church-based enrichment program for Black male youth. However, she tells me firmly, she was never the typical preacher's wife, doting on her husband and going to prayer meetings. She had her own career, partly out of her own passion for education, and partly because, despite the prestige of her husband's position, a pastor's salary simply wasn't enough to raise three girls and send them to the best schools.

As it turns out, I should have known Louise McKinney: she was my principal at Martin Luther King Elementary, which I attended for kindergarten in 1974-75, a couple years before the Seattle Plan was implemented. Now 76, she is still tall, straight-backed, and strikingly beautiful, very reminiscent of Diahann Carroll, especially now, as we are drinking iced tea, looking out at the view of Lake Washington from the front porch of the McKinney home in South Seattle.

As many Black elders do, Mrs. McKinney asks me about my own schooling in Seattle and beyond. I am very conscious of the fact that I grew up poor in a single-parent home, in a series of small apartments, for the most part, very different than her middle-class upbringing, very different than her daughters, who graduated from Seattle's prestigious and private Lakeside School before attending such institutions as Spelman, Columbia and Brown. I tell her of the various schools I attended in Seattle, and note how I was accepted into Horizon, the district's "gifted and talented" program, when I was in the fourth grade. That alone, McKinney assures me, was an uncommon occurrence for Black youth in the city's schools. When she first became principal of Whitworth School in the late 1970s, she confronted the issue head on.

"At Whitworth," McKinney tells me, "We had the Horizon program, and it was all white. And I said, this isn't going to work. One of the things I saw was that the regular

classes had 36, 37, 38 kids. The gifted classes had 20!" She laughs bitterly. " I needed an explanation. They said, 'Well, that's just the way it is.'

"But while they were explaining it to me, an African American mother came in and wanted to talk to me, and I took the time, and she said, 'I want my child in the Horizon program here.'

"And I said, has your daughter taken the test? And she said, 'yes!' And I said, 'Well, she must not have passed it.'

"'She did, she's on the waiting list.'

"'What waiting list?' She said, 'There's a long waiting list of kids waiting to get in.'

"And I said to the secretary, 'Is there a waiting list for gifted kids?' She took it out. Every kid on that list was African American, Asian or Native American!" McKinney pauses, and takes a breath. "And I said, 'Where are these children? They were at the school! Every one of them was at Whitworth School! They were the reason the other classrooms—the non-Horizon classes— had so many students.

"I said, this solves my problem . I worked with those class lists, and I sent a letter out to teachers saying there was going to be reassignment of students. And you need to know that I don't really believe in the pure gifted classroom. I think that all children should be taught as if they're gifted. My emphasis is on instructional strategies—the strategies that deliver learning to everybody, okay? So, anyway, I told them that all of the gifted kids on the waiting list were going into gifted classrooms.

"Well, the regular classroom teachers were thrilled, because they were going to have some room in their classrooms. The gifted teachers were not pleased at all. Parents of color were thrilled: This Black lady is on the move, getting my kid into the gifted program!

"Pretty soon, the gifted teachers were coming to me, saying,--and here McKinney adopts the high-pitched nasal voice that Black folks often use when we imitate whites we believe are clueless—'Well, Louise, the gifted kids are working out well, but I think John is, uh, shouldn't be in the program,' and this one doesn't need to be in and that one.

"Okay. Why?"

The nasal voice again: "'Well, he does this and he does that and the other." McKinney looked over at me, one eyebrow raised. "Now, one of my strengths as an instructional leader is that I went into every classroom every day. I knew every kid in the school. So when they told me everything John was doing, I said, I know John. Sure. Okay, we can de-certify him. That means you'll want to decertify Charles—Charles is white, okay?

"'Oh, why?'" Again with the clueless white voice.

"'Well,' I said, 'Charles does the very same things John does.'

"'Oh!' they would say.

"'I never had to decertify a kid,'" McKinney says sharply. "'I never had to decertify a kid.' And eventually, they started coming to me, saying, 'Louise you really did the right thing.'"

This experience at Whitworth, and more in the years to come, lead McKinney to this bitter conclusion: "There are a lot of white people who *love* the Seattle Public Schools, they really do. And they should, because the school system works well for them. White parents come together, organize in large, large groups, and their advocacy is for *their* children. And we—we don't have large communities of us, we really don't. And I think we began, Black people began the fight too late—we were fighting for integration and forgot about education,

thinking they were one and the same, that if our kids got into schools with the white kids, that it was gonna' be alright…"

Larry Gossett: The search for Black Power

Larry Gossett is proud to tell me about his granddaughter, who is doing well in kindergarten at Madrona, a predominantly Black K-8 school in what used to be considered part of the Central District, but since the influx of whites, has been more clearly delineated as the Madrona neighborhood. Multicultural perhaps, but definitely not Black. Madrona, the school, however, remains decidedly committed to serving Black poor and working-class youth. This has created tension between school administrators and Black parents, on one side, who tend to emphasize improvements in basic academic skills, and on the other, recently-arrived middle-class white residents who want more of a focus on arts and music programs, and believe that, as Madrona homeowners, their neighborhood school should be more responsive to *their* children's needs.

"You know, the students sing *Lift Every Voice and Sing*[22] every morning," Gossett reports proudly, standing behind his desk on the 12th floor of the King County Courthouse, where he and the other members of the Metropolitan King County Council have their suite of offices. Back in the late 1960s, Gossett was a Black Power activist at the University of Washington, where he helped organize the Black Student Union, and demanded change in the curriculum, and recruitment of Black faculty, students and administrators. After graduation, he would become the first head of the Black student division of the UW's Office of Minority Affairs. From 1979 until his election to the Council in 1993, Gossett was director

[22] *Lift Every Voice and Sing* is commonly known as the Black National Anthem, and chronicles Black struggle and triumph in the United States. It was penned by James Weldon Johnson in 1899, and is, in itself, offers a collective ontological and mobilizational narrative.

of the Central Area Motivation Program (CAMP), an anti-poverty organization founded by civil-rights leaders in the mid-1960s. Still, even though he now has a large dowtown office, overlooking skyscrapers and Elliot Bay, he still considers himself very much a community activist. In fact, the first time I met with him, he ushered me in, and gestured for me to take a seat as he continued a phone conversation with the head of one of the county housing agencies. He was trying to get some answers for a constituent, an East African immigrant who was being threatened with eviction from public housing because her son was arrested for drug possession. "I'm just trying to find out exactly what the policy is," he asked the person on the line, who promised to get an answer for him.

The next time I saw Gossett, he was doing the electric slide at a back-to-school information festival that his office co-sponsored with the Rainier Beach Community Center in the southend.

In our conversation in his office, I ask him to explain the perspective of Seattle's Black Power activists on school desegregation. "Well, " he says, "at the school board meetings, we would ask, 'What is mandatory busing going to do for poor Black youngsters? What programs are going to exist to help them?' So I know that often we found ourselves in the minority at some of these school board meetings, talking about improving the schools where the kids are at, rather than busing them. It hasn't really changed all that much, now that I think about it. We were saying let's not have the emphasis on sitting next to white folks.

"And we don't know without the curricula being integrated with information about us—even if they are doing well with that type of curricula—whether it's going to be healthy for them. I don't want a system that makes it easier to become other than yourself and call

that quality education. I'd like a happy medium where all the children—Black, white, Asian, Latino, Native American and others—gain a mutual respect for the diversity they are without anyone having to change who they are to be successful educationally.

"By way of example is the 1968 student sit-in at Franklin [High School] that I organized. Franklin had 180 black students, and about 1000 white students and a couple Asian students. What the school was doing was saying Black Power, the Black Student Union, wasn't necessary because we were already integrated. And then when some Black girls in early '68 wore their hair natural, the principal actually kicked them out. So that inspired a resurrection, a rebellion of the Black students against the administration. So we went down from the University of Washington where I was attending, and I was president of the Seattle Alliance of Black Student Unions at the time and kids wanted to tear the school up, burn it down, and those things were happening the length and breadth of our nation. And this was still pre- the killing of King, but this was still a very active time. This is March of 68.

"His [the Franklin principal's] definition of education was a Black girl straightening her hair. When she no longer straightened her hair, he sent a note home, saying she no longer looks 'lady-like'. OK? So in order to get an A in history or social studies at that time, you had to show how knowledgeable you were of white nationalism—the history of white folks in US and World history…the reading and comprehension of white literature….And in social studies, from the perspective that Black people are a problem and we've got to figure out a way for them to become like us so they'll no longer be a problem. Unh-uh. That's no longer education to us.

"A decade later, I'm suggesting to you that the debate hadn't changed much with mandatory busing. One of the problems was by '78, '79, there were very few student unions, the Black Panther Party had been killed by the FBI and others and there wasn't the kind of community-based grassroots organizing. It wasn't as prevalent nor as effective in '79 as it was in 69."

By the 1980s, Gossett argues, the nation had become immersed in "materialism, individualism, capitalism." And for Black people, "everything was changing away from a collective struggle, seeing ourselves as Black and beautiful. And the powers that be, Mr. Dumas, had a lot to do with that. They were determined to find a way so Black people did not see themselves as one whole, and to go back—maybe not to go *back*—but to see themselves as white folks do. As individuals. And to figure out a way we can get them to be *individually* successful, and not to see that in order to do that, you had to be in collective groups, demanding change in the society. They wanted to figure out a way for us to more successfully integrate into society, but *not* in a way that we think about changing it.

Gossett needs no prompting from me, so I let him continue without interruption. "In the '70s and '80s, we weren't as militant, not as many street demonstrations or resistance. People started feeling they had to resist all by themselves. Black kids were acting out in schools, particularly our males in the '80s, and getting kicked out, but they weren't joining Black student unions.

"The curriculum hadn't changed, the power of Black people to have an effect over the schools hadn't changed….But our youth were still being alienated, disenfranchised, which led to high dropout levels, being turned off by education rather than turned on, whether they were in integrated schools or not. The quality of education for most of our Black youth was

not very good, whether they were 100 percent [of a school's population] or 2 percent. And I'm telling you that we weren't having a big impact on being able to do anything about it. There was just less activism in the '80s and '90s than there had been."

Annette Burfect: Trying to get our children grown

Sitting on the hardwood floor of Mrs. Bunny Wilburn's livingroom one afternoon, I sit and talk with Wilburn and three other women— Annette Burfect, Edith Giles and Zakiyah Stewart—about their years of activism leading the work of the Seattle chapter of the Black Child Development Institute, an organization with a long history of education advocacy for Black youth and parents. We have tea and a spread of cheeses, fruits and cookies, as they each begin, one by one, to introduce themselves. Wilburn, the eldest, speaks first. A retired nurse, she describes how she made the choice to send her daughter, who had attended parochial schools since kindergarten, to Roosevelt in the 1960s during the years of the Voluntary Racial Transfer Program. "I wanted her to get a sense of the real world," Wilburn explains. Also, Black leaders were encouraging members of the community to send their children to northend schools, and she says, "I like to see myself as someone who was down for the cause."

Psychologist Zakiyah Stewart went next. "I have to say that Bunny nurtured me and Edith radicalized me," she says, laughing.

Sitting next to her on the sofa, Edith Giles laughs. "I ain't radicalized nobody," she says.

Both of Stewart's children are adults now, but much younger than Wilburn's. She speaks about benefiting from that earlier generation's experience in integrated schools. As she asked around in the community in the mid-1980s, the assessment was bleak: "The

academic performance piece was missing," she explains, "and it seemed as if you put them on the bus, that meant they were going to be suspended at one point or another during that school year. I made a *conscious* decision not to send my children there. Which means I had to use the—what do you call it?—the 'controlled-choice apparatus' to keep my children as close to home as possible."

Edith Giles, who was a teacher in the Seattle Schools for many years, is also retired. I had met with her a few weeks before, and she had helped arrange this day's discussion. She had made her perspective very clear at that time: "One of the things we as a people don't understand is that even among the majority population, even those who support us, they're only going to go so far. They have an agenda--that's just how white folks are, and Black folks don't seem to understand that...The buck is gonna stop there, and it's gonna' stop on their side of the fence..." Even though there may be broad support for reforms such as school desegregation, she said, "there's a whole 'nother agenda, and maybe they're not even conscious of it, but it's there…We need to figure out what we need to do for us, making our own decisions, without being dependent on anybody else." Since she and I have already had an initial conversation, we all turn our attention to Annette Burfect, who until this moment, had been sitting quietly, listening.

Now, she puts her head down and begins to weep. Someone offers her a box of tissues. After a few moments, she looks up. "I'm sitting here listening to them," she says, "and we're all different. They have husbands. I'm a single mother, with *two* sons that have been through the Seattle school district. And the big picture, the big picture for the United States, America, they, whoever it is—they have a plan, we have a plan. I want my kids to be able to read, write, do math, get a job, take care of their children, hold a decent conversation.

But they feel because I'm a single parent, my kids are less, I'm not interested in my kids, and because I'm a single parent, my husband is either a pimp or a drug dealer or some wonderful thing, and I'm sleeping with anything and everything out in the street and I don't care about my children. I don't know where they get this from. I care as much about my kids as they do… but I have a fight all the way from day one until"—she pauses, searching for the words—"they're in the box." She begins to cry again.

"I feel that they work very hard on Black males from the very first day that they go into school."

The other women nod and say, "Mmmmhmmm."

"I've worked in the school district," she says, noting her many years as a cafeteria worker. "I'm retired and I'm working back in the school district, and I'm seeing the same plan there as when my kids were there, but it's more out there, and they don't care…"

Burfect remembers the day her youngest son got suspended from Eckstein for fighting a white kid who had called him out of his name. "What was the story about this?" she says, sighing. "Okay, him and a little white boy were out on the gym floor. My son had the ball and the white boy wanted the ball and said, 'Give me that ball, nigger.' And my son done the way he was trained—he whipped his ass good. And he better! Cause that's how I trained him. He better not go to school and *start* no fight, but if it starts, he better end it."

I laugh. "Yes, *my* mom told me that, too."

"That's just the way I am," she says. "They suspended my son for three days and didn't even tell me." She took her son to the school the next day to confront the principal. "I asked him, 'What happened to the other child?' He said, 'I had to take him home and explain to his parents why he had a bloody nose.'

"But nobody came to *my* house? Nobody called me. Nobody said a word! So anyway, I looked at my son and I looked at the principal and I said, 'Yes, he did exactly what I told him: If anybody ever calls you a nigger in life, you better whip his ass, and whip his ass good, 'cause if you don't, I'm gonna whip yours when you get home.' And the principal did not understand that. But I said, he's not gonna lay down and let someone walk all over him. He better not.

"I got a bad attitude," she says, laughing bitterly. "But I've got two sons, and I'm trying to get them grown, without them going wherever it is *we* go, to jail or wherever it is."

As Burfect sees it, not much has changed. "Out here where I'm working right now, I had the principal tell me—" She stops herself to start the story at the beginning. "Well, the kids come in with their hoods [doo-rags] and I said, you can't wear your hoods in the cafeteria. Now they all mad, but they take them off. One of them said, 'No, I'm not taking it off,' so I tell him I'm not serving him.

"And he runs to the office to tell the secretary that I won't let him eat breakfast, and she says why. 'Because I have my hood on.' She says, well take it off then.'" At this point in Burfect's story, it becomes clear that the secretary is also Black.

"The principal comes out and comes down to the cafeteria and is going to address me in front of all these kids—" Burfect pauses to change her voice to the high-pitched whine we all know means the speaker is white. " 'Well, the hood is their comfort zone, and we're an alternative school— '"

Everyone else in the room laughs. "Nah, I ain't through," Burfect says sharply, still serious. "See, I remember that children are children, but I said, you're setting them up for the street. Here, they're children, you can do something about it. When they go to the next

school, you can forget it. When I told that man, you're setting them up for the street, he said, (again, in the nasal voice), 'I know—and you're going to have to change your attitude because I had to change mine when I came here.' I looked at him, and it made me lose all respect, and I said, I'm gonna be at that school. I'm gonna be at that school."

She explains that even though she is retired and just plain tired, her resolve to "be at that school" offers her the opportunity to challenge the principal's thinking and provide a different example for the children. "And you know what. You can see them, the ones that's gonna' be at Walla Walla [State Prison]. Kids smiling, thinking they got me, they can wear their hoods. That whole school is out of control. Children running up and down the hall, yelling. These kids are doing what they want to do. The discipline? You got these kids out in the hall… Why?"

Her voice changes pitch again, this time effecting a desperately whiny "white" voice. "'Well, he's out of control.'"

"So?!" she exclaims, her voice now in her own lower register. "He's a kid! You need to tell him I'm the adult in this room, and this is what you're going to do!"

Elnora Hookfin: It's ugly, but it's real

Back when I was at Eckstein Middle School in the early 1980s, I had Mrs. Hookfin for home economics two years in a row. The first year of home ec—sixth grade—was cooking, which was fine. But in seventh grade, we had to sew a pillow. I remember being given a roller-skate pattern, with various swaths of colored fabric for the wheels and stripes. I complained and fumbled with the material all semester, accomplishing very little, figuring I could just ride out the term and take whatever grade I got. That grade would be an F

(actually, I think they gave Es in those days). And that, I thought, was the end of my time with Mrs. Hookfin.

And then she called the house and spoke to my mother. The two of them agreed that I would spend winter vacation working on the pillow, which I would re-submit for a higher grade. I submitted the finished product in January. The stitching was uneven, and it barely looked like a rollerskate. Still, Mrs. Hookfin changed my grade to a B-minus.

As I began this project, I recalled that Elnora Hookfin and her husband, the sixth grade administrator, David Hookfin, were two of the very few educators of color at Eckstein at the time. Both were regarded by many Black students as our strongest advocates at the predominantly white, middle-class school, and even for those of us who tended to get into trouble, their discipline was firm but always warm. I sought both of them out for this project because I knew they would be able to talk about what it was like to work at a northend school in the early years of the Seattle Plan. I would later discover that both had been recruited in the 1970s to the Seattle Schools from historically-Black Grambling State. And, as I had suspected, they both had stories to tell about addressing issues of racial equity and understanding, not only at Eckstein, but throughout their many decades in the district. One of my favorite stories involved one of the Eckstein music teachers, whom I remember as a particularly cruel white man, although as a student in his music appreciation course, there was never anything he did that I remember being overtly racist. It was just a feeling I got, and I reacted by being as resistant as I could. As Mrs. Hookfin tells it, she remembers finding it odd that none of the members of the school band (which this teacher directed) were Black. Coming from Grambling—world-famous for its marching band—this just didn't seem right.

When she asked him about the absence of Black students, his response was that Black kids simply weren't interested in playing musical instruments.

I found Mrs. Hookfin at Rainier Beach, beginning her third year as vice-principal. Mr. Hookfin, it turned out, was in a similar position at Ingraham High, in the northend. "I have worked in the northend forever," she tells me as we sit in her office, "and I wanted to see what was going on, and this is one of the schools that was struggling…. I could have retired yesterday. I don't have to be here—I *want* to be here." She tells a story about how, during her first year, she noticed that one teacher would allow large groups of students to sit at the back of the class braiding each others' hair instead of participating in the lesson. "I had to put a stop to that."

Conditions have improved since she arrived, which she credits to a change in leadership, and refocused attention on "academics, academics, academics." Still, while schools like Roosevelt and Garfield have upwards of 1600 students, with students competing to get in, Rainier Beach struggles to get even an enrollment of 500.

She explains the challenge: "We are plopped right down in the middle of—are you familiar with this community?"

"Oh, yes," I say, nodding. Although my mother could not afford to pay much for rent, thanks to Section 8[23], we purposefully avoided living as far south as the Rainier Valley.

[23] Section 8 is a government program that heavily subsidizes rents for low-income families. As there is a long waiting list to be accepted into the program, and because some landlords refuse to accept Section 8, it is not the panacea it might seem. However, in our case, it allowed us to stay in the central part of the city, rather than move to the Rainier Valley, where rents were lower, but crime more prevalent.

"We are plopped right in the heart of trouble," she continues. "Nice school inside the fence, but outside the fence, there's a war goin' on, on the streets. Two or three years ago, we wouldn't be able to sit having this conversation, it was such chaos."

I am reminded that a few days before our interview, I had stumbled across a couple quotes from Rainier Beach students posted on an online website (Greatschools.org, 2006). Most had been posted a few years ago, around the time students had staged a protest over the lack of textbooks and other supplies. I share a couple with her.

From one student:

> "I'm a student at Rainier Beach High School. I am proud to be a student here…. Some students here are very smart intelligent young adults and it's a shame that the school district deprive them of being all that they can be. They can do a lot more to help the students then what they are doing. This school has potential and there is no way for it to be shown if people outside the school and the school district keep putting us down. Instead of doing so they could help us. Other schools have their support but we aren't receiving ours. Then some people wonder why kids tend to struggle or they feel that there is no point to accomplish anything, then you want to complain. That is a put-down for a lot of us."

And another:

> "Nobody listens to Rainier Beach, they think we are only good for our sports. If we had things to let us work better academically, like books, computers, and better teachers and tutors, then we would be an above average school. I work hard at my school, and nobody recognizes that because they are too busy recognizing how much better other schools are. Just because we are a primarily black school doesn't mean we can't learn. Teach us. I don't want to leave high school knowing almost nothing! … Please give us some things to make us learn. Why get up so early to be treated stupid? I hope someone read this."

"Let me address that," Mrs. Hookfin says, suddenly sounding more stern, "because the kids are so right on with that…They were working with ancient computers up until two or three years ago. They've been updated. We do need a stronger curriculum. We don't have that."

However, she notes, Black students and other students of color are still marginalized throughout the district, not just at Rainier Beach. “This is still goin’ on. We talk about closing the achievement gap, but we have to take a look at what we’re doing to our kids. And if you go to a school—say a Roosevelt High School—Roosevelt is going to take care of the honors kids, but the other kids, they’re probably going to place them on one wing, or a floor all by themselves and let them tear it up. Garfield is guilty of that. Although they have the largest AP program, they also have the largest group of misbehaving students, because they plop them together, and give them the worst teachers, who cannot gain control, who are not motivated, who are not educated. So...” Her voice trails off.

I ask her to help me see what went wrong: “But I thought—and this is what I’m trying to figure out for my own study—we’ve gone from desegregated schools, or some attempt at desegregating schools. I thought part of the answer was going to be the integration piece.”

“We never really desegregated,” Mrs. Hookfin replies. “We remain a sophisticated, segregated system. How did we do that? We came up with something called the honors program. So kids were bused, but they were not placed in honors. And kids were bused and placed with some of the worst teachers we had in the building. So desegregation had its advantages and its disadvantages. It helped the big picture. At least you were able to sit on the bus wherever you wanted to sit, and go anywhere you wanted to go, that kind of thing. But as far as education, it was not fixed, because teachers are still teaching in a segregated way—remember how we were talking about the kids allowed to sit at the back of the room and do what they wanted to do?—that’s all part of that. Until we fix that kind of teaching, we’re still in a segregated system.

"We have to encourage our young people to learn. We can't just allow them to do what they want to do. Sure they come from the same neighborhood, they might be related, but when they come to school, that's another situation. We must have higher expectations for them. If we don't have goals and high expectations, students don't have them."

Mrs. Hookfin pauses, thinking for a moment. "You know, I think we're more segregated now than we were before 1964." Returning to the issue of disparities between schools, she contrasts the funding of Roosevelt and some of the southend schools. Students at schools such as Rainier Beach, she insists, "are not going to have the same educational advantages that, say, Roosevelt has, because we don't have the money. We don't have the money backing. So the kids that have the money backing are going to get the best. So we're right back—I think we're worse than we were before we desegregated. It's ugly, but it's real."

"How do we fix the ugly?" I ask.

She laughs. "If I knew that I'd be rich." She then becomes serious. "The only way we do that is to have equal educational facilities throughout the district."

"How do you get that?"

"I don't know, she responds slowly. "I know we don't have the rich alum like some schools have; since the other schools have all the rich alum, the district could pump money into the schools that need it the most. They don't need to pump a lot of money into the rich schools; they're going to get it anyway. But that's what they do. That's exactly what they do."

Reading school desegregation narratives

In the process of gathering stories in the field, I noticed that in each successive conversation/interview, I had the tendency to repeat stories I had heard earlier, either from others or recounted in newspapers, books, or other media. I would often do this in response to something the most recent participant said that was consistent with, complemented or complicated something I had heard or seen before. On occasion, I would even draw on my own life experience as an example. Perhaps it was my way of saying "You aren't the only one feeling (or thinking) that way."

Although I have already acknowledged my role as co-constructor of these education narratives, I am generally receptive to the critique that I may have influenced the story through my involvement, or as some researchers might say, that I have "contaminated the data." However, I would offer two gentle objections. First, I would only tell my stories as a response to theirs, as a kind of testimony or witnessing that would likely be culturally familiar to most of my Black participants (In fact, it would be quite odd, even offensive, if I did *not* share). My stories would often then spark another memory, or at very least, increase their comfort with me as someone who would represent them in a broader public arena. Second, participants were not so vulnerable or malleable as to simply accept my story as the final word. Thus, my co-constructive role actually sharpened my ability to more accurately capture the meanings and moral lessons in *their* stories.

I provide this explanation because I am about to make some observations about the ontological and mobilizational themes within these narratives—observations that might seem like generalizations about the way "all" or "most" Black people think or feel, or that might seem too broad based on the evidence provided here. The narratives in this chapter are

certainly representative of others that I have heard and read; however, as I stated earlier, I am not necessarily interested in drawing conclusions about Black folks in general. Rather, I aim to analyze the imaginative processes of Black leaders, educators and activists in Seattle over a period of time. The *themes* I have identified are present across the narratives of the five participants highlighted in this chapter, are reflected in other data, and can also be regarded as a continuation of a deliberative process begun generations earlier (Recall, for example, the historical trajectory of the Black educational imagination explored in Chapter II).

Ontological narratives

Beginning with ontological narratives, I hear my participants collectively submitting a story with the following chapters, which might be placed in this order: 1) *I Sacrificed for the Struggle*; 2) *I Mourn What We've Lost*; 3) *My Faith in the System Has Been Greatly Tested*; and 4) *Even So…* . In the public sphere, school desegregation has mostly been emplotted as a triumph or opportunity, an improvement in Black education. To the extent that sacrifice is acknowledged, it is limited to some of the early Southern pioneers (sacrifices?), such as the Little Rock Nine or James Meredith at the University of Mississippi. My participants never seemed to seek sympathy, and did not compare themselves to those whose lives were threatened by angry white mobs. However—and especially with a retrospective gaze—they do understand themselves as people who have endured hardships for a broader purpose, and have taken on the responsibility of advocacy in spite of the risks. Roscoe Bass sacrificed by suffering the district's backlash against his outspoken opposition to part of the desegregation policy. Louise McKinney stood up against white parents and teachers opposed to admitting children of color into the advanced academic track. And Annette Burfect sees herself as someone who continues to work in the cafeteria to help save Black children—boys

especially—by challenging a permissive school culture that seems resigned to prepare them for the streets, or as Burfect warns, prison.

Loss is a central theme across the narratives, and looms large in how narrators emplot their lives and their work. A general, pervasive sense of sorrow is a constant companion to their words. Larry Gossett laments what he sees as the detrimental effect of individualism and capitalism on Black activism and collective identity. Elnora Hookfin suggests that over the years, partially as a result of school policies and practices, Black children have been "segregated" away from educational excellence. McKinney suggests as much when she sadly surmises that integration distracted us from the more important goal of academic achievement.

Sacrifice and loss contribute to narrators' re-thinking of their own belief in "the system," particularly given that most of them have worked within schools, and/or have otherwise participated in public sphere deliberation in an effort to persuade whites in power to extend opportunities to and improve conditions for Black students and other students of color. Thus, I read in the narratives a rather complicated self-definition in relation to what are regarded in the public sphere as *our* democratic institutions. Bass speaks about the implications of a loss of US global power as a favorable change over the course of his 80 years, situating himself as someone looking forward to a certain level of global and intranational instability. McKinney and Hookfin make a clear distinction between white and Black access to the resources of the Seattle schools, suggesting that as Black educators, they always occupy an oppositional position in relation to the institution of public schooling. And when Burfect theorizes that "they have a plan, we have a plan," she is offering an

explanation—the "why"—for her own efforts to protect her sons in and against predominantly white schools.

The ontological chapter I have titled *Even So…* begins to hint at the mobilizational function of these narratives. Across their accounts, I hear these authors articulate their own sense of themselves as individuals still searching for answers, still committed to Black children (and often, all children), as not yet ready to give up. This should not be read—or at least, I would not want it read—as a comforting narrative of noble perseverance. Rather, I imagine the "even so…" as an existential acknowledgement that, for Black people, there is no other choice but to go on (Gordon, 1997, 2000). Thus, the "Even so…" serves as the implied preamble to the following mobilizational narratives.

Mobilizational narratives

Perhaps the most prominent mobilizational theme in these narratives is one that might be titled, [Even so…,]*We Must Liberate Our Own People*. I read in these narratives an urgency that really is not surprising in itself. However, as these participants reflect on the past—even their own experiences working within the public sphere—it seems that their message for the future is that in order to address the challenges facing Black youth, Black people may have to address the issues themselves. Of course this is stated most explicitly in Edith Giles' statement that Black folks "need to figure out what we need to do for us." But it is also present in Elnora Hookfin's decision to take a position at a south end school in order to "see what was going on." And besides during our interview in his office, I heard it directly from Larry Gossett that afternoon at the back-to-school festival. As the song finished (remember, he was doing the electric slide), he recognized me and called me over to introduce me to one of the organizers. "This brotha's doing some important work for all of

us, on the education of our young folks," he said, as he put his arm around me. I do not mean to suggest that there has been a broad resurgence of nationalism within Black communities. I am not sure that is accurate. In fact, Gossett argued quite the opposite was true during our interview. However, for these narrators, their experiences of the past 30 to 40 years lead them to theorize that Black people have only to rely on themselves.

This nationalist narrative exists, however paradoxically, alongside another, which states, [Even so…,] *We Must Continue to Make Demands of the System*. Although some strands of Black nationalism advocate as little interaction with the public sphere as possible, as Michael Dawson (2000) has argued, nationalism in Black communities is usually accompanied by a certain amount of liberalism, which holds onto a belief in the possibility of mobility through accessing mainstream institutions (I will explore these issues further in the next chapter). And perhaps, given my sample, which includes elected officials, public school teachers, and grassroots activists seeking change at individual schools, it is no surprise that this theme would emerge. That it exists in tension with the loss of faith in public institutions is a paradox, but one which people are able to live with, perhaps because, as Michael Apple (2003) contends, activists rarely adhere to any ideology in its pure, academic form, but rather, form "bricolages in their daily lives" that allow them to respond to the urgent political needs of the moment.

Finally, I have identified a third mobilizational narrative, one rarely voiced aloud outside of counterpublic spaces: [Even so…, still] *Beware the Intentions of White Folks*. This moral message is grounded in lived experience, I would argue, far more than *a priori* ideological or social prejudice. Bass invokes James Baldwin to suggest that insurgent Black actors are a threat to those in power. Hookfin, McKinney, Burfect and others suggest a host

of racial betrayals, as educational resources are horded by white communities, and white students are given unfair advantage or attention over Black students. And the very tone used when imitating whites in the narratives suggests a white antagonist who is arrogantly incompetent and in other cases, willfully dishonest or blithely naive. To be clear, I do not read the narrators as suggesting ill intent on the part of *all* white people. In fact, nearly all of them at some point identified a number of white allies or "good white teachers" (along with a critique of unqualified Black teachers). However, I do think it is fair to say that in these narratives, white people in general are subject to harsh critique for their perceived failure to fully support an equitable integration policy, and white educators as a whole are presented as inadequately prepared to educate and nurture Black children, yet entrusted with the power to wreak educational, cultural and emotional havoc. The message here is to always be on guard.

Reflecting on their school desegregation experiences, these narrators make the case for an engaged Black cultural politics centered on education. This might suggest new possibilities for reinvigorating the Black counterpublic sphere, However, my conversations with Black leaders, educators and activists also reveal ideological tensions and uncertainties that complicate how we might imagine a liberatory Black education politics as we move forward. This is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI

CONSIDERING COSBY:

BLACK EDUCATION POLITICS AFTER DESEGREGATION

"*Brown versus the Board of Education* is no longer the white person's problem," Bill Cosby told the crowd gathered for the NAACP's 2004 gala event celebrating the 50th anniversary of the landmark decision. "We've got to take the neighborhood back." The audience clapped in approval. "….We have to begin to build in the neighborhood, have restaurants, have cleaners, have pharmacies, have real estate, have medical buildings instead of trying to rob them all. And so, ladies and gentlemen, please—[civil rights leader] Dorothy Height, wherever she's sitting—she didn't do all that stuff so that she could hear somebody say, 'I can't stand algebra, I can't stand…' and 'What you *is*.' It's horrible" (Cosby, 2004).

In his speech, Cosby argued that the school desegregation victories won in the 1950s were now being squandered by "lower economic and lower middle economic people" within the Black community who were "not holding their end in this deal." Some members of this group, he declared, tended to devalue education, glorify criminal behavior and teen pregnancy and engage in crass materialism, choosing to purchase "$500 sneakers" instead of, for example, *Hooked on Phonics*. "Well, *Brown v. Board of Education*, where are we today?" he asked the crowd. "It's [opportunity] there. They paved the way. What did we do with it? The white man, he's laughing—got to be laughing. Fifty percent drop out, rest of them in prison."

Cosby's speech immediately drew both praise and criticism. A number of Black leaders and commentators came to his aid, including Rev. Jesse Jackson, Jr., who shared the stage with him at the NAACP event, who noted, "It's the same thing I've been saying since

1976" (Harris & Farhi, 2004, July 3). Kweisi Mfume, then president of the NAACP, suggested that "Bill did us a favor." He explained, "Perhaps….more people will now be prepared to step forward. It'll be a tough love conversation, whether or not people want to have it. And it will take opinion leaders to say those things that should be said" (Tucker, 2004, May 26). And Cynthia Tucker, editorial page editor at the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* viewed the speech as "an eloquent reminder of the stunning success of the civil rights movement that followed the *Brown* decision: Black America is strong enough and successful enough to admit its shortcomings and gird itself for the work ahead" (Tucker, 2004). She went on to suggest, perhaps somewhat self-righteously, that although some Black people might be reluctant to have this hard-edged conversation, the Black middle class certainly is.

The most prominent Black critic of Cosby's speech, undoubtedly, has been cultural studies scholar Michael Eric Dyson, who quickly published a book on the topic: *Is Bill Cosby Right?* (2005). Its subtitle posed another question: "*Or Has the Black Middle-Class Lost Its Mind?*" Like Tucker, Dyson interpreted Cosby's speech as highlighting class divisions within Black communities; however, Dyson argued that it was *middle class* Black folks whose cultural values had been turned upside-down, guided more by "Afristocratic" elitism than genuine interest in addressing the political and economic needs of Black poor people (whom he dubbed the Ghettocracy). For Dyson, the Afristocracy include the upper middle-class, who, he suggests commonly "rain down fire and brimstone upon poor blacks for their deviance and pathology, and for their lack of couth and culture" (2005, pp. xiii, xiv). To a large degree, says Dyson, the conflict between the two groups is generational, since the poor Black people most targeted for criticism are the young, whose music, language and dress are deemed the most offensive.

Although Dyson acknowledged the existence of such dysfunctions as materialism, criminal behavior and misogyny in a number of Black communities (and in others), he pointed out that a focus on cultural values absent a critique of unchecked capitalism and white supremacy offers an imbalanced analysis of the social condition of poor Black people and other poor people of color. "Exercising personal responsibility cannot prevent the postindustrial decline…, nor can it fix the crumbling infrastructure that continues to keep the poor, well, poor" (p. 216). And with regard to post- civil rights schooling, Dyson argued, "If the rigidly segregated educational system continues to miserably fail poor blacks by failing to prepare their children for the world of work, then admonitions to 'stay in school' may ring hollow"(2005, p. 6).

To the extent that *Brown*, the civil rights movement and school desegregation failed to equalize educational achievement between Black and white students, who or what is to blame? What is a more significant factor: the lack of equal educational opportunities or the lack of interest in education on the part of Black poor people? Should we hold the state accountable for unjust policies or point the finger at (poor) Black parents for failing to instill values in their children? Can we dismiss Black educational failure as an individual problem, or is it (still) a collective political challenge that *all* Black people should take on? These questions point to the significance of class and ideology in the formation of the Black educational imagination, and to the Black educational imagination as a formative sphere in the construction of political-ideological discourses within diverse Black communities.

These issues swirl together and intertwine, not only in the national discourse, but also in local discourses about Black education. During my interviews, a number of participants referenced Cosby's speech explicitly. Some took issue with the speech, either because of

their assessment of Cosby's politics, his somewhat flippant comedic delivery or the way he publicly "aired the dirty laundry" of the Black community. In most cases, however, folks I spoke to approved of what Cosby did, if not every word he said. Others, while not directly mentioning the furor over the speech (most of which took place two years prior), still echoed some of Cosby's arguments as they reflected on the trajectory of school desegregation in Seattle. As I sat and listened to folks speak about values and responsibility, I began to worry: Was this simply the middle-class elitism that Dyson had written about? Did their views reflect the growing influence of neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies in Black communities?

A closer analysis—or rather, "hearing"—of their words convinced me this was too simplistic an interpretation of their (and Cosby's) ideological position. Of course, rightist ideologies have gained a stronger hold in Black communities in the post-civil rights period. That is neither surprising, nor is it news (Dawson, 2001). And as several scholars have noted, class divisions within Black communities have grown wider over the past 30 years (cite Dawson, 1994, 2001; Jackson, 2001; Wilson, 1978, 1987, 1996) However, what I discovered is that as exasperated Black leaders, educators and activists attempt to make sense of the current state of Black education, the perceived failure of school desegregation comes to symbolize the flaws in, and limitations of liberal social policy.

Seeking alternative explanations, social actors turn to other ideological traditions, particularly conservatism and cultural nationalism. It is not that they fully eschew liberalism in favor of rightist and/or culturalist worldviews. Rather, their imagination of Black education is now informed by a greater and certainly understandable suspicion of liberalism, and an increased willingness to support some of the tenets of ideologies that advocate a

reduced state role in school reform, and an increased focus on market- and/or morality-driven remedies.

In this chapter, I want to use Cosby's speech as an entry point to explore the interplay between liberalism, conservatism and cultural nationalism in post-civil rights school desegregation narratives. First, I identify themes in the Seattle narratives, which, as became clear to me in the field, echo those in Cosby's very public message. Through my analysis of ideology in these narratives, it becomes clear that the local discourse in Seattle provides a site from which we can fairly pose a macro-analysis of the role of ideology in the formation of the Black educational imagination, particularly—and this is very crucial—as constructed by the predominantly middle-class group of Black political actors who have long served as the arbiters of Black interests in the public sphere. I conclude with some implications for Black education politics.

In the interest of defining my terms, let me quickly say a brief word about liberalism, conservatism and cultural nationalism, the three ideological frameworks I focus on in this chapter. The Black liberal tradition differs greatly from mainstream US liberalism in two significant ways. First, as I noted in Chapter II, while mainstream liberalism emphasizes the individual and individual rights, Black liberalism has insisted that securing rights for Black people must, by necessity, be race-conscious. That is, the state must take into account that since racial inequality and injustice were meted out to individuals on the basis of their membership in a specific and identifiable racialized *group*, so must equality and justice be delivered in a way that recognizes that group's *collective* experience of misrecognition and maldistribution, to use Nancy Fraser's terms. Second, mainstream liberalism idealizes the practice of rational dialogue between citizens who are considered inherently equal (or so they

would argue) not only by the state, but also in the public sphere. Black liberalism, on the other hand, maintains that citizens of unequal political, economic and cultural power do not, and cannot dialogue equally, let alone access opportunities for social and economic mobility. Thus, Black liberalism has insisted on the decidedly anti-liberal redistribution of various forms of power: from affirmative action to school desegregation to urban anti-poverty programs, Black liberals have contended that the promise of democracy must be guaranteed by a strong central state. In other words, "the people" cannot be trusted to practice the democracy they say they believe in (Dawson, 2001).

Black liberalism, despite these significant features, has generally advocated that Black people approach the state and citizenry as supplicants, through appeals in the courts, legislature, and media for justice and equality. Black liberals believe that the purpose of Black struggle is to help realize the promise of 'America.' by claiming that what they demand is morally required in a democratic society. Liberalism is also posited as the only practical strategy, since it does not entail a radical transformation of the society; rather, it aims to gradually assimilate Black people into the society. Unfortunately, throughout history, white people have found ways to sidestep moral "obstacles" to dominance, and have used violence against Black people to an extent that, for some, the practicality of gradualism becomes questionable at best. Even so, Black liberalism is still the most dominant ideology in Black political thought, serving as a foundation for the notion of Black racial uplift (Dawson, 2001).

I use conservatism here to refer to the neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies that gained strength in the post-civil rights period, and especially in the 1980s and 90s (Apple, 2001; Apple & Pedroni, 2005; Lipman, 2003). Neoliberalism advances the idea that markets

and individual choice are the means toward social and economic progress. For neoliberals, inequality is the result of inherent individual and (some would insist) group differences, as opposed to the practices of the market or unfair distribution of wealth. State-initiated reforms, they contend, interfere with the market's ability to meet the needs of individuals at all levels of the class structure. Neoconservatives desire a return to a more idyllic past in which "traditional" values unified the culture and ensured social stability. In their view, multiculturalism and its attendant political-cultural demands have ushered in a more fluid (and therefore weaker) kind of social fabric—one in which individual allegiance may be to a specific group rather than to what neoconservatives have determined "our" shared traditions and values to be as a society, and more specifically, as a nation ("under God" would be added here by those whose conservatism is founded in religious belief, thus suggesting divine support for various xenophobic and racist political projects).

Cultural nationalism is, at the risk of being reductive, the belief that Black people must organize themselves for their own political, economic and/or cultural salvation. To be sure, there are vast differences amongst nationalists, from those who advocate that Black people form separate states to those who believe that Black people must work together to gain rights in a white society. Others give little attention to issues of governance, and focus primarily on the need to preserve or restore what they regard as essential (that is, inherent and defined) Black traditions and mores. In this chapter, I am most interested in Black nationalism as a response to an historical moment in which a significant number of Black people regard liberalism as a flawed ideology, and an inadequate basis for social policy. I am struck here by Michael Dawson's argument that Black people are more likely to turn to nationalism in times of widespread disillusionment—"when the nation is perceived to have

turned its back on blacks" (p. 133). He explains that although nationalisms tend to "[assign] precise roles to members of their nations and [deny] that differences exist between members of the nation" (2001, p. 90), they become attractive for the same reason—they provide a level of certainty in periods of destabilization. Regarding Black nationalism in particular, Dawson states that even though support for some of the more separatist forms has waned in the past few decades, we now find ourselves in a period in which nationalistic themes have come once again to the fore. As will be clear by the end of this chapter, I believe (as does Dawson) that this resurgence is extremely significant, with important implications for Black education politics, and more broadly, how Black people imagine education, and specifically, public education.

Finally, we must always keep in mind that most people do not imagine the world in ideological boxes or grooves. Rather, we tend to engage ideology in fragments, bits of ideas that we connect to other bits to explain parts of our lives. However, our thinking may be consistent with certain ideologies to the point where we might conclude that we have been influenced by a broader ideological discourse, or set of discourses. This is not to say we are dupes, but to acknowledge that we are all susceptible to intentional political-ideological appeals (Foucault, 1980). Perhaps what is most important for my analysis here is to understand that social actors encounter and engage fragments of a range of ideologies that may conflict with each other in the abstract, but resonate as folks reflect on what is, and imagine what could or should be.

Reading ideological fragments in Black educational narratives

"I understand that there is an economic discrepancy that sometimes can impede learning," former mayor Norm Rice acknowledges, as we speak in his office at the

University of Washington. “But I guess I’m old enough to believe that many of our folks didn’t have anything and they learned.

“I’m not gonna always say it’s income and poverty that makes us fail,” Rice insists. “I’m maybe trying to make it too simple, but come on—somewhere you have to take a stand, and the stand that has to be made is one within the African American community. And we don’t like to talk about our problems publicly, but by not talking about them publicly, we don’t talk about them at all. And then you get mad when anyone finally says something, like Bill Cosby or somebody, and then someone else comes out to justify, like, rap, or whatever. And you lose the prize.”

Rice pauses for a moment, thinking. “But the real issue is you’re finding more and more African Americans now feeling comfortable taking on busing and wondering if they should take over their own schools. I think there’s something making people challenge the status quo.”

For Rice and a number of other people I interviewed, lack of access to resources cannot be used as the rationale for persistent Black educational failure in the post-civil rights period. Drawing on their own personal experiences, and their imagination of the history of Black education and mobility, they argue that a significant number of Black people in the past achieved far more with far less. Further, the victories of the civil rights movement, including school integration, have improved opportunities for the younger generation, leaving them with less of an excuse for their relative lack of accomplishment. However, in another moment, the same participants detail *current and persistent* racial and economic injustices, but then propose that Black folks (and young people, in particular) must learn to transcend these structural constraints, as they did and as their parents did.

In this narrative, Bill Cosby comes to stand in for a new kind of Black "radicalism" which openly scoffs at, or at least minimizes the role of institutional racism and the maldistribution of wealth, or alternatively—and this is an important distinction—suggests that despite (or perhaps because of) the persistence of race and class inequities, Black people can no longer hold "the (white) man" or "the system" accountable for our shortcomings. In either case, civil rights, for all its good, is faulted for contributing to a prevalent "victim" mentality in Black communities. Busing and the struggle for integrated schools are posited as (liberal) obstacles to racial uplift.

Those who fail to acknowledge the deleterious effects of economic disparities and institutional racism might fairly be called conservative ideologues. Not too surprisingly, none of my participants fit neatly into this category. Seattle is a generally liberal city, and my participants are, by selection, social-change agents, and are therefore more likely to believe that conditions could be better, at very least. Therefore, what I want to unpack here are the ideological fragments present in the narratives of those who recognize persistent injustices, but make the case for shifting our focus from changing the structure to changing ourselves. I then present an alternative view, a minority view among participants, but one that I think contributes to our development of a critical, progressive vision, and imagines Black education in a way that neither situates us as victims nor castigates our children for not acting superheroically in the face of structural oppression.

Transcending structural constraints

"I'm through with the victim role," Dr. R.Y. Woodhouse tells me, laughing bitterly. We're sitting at the Starbucks on 23rd and Jackson, in the heart of the Central District. Her words remind me of the recent controversy over the location of the chain coffee store at this

major thoroughfare. For many Black activists, the spot should have been given to Catfish Corner, a popular Black-owned restaurant with a store at the less-traveled corner of Martin Luther King, Jr. Way and Cherry Street. That Catfish Corner lost their bid to Starbucks was seen as yet additional proof of the gentrification of the Central District, and the lack of respect for Black cultural spaces in the city. Although I heard a few murmurs of discontent about the Starbucks and the adjacent condominium complexes built around the same time, these days it seems to be a popular meeting spot for Black middle-class folks, even those who no longer live in the neighborhood. This particular shop has proudly been dubbed Soulbucks, and for those who frequent it, I suppose few are real victims of the shifts in the neighborhood. These are not the people forced out by rising rents and property taxes.

Woodhouse was president of the Seattle Urban League from 1984 to 1998, leading the organization through much of the post-civil rights period. Now, as I ask her about the state of Black education now, she emphasizes that times have changed. “So it’s [the lack of Black educational achievement] got to be something that is, that is cultural. And I don’t know what it is. Because it used to be that education was so, so revered among Black people…. A lot of the people who grew up in the south had the discarded books, but they achieved…. So I don’t know, Michael. I really don’t know. Whatever it is, it’s something we need to take care of—we as a people. I hesitate to say I’m with Bill Cosby on that, in terms of we, it’s our business. We need to take care of it, you know?” She notes that it “galls” her and her husband that there are no longer any Black students in Garfield High School’s jazz band, which is now overwhelmingly made up of white students from the north end. “There’s no doubt our kids are just as smart as any other ones.”

Like Rice, Woodhouse imagines a Black past in which resources were limited, but people persevered and achieved. Since there are more resources now, she reasons, we have to look to cultural explanations. Since both Rice and Woodhouse acknowledge material constraints, it is not that they are contending that we erred by demanding more equitable policies in this area. Rather, they seem to suggest that lack of resources is no longer the pressing problem.

The perceived loss of moral values also comes in for critique. On another day, I am at another Starbucks—one with less soul, as it were—speaking to Mona Bailey, the former district assistant superintendent and my mother's guidance counselor at Garfield back in the 1960s. "It's interesting," she says, "the role models that are important to African American youth, the lack or presence of a value system in our African American families and homes. We tend to value the hip-hop culture, we tend to value the culture we see in Hollywood, or dressing in the baggy pants hanging off their rears. We seem to value things that really aren't going to contribute to their economic, their physical or social development. And why is that? Why is it that [rapper] 50 Cent gets more press than someone who is really encouraging students to stay in school?"

Stephan Blanford is an attorney and administrator at the non-profit Seattle Alliance for Education, which raises corporate monies for public education. "Whereas I don't like what Bill Cosby said," he tells me, "I think we do need to continue to ask the question: What is it that we need to do differently in order to see the achievement gap close? Even if we got a perfect weighted-student formula and more resources, even if we had adequate funding, I think we'd still have a problem…And it's a hard conversation to have and I think it's an important conversation to have….When I go to school board meetings, I'm always struck by

the low number of African Americans who turn out for those meetings. And I don't know if people are just caught in the '60s, tired or apathetic, and don't believe a school board meeting is the appropriate place to—. I don't know. I think a lot of people just don't care. People are into their own things."

For Blanford, who is in his mid-30s, "caught in the '60s" becomes short-hand for the direct activism characteristic of the civil-rights era. He sees himself as part of a new generation of Black leadership and counts Norm Rice as one of his key mentors. Regarding one older Black activist, who is known for aggressively confronting district officials, he confides, "I think he may do more harm than good." Like Woodhouse and Bailey, Blanford laments the level of Black engagement in and with schools, and suggests that something cultural is at the root of the problem. New Black leaders, he suggests, are not as quick to call for state-sponsored solutions to community problems and are more willing to work within the system—including the private, corporate sector—to address the educational needs of Black students.

However paradoxically, Blanford and other participants narrate the need for a "cultural turn" in decidedly collectivist terms. That is, although they often note problematic individual behavior (i.e., wearing sagging pants; failure to attend school board meetings), they repeatedly emphasize that "Black people" must make the change. On the one hand, much of the critique falls on poor and working-class Black folks, Cosby's "lower economic and lower middle economic people" who had failed to live up to standards apparently modeled by the more affluent Black population. Yet, if we read these narratives (and even Cosby's) more carefully, considerable responsibility is also placed on the Black community as a whole.

To the extent that "the Black community" is a fictive construction, it is not always clear, neither to me nor to them, who the "we" should be in any concrete terms, or what "we" could be counted on to lead, or even follow, the charge. Note, for example, how Mona Bailey shifts voice within each sentence of her critique of hip hop culture: "*We* seem to value things that really aren't going to contribute to *their* economic, *their* physical or social development." I read in this the complexity of her connection to, and simultaneous distance from some segments of "the Black community." They become us; we are they. *Or are we?*

Similarly, Blanford comes to some realization about his own racial responsibility after hearing a song by Black artist Meshell Ndegeocello: "She asks, 'Are you free?' And in my mind what she's talking about is, we have this idea that we are now free, we are not constrained by the economic realities that our parents and grandparents were faced with…She talks about a guy who is driving down the street, big car, fancy jewelry …what kind of freedom is that?"

I found the song Blanford referred to in my own CD collection, a song provocatively titled *Dead Nigga Blvd.*:

Just 'cause civil rights is law
Doesn't mean that we all abide
So tell me are you free?
While we campaign for every dead nigga blvd
So young motherfuckers can drive down it in your fancy cars
Free
You try to hold on to some Africa of the past
One must remember
It's other Africans that helped enslave your ass
'Cause everybody's
Just trying to make to make that dollar
Remember what Jesse used to say?
I am somebody
No longer do I blame others

For the way that we be
'Cause niggas need to redefine
What it means to be free (Ndegeocello, 2002)

"Once I heard it," Blanford explains, "I was like, 'Oh my God, I think we are caught up in status, how to achieve status, without looking at the things that are really important. It was really enlightening for me. I'm the first in my generation to enroll in a doctoral program and was the first in my generation to achieve a master's degree. And not that that means anything except I know I have this huge legacy ….I know my grandfather and his father were doing things so that I could be in a doctoral program and do all this interesting stuff that I'm doing. And I don't think that—I think there's been a neat break, where people don't recognize their responsibility to the next generation."

What becomes interesting here is that Ndegeocello's song is a radical critique of the effects of capitalism on Black communal values. It is not pointed at one socioeconomic class of Black folks, but as Blanford realized, every segment of the population, including his own. Given her historical references, she would not necessarily agree that crass materialism and individualism are recent phenomena, but enduring evils that must be checked by each generation. Still, like Blanford, Ndegeocello articulates a kind of collective politic that turns its critique inward, rather than at white people.

In her own critical reflection on the state of Black education, Mona Bailey suggests that the civil rights movement might have been so focused on appealing to the state for redress that Black folks neglected some important intra-group work. "The whole question of race consciousness," she explains, "and the achievement of goals for the racial group you're a part of is at the core of this storm in America and in Seattle, and all the questions we have [about education] may not get attended until we answer that question. And it may be that is

the work that is left undone, incomplete in Martin Luther King's era—in terms of what is it we want as a people in this country. And no matter where you geographically reside, you have an attachment to the racial group.

"I believe other groups have found a way to solidify and concretize what they're doing. I believe we are still floundering as a race. The success of an African American, no matter where you are placed, ought to be connected to the success of every African American. I don't believe that as a race, we have internalized that. In fact you hear now, throughout this country, that we are at a standstill, we appear immobile because there is no one to send out the message of what we are supposed to do. [Actor and activist] Ossie Davis used to say, 'If we don't a plan, we're not going anywhere.' I feel there is a general feeling that we don't have a plan….So that the overarching issue of where we are after *Brown v. Board of Education* is that we may not be anywhere because we did not have a central plan to get us there."

Al Black insists he has been making this argument for years: Black people have to develop their own political and educational agendas. "This has become one of the major issues for me," says the longtime parent activist and (now retired) sociology professor at the University of Washington. "I keep trying to get this point across to my people, and I've been unsuccessful. Black people have gotten to the point where what they want to do primarily is call the white man a racist. Is the logic that if you call him a racist enough that he is going to change, is that what you think? I don't need to be told two million times that he is a racist. I knew that from the beginning.…*We* must change, fundamentally.

"The important thing about the civil rights movement—I'm not talking about integration or any of that—is that Black people came to see themselves as agents of

change….This is such an important thing for us to get right. We can no longer afford to be focused on this—integration." He cites the example of his own father, who graduated from the all-black Booker T. Washington High School in Tulsa, Oklahoma. "Powerful school," he says. "Turned out all these successful African American students. He believed in us being educated by powerful educators. I would also say he believed in integration, but by the time I came along, I don't think I thought that integration was going to be the thing that worked for us…. It was a very laudable goal, but I think it's had some very deleterious effects for us as a people. I want to live in an integrated world, but we've got to get a hold over our own community. If you have all Black people in a school, could it be possible they can't learn? That's ridiculous! I don't know whoever is saying that, but I fundamentally disagree. There may be a whole bunch of poor people who are behind, but you can create the conditions so that over the long-term they're successful and it's happening all over the country and the world. In Africa, there are rooms full of Black people who learn, and there ain't nobody there but them. So it's ridiculous."

Black, although in favor of integration in theory, concurs with the authors of *Black Power* (as discussed in Chapter II) that Black people must first close ranks. What he admires about the civil rights movement is that Black people worked together collectively; what became a problem, in his view, is that we worked collectively against the idea that we could accomplish anything (including learning) on our own. That would not be how school desegregation proponents would interpret their aims: Recall that the goal was not to sit next to white children, but to access the resources reserved for them. However, for Black, the racism of whites—their greed and bigotry—placed Black people in a position in which, over time, they began to sound shrill in their charges of racism. Further, he would argue, since

whites are never going to change, why should convincing them to embrace racial equality be at the center of the Black agenda?

'What the fuck are we?': An alternative analysis of the state of Black education

Don Alexander must be in his 70s now, but continues to participate in community forums and keep up on education politics. The co-founder, with Bass, of Save our Southend Schools, Alexander grew up in an activist family in Chicago and Los Angeles. His roots are as firmly in the labor movement as they are in Black struggle, and this at least partially explains why his analysis of Black education struggle differs markedly from most of the other people I interviewed. Sitting in his small house in the south end, he leans forward on his cane to offer a searing critique of conciliatory Black politics. In the process, he turns the cultural critique upside down, responding harshly to established Black leaders' criticism of urban Black youth. His analysis, I will argue later in this chapter, helps us break through the impasse of the ideological entanglement of liberalism, conservatism and nationalism.

"If this community does not allow itself to be seen as human beings," Alexander says to me, "as people, as men and women, we will not be treated as such. We will be treated as slaves as long as we act like it. If we want to protect our children, keep 'em out of fuckin' Monroe and Walla Walla [state prisons] and get 'em in the University of Washington, we've got to make sure they get an education at Rainier Beach. If we don't do that, if we don't—we're gonna lose another generation. We've lost this one. These kids are gone. You can't help these muthafuckers. These kids are—how you gonna help a child, 17 years old, for whatever false reason he might contrive, he know muthafuckin' well he can make more money selling dope than he can workin' at McDonald's. However false security that is, however long he can get it, rather than go to jail or get shot, he can make more selling that

dope on that bicycle than he can at McDonald's. How the fuck I'm gonna tell you to work at McDonald's, that that's honorable and sellin' dope isn't? You think I'm stupid? I can't count? How am I gonna respect you, you telling me some shit like that? We've lost that generation because we won't take control, and we're gonna lose another one if we keep doin' the same thing."

"Let me ask you a question," Alexander continues, taking a long pause. "If you had a factory, and you had total control of that factory—the hiring, the firing. And you had an opening for 10 people, and someone said to you, well, we're watching you, we're gonna see how biased you are in your hiring. You white. And you had some janitors to hire, some engineers to hire. Scientists. You had to hire some people to dig some ditches. Who would you hire to do what? I know muthafuckin well, if I was white, I'd hire white folks. It'd be some black muthafucker cleaning out that ditch, only because I had to hire him, just to look like I was bein' fair. Someone who looks less like me would be doin' that menial task. The person who looks more like me will get the better job. And I don't care what anyone says, that's what the muthafucker's gonna do!

"Well, what am I gonna do? I'm gonna walk up to this white man, and say (here Alexander changes to a soft, pleading voice, the one Black folks sometimes use to effect the tone of those Black people perceived as overly docile) 'Sir, sir, don't do me like this. As a janitor, a ditch digger, a shit-hole cleaner, you're only gonna give me five dollars an hour. This engineer is getting $80 an hour. Why don't you give me eight dollars an hour?' White man gonna say, 'You're right. I'm gonna give you eight dollars an hour.' He ain't said a goddamn thing about giving you an engineer job!" Both of us start laughing at that one. Then

Alexander is serious again. "Now see, from his point of view, from his racist ass, whatever, why is he wrong?

"As compared to [if the Black man said to him:] 'Muthafucka, if you gonna be here, I'm gonna be here. 'Cause goddammit, this job ain't gonna go on unless someone who look like me gonna be doin' this work. Otherwise, this job won't go on. It just won't happen. And I don't care what you think this means, you can call it a threat, a promise, a strike, a boycott, or whatever.'

"I'll tell you what it means," Alexander says, his eyes narrowing sharply. "It means you are not going to come into my community and make your people rich and my people poor. And not my children standing off watching you do this to me and me accept it. How in the hell can my child have respect for me if he sees me allowing this? And for me to say to that child, you do what I say do? Fuck you! What the hell have you done? What have you brought to the table to be able to have the audacity to tell me I've got to do a certain thing in order to get along in this country? So if we treat our children like we treat 'em, and expect someone else to treat 'em better—what the fuck are we, a bunch of stupid—what are we?"

Implications for Black education politics: Some cautionary notes

The tentative manner in which my research participants make mention of Bill Cosby suggests less than a full embrace of the entertainer's "comedic" take on poverty and Black educational achievement. "I'm maybe trying to make it too simple," Norm Rice admits, before invoking Cosby in his critique of Black youth culture. "Whereas I don't like what Bill Cosby said…," Stephan Blanford offers as a preface to his remarks. And R.Y. Woodhouse is almost apologetic: "I hesitate to say I'm with Bill Cosby." Even then, she specifies that what she is agreeing with is his point about Black folks taking care of each other. These

expressions of uncertainty about parts of Cosby's message—or at least how that message might be interpreted—reflect a level of wariness about totally discounting the effects of limited economic and educational resources in poor and working-class Black communities.

However, most of them seem to have concluded that more resources are not forthcoming, despite years of making demands of the state and appealing to the better natures of white people. This has, as Dawson theorized, led to an increase in affinity for certain aspects of nationalist ideology. We might expect this to provide the foundation for a renewed commitment to fighting for educational opportunities for Black youth and poor and working-class Black communities. And it might, except for one thing: Black leaders, in agreement with Cosby, believe that certain groups of Black people have failed to take advantage of the opportunities that have been won. Therefore, demanding more resources will not improve Black educational achievement; the problem, as they see it, is cultural.

Interestingly, fewer *educators* make this argument, and those who still work in south end schools, like Rainier Beach's Elnora Hookfin, adopt a position closer to Don Alexander's: Black youth have a right to be angry about the maldistribution of educational resources, and their awareness of this injustice can contribute to apathy and even resistance. Still, even they seem to voice support for a Black-led and Black-centered educational movement. The question remains whether the re-emergence of nationalism will be guided by the belief that, as Mona Bailey insists, the fates of all Black people are connected, or whether that nationalism will be informed by a conservative ideology which suggests that some Black people, due to their inability to "make it," are less worthy, and perhaps should not be included in our imagination of the collective "we."

I am also concerned that by speaking about educational disproportionality as a *Black* problem, as opposed to a national or public crisis, we absolve the state of any responsibility, and dismiss the role of market forces in determining educational opportunity. Those in the community with this imagination of Black education tend to reduce broad questions of social policy to the level of the individual, suggesting that unsuccessful Black students only have themselves to blame, or their parents are to blame, and that the best remedy is individual effort. Thus, as empowering as it is to take community ownership of the challenge in Black education, we inadvertently aid a regressive neoliberal agenda which aims to privatize not only the system of public education, but also the very public discourse on educational opportunity. This is the very point made by Michael Apple and Thomas Pedroni (2005) in their work on conservative ideology and Black education politics, which I discussed in Chapter I. However, as sympathetic as they are to Black frustration, I am not sure their analysis goes far enough in providing us a way out of the problematic of this nationalist-neoliberal accord. I think Don Alexander offers some guidance here, and I will consider that in a moment.

Finally, I believe there is a danger that the trajectory of school desegregation over the past few decades has led to an understandable but overly broad denunciation of liberalism among some influential Black leaders. Although critique of the limits of liberal ideology is warranted, Black people—and particularly poor and working-class Black folks—are not well-served by a frontal assault on liberal social policy. In this narrative, it is suggested that safety-net programs have made certain Black people lazy and efforts to diversify schools have destroyed the cultural fabric of what would otherwise have been stable, thriving Black communities. In a romanticized rendering of Black education history, it is implied that Black

people had access to quality education prior to intervention by the state. While there is a compelling record of successful, segregated Black schools, it is not clear that the vast majority of Black youth, across the span of social class, had ready access to these institutions. It might be arguable whether the situation is any better now (although few would seriously suggest we return to pre-*Brown* schooling). However, we find ourselves complicit with rightist political projects when we too easily blame poor academic performance and neighborhood instability on liberal policies (usually those associated with the 1960s), while not critiquing neoliberal policies which reduce funding for public education by making it easier for corporations and wealthy individuals to avoid paying their fare share of taxes, and neoconservative policies which divert our attention and dollars to "cultural wars" over such issues as sex education and school prayer (Anyon, 2005; Apple, 2001; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Lipman, 2004).

Toward a critical Black education politics

In the scope of Black politics in Seattle, Don Alexander is hardly as influential or as well-known as Norm Rice, R.Y.Woodhouse, or Samuel B. McKinney. And while I value the knowledge of these more mainstream leaders, I think Alexander was more clearly able to articulate how we might resist the convergence of cultural nationalism with conservative ideologies, while at the same time continue to challenge liberal approaches to social and educational policy.

In Alexander's view, we are losing generations of Black youth because Black adults refuse to "take control." Interestingly, in Cosby's rhetoric, to "take control" largely means to demand a higher level of accountability from Black youth and poor Black people. In contrast, for Alexander, it means to stand up to powerful forces acting against the social and economic

stability of Black communities. In asking "What the fuck are we?" Alexander turns attention to the moral accountability of Black leaders, and Black adults in general. Perhaps he is less sympathetic than he could be with regard to those who, from where he sits, settled for less rather than fighting for a true justice. Perhaps. Still, he provides a powerful counternarrative to the discourse on cultural values, refusing to sever the connection between political economy, race and the life choices of younger generations.

Like others I spoke to, Alexander advocates an increased level of collective politics and responsibility. However, his cultural nationalism is paired with an economic agenda. In Alexander's view, there is no "cultural turn" without an engagement of class. While civil-rights and even self-identified post-civil-rights leaders urge Black youth to succeed either because of civil rights victories, or despite the limitations of civil-rights era policies, Alexander suggests that we failed by compromising power, and then blamed (poor) young people who could see through our cowardice to the economic and racial oppression that we had chosen to either ignore, excuse or downplay.

Liberal policies such as school desegregation fail not because they make too many demands of the state, but because they are not radical enough. They are akin to Alexander's ditch-digger asking his boss for a three-dollar raise rather than demanding a transformation of company hiring policy. Although the raise may seem like a victory, a step forward in a gradual process toward equality, in fact it reinforces the idea that Black people are never meant to be, say, engineers (to use Alexander's example). Closer to the focus of this study, such gradualism legitimizes the second-class status of Black students, and particularly those in poor and working-class communities. Further, Alexander would argue, it has the cultural effect of creating a climate in which Black youth have less faith in the system of education

and frankly, less faith in the idea of Black people. To put this another way, the convergence of liberal, conservative and nationalist ideologies leaves the next generation without the political tools to imagine a Black counterpublic sphere.

My intention here is not to minimize the importance of the work of civil rights activists; nor do I mean to suggest that what they did was not radical at the time. However, it may be true to say that not much that is radical has happened since! If indeed we are seeing a resurgence of what we might call Black-led or Black-centered approaches to improving Black education, it will be important that our efforts not be co-opted by rightist political projects or stagnate in the compromise of liberalism.

CHAPTER VII: AT RIGHTS' END: THE BLACK EDUCATIONAL IMAGINATION IN NEW TIMES

Historian Quintard Taylor, characterizing the experience of Black people in Seattle from its early days through the civil rights era, writes:

> As a self-proclaimed politically progressive city, Seattle celebrated its image as a multicultural, multiracial democracy where opportunity was open to all. The reality for the entire century between 1870 and 1970 was vastly different for most of black Seattle….the forces arrayed against black aspirations were supported sometimes consciously, and often uwittingly, by the vast majority of Seattleites who chose to ignore the plight of the impoverished, the uneducated, the economically disadvantaged—particularly if they were of a different color" (1994, p. 239).

Taylor concludes that in the 21st century, real social change in Seattle must be founded on economic justice, rather than the "illusion of inclusion" that has been the city's primary race relations paradigm.

Unfortunately, the recent Supreme Court ruling in *Parents Involved in Community Schools v Seattle School District No. 1*, the so-called racial tiebreaker case, illustrates that the nation is following Seattle's lead in adopting a more illusive approach to racial equality in the area of education. In mandating color-blind school-assignment policies, the court effectively chose not to see severe racial disparities in access to the best educational facilities and resources. Or, once seen, they chose to forget or deny the historical links between decades of white resistance, state inaction, and the economic marginalization of urban (and more recently, inner-ring suburban) Black communities. Without this kind of contextualization, we are collectively unable to explain the persistent gap between the achievement of Black and white students, and perhaps more importantly from a Black-counterpublic perpective, the gap between the Black educational imagination and the Black educational reality.

However, while liberals lamented the loss of the racial tiebreaker case, I would contend that most of their tears were shed for the wrong reasons. For liberals, school desegregation has largely symbolized the nation's commitment to developing a society in which each individual is free to pursue her potential, a society in which race is no barrier to opportunity and social mobility. And indeed, the court's ruling does represent a retreat from these ideals, despite the justices' protestations to the contrary. But I would argue that the real reason to cry over the decision in the Seattle case is that it reveals the limitations of a civil-rights approach to Black liberation. To be clear, I am not suggesting that the civil rights movement was ill-advised or without accomplishment. Rather, I mean to propose that the limits of rights should not be the limits of our imaginations.

In this chapter, I want to revisit the questions I posed at the beginning of this text, questions which my research reveals to be at the core of Black counterpublic concerns about education: What will be better about the education *our* children receive in integrated schools? How will the souls of our children be nurtured in integrated schools? To what extent can whites be trusted to treat our children fairly and share resources equitably? How will integration, and specifically integrated schools, help us as a [Black] people? In doing so, I aim to delineate public and counterpublic education projects that I believe are crucial to the praxis of the Black educational imagination, and that may just help revive the Black counterpublic sphere.

The limits of rights: The court's (final) answer to Black supplication

If it were not clear before, there are several indications in the Supreme Court's recent ruling that the counterpublic perspectives on school desegregation that I heard in Seattle are not at all relevant in the state's determination of what is just. Writing for the majority, Chief

Justice John Roberts states, "The Seattle public schools have not shown that they were ever segregated by law, and were not subject to court-ordered desegregation decrees" (2007, p. 12)[24]. As the cultural political economy of desegregation in Seattle reveals, although the schools themselves may not have been segregated by laws related to public education, they were segregated largely as a result of racially-discriminatory laws related to housing, and indirectly, as a result of a history of documented discrimination in employment. These connections are clearly and poignantly articulated by Black leaders, educators and activists, but are not even considered in the Court's deliberation.

The Court also displays a willful naiveté about the significance of white dominance and privilege. Or, to be fair, perhaps it is simply that their interpretation of the Constitution does not allow them to acknowledge systemic injustice. In either case, the Court dismisses the narratives on whiteness offered by Black folks in Seattle—their understanding of how white people preserve for themselves the best schools and the best seats in those schools, and the connection civil rights leaders made between proximity to white bodies and access to material resources. This is evident in Roberts' complaint that the district's racial-balance formula privileges a certain percentage of white enrollment over a broadly diverse representation of racial/ethnic groups:

> Under the Seattle plan, a school with 50 percent Asian-American students and 50 percent white students but no African-American, Native-American, or Latino students would qualify as balanced, while a school with 30 percent Asian-American, 25 percent African-American, 25 percent Latino, and 20 percent white students would not. (pp. 15, 16)

[24] Ironically, the desegregation activists who pushed Seattle into implementing city-wide busing "without a court order" might have done better to actually insist on one, because here the court uses the absence of legal action as proof that discrimination was never proven!

Although we might debate the sense of this policy from a pedagogical perspective—that is, many multicultural educators would probably prefer the broader range of diversity in their classrooms—what the court ignores here, or simply rejects, is the bitter truth that resources are already allocated along racial lines, despite the absence of any explicit policies dictating that this be so. A school with more students of color than white students rarely has the political and therefore economic power of a school that white people regard as "theirs." For Black desegregation proponents, the goal was to create a situation in which those who are more politically and economically privileged are in a position that encourages (or forces) them to share the resources they have accumulated largely as a result of that privilege.

Conservative Justice Clarence Thomas goes out of his way to deride the existence of white privilege, as part of his broader argument that school districts should not be trusted to consciously consider race in the formation and implementation of policy. In a concurring opinion, he complains, "The school district sent a delegation of high school students to a 'White Privilege Conference.' One conference participant[25] described 'white privilege' as 'an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was meant to remain oblivious' (p. 36). Thomas is so certain that his audience will share his distaste of the idea of white privilege—and the idea that a school district might take it seriously—that he simply cites this one definition offered by a conference speaker without further comment, as if the very definition were damning enough. Again, this serves as another example that the counterpublic discourse on school desegregation is rendered irrelevant in the state's determination of rights.

[25] Here Thomas is referring to Peggy McIntosh, the author of the much-cited article, "White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack" (1989).

White privilege (let alone white political dominance) is also absent in the more mainstream liberal discourse on school desegregation; the more oft-cited goal is to improve racial harmony by bringing people together across differences. The weakness of this liberal argument is that it fails to take into account what many of the participants in the current study understand clearly now, if they did not in years past: integrated schools do not necessarily mean that Black children will have access to the same resources, nor does it mean that they will have meaningful egalitarian encounters during the school day. Thomas is able to exploit this in his concurring opinion:

> By the dissent's account, improvements in racial attitudes depend upon the increased contact between black and white students thought to occur in more racially balanced schools. There is no guarantee, however, that students of different races in the same school will actually spend time with one another. Schools frequently group students by academic ability as an aid to efficient instruction, but such groupings often result in classrooms with high concentrations of one race or another. (pp. 22, 23)

Of course, Thomas fails to consider why individual classrooms might be racially segregated, something which the people I interviewed theorized about at great length and determined to be the result of a long history of discriminatory policies and practices. In sharp contrast, in the Court's majority determination, Chief Justice Roberts refers to these racial imbalances as the result of "private choices" rather than "a product of state action" (p. 28). Therefore, he concludes, there is no violation of the Constitution in the racial disproportionality between different academic tracks.

Proponents of school desegregation, although disappointed by the ruling, were encouraged by moderate Justice Anthony Kennedy's more nuanced interpretation of the Constitution's allowances of race in the aim of diverse schools. Kennedy concurred with the majority that the Seattle school district had overstepped its bounds by recognizing the race of *individual* students; however, he maintained that certain forms of race-consciousness are

constitutionally permissible, if they "address the problem in a general way" (p. 8). He explains:

> School boards may pursue the goal of bringing together students of diverse backgrounds and races through other means, including strategic site selection of new schools; drawing attendance zones with general recognition of the demographics of neighborhoods; allocating resources for special programs; recruiting students and faculty in a targeted fashion; and tracking enrollments, performance, and other statistics by race. These mechanisms are race conscious but do not lead to different treatment based on a classification that tells each student he or she is to be defined by race, so it is unlikely any of them would demand strict scrutiny to be found permissible. (pp. 8, 9)

Kennedy goes on to say:

> The decision today should not prevent school districts from continuing the important work of bringing together students of different racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds. Due to a variety of factors—some influenced by government, some not—neighborhoods in our communities do not reflect the diversity of our Nation as a whole. Those entrusted with directing our public schools can bring to bear the creativity of experts, parents, administrators, and other concerned citizens to find a way to achieve the compelling interests they face without resorting to widespread governmental allocation of benefits and burdens on the basis of racial classifications. (p. 18)

Importantly, Kennedy acknowledges the state's role in manufacturing social inequity, and offers guidance on the kind of policies that should meet constitutional standards. It remains to be seen whether future courts will give equal consideration to his concurring decision, or will reinforce the narrower interpretation authored by Chief Justice Roberts.

Public and counterpublic education projects

When we consider the Supreme Court's ruling in light of the Black counterpublic questions I have focused on throughout this study, it becomes clear that there are limits to what the public sphere can or is willing to do to address minoritarian concerns. At best, the "public" is interested only in the education of students as individuals. In practice, I would argue that to the extent that race and class powerfully shape who the "public" is, Black folks

and particularly poor and working-class Black folks cannot count on their children's educations getting any better through relying on civil rights law or diversity-related school policies and practices. Consideration of the souls of Black children is not part of the public discourse, and there is little evidence that it ever will be. Most of the people I spoke with argued that although there are some wonderful white teachers and administrators, Black people cannot simply "trust" that the state's white educators (or its Black educators, for that matter) will treat Black children fairly. Similarly, the persistent cultural devaluation of Black bodies means that in general, a significant number of parents of all racial/ethnic groups are likely to regard sitting next to (too many) Black children as detrimental to their own children's educations. Thus, educational resources will not be shared equitably simply by wishing it so, nor by passing a law that is supposed to effect change on its own—that is, without ongoing and persistent political action.

With this in mind, I would like to suggest implications of this study for what I have delineated as public and counterpublic Black education projects. In making this distinction, I want to be clear that I regard them as interconnected. As Nancy Fraser has argued, one of the primary aims of any counterpublic sphere is to be a "training ground" for public deliberation, even as its central purpose is to address those issues that cannot be entrusted to the public sphere.

Counterpublic education projects

It is precisely because of the limits of public projects, and the "training ground" function of counterpublic spaces that I begin with a discussion of counterpublic education projects. Counterpublic education projects are those initiated within Black cultural spaces to address conflicts and uncertainties about the role of education in Black life, and to engage

and celebrate tensions and triumphs that emerge along the journey. First, from what I discovered in Seattle, I would argue that we need opportunities for Black people—teachers, parents, students and activists—to come together across socioeconomic class to discuss what it means to commit to a "linked fate" approach to Black education. It might be objectively true that our fates are not linked. That is, middle-class Blacks can move out of historically Black neighborhoods, arguably to areas with access to better schools. But what would it mean to imagine that all of our Black children were important to all of us? This is the proposition that I heard repeatedly in Seattle, as people wondered aloud how we might get to the cognitive and affective space where politically, culturally, emotionally, we regarded each Black child as our own. Such recognition does not require allegiance to cultural nationalism in some dogmatic sense, and in fact, our "links" should always be made critically, through deliberation, rather than assumed simply by shared skin color.

Second, and following from this, I would argue for more deliberation within Black communities on the significance of class, not only in shaping the cultural and ideological divides amongst us, but also related to the impact of its macro-structural form, the capitalist economy. Through the experience of school desegregation, I believe that more Black people came to a sharper understanding of the limits of policies and practices aimed at extending rights or celebrating diversity. Rights are not the entirety of liberation, and diversity does not guarantee access to material resources. Most of the people I spoke to, even those critical of white racism, noted that the broader culprit was greed. Some, like Don Alexander, made the link between declining educational aspirations and the lack of living-wage jobs. Others saw connections between corporate interests and the destabilization and gentrification of the Central District, which in turn, they argued, undermined the political base of Seattle's Black

community, making it that much more difficult to defend the educational needs of the community's children.

Third, I believe Black people need to follow the lead of GRACE Academy's Mother Wanda in creating more Black educational institutions, be they independent home schools like GRACE, or supplementary schools that meet afternoons or on weekends. If sitting next to white children failed to deliver us resources, it may have failed more in teaching Black children that they are undeserving of educational equity and more damaging, that they are unfit for educational vocation. While Cosby and even several of those I interviewed are bewildered by the resistance of many Black students to formal education, Mother Wanda is very clear that Black children are broken by a system that assumes they should be placed in special education, and that is all too willing to label them emotionally disturbed or otherwise unable to learn.

Now, certainly, we have any number of tutoring programs, after-school centers, and counseling centers that provide services for youth, and some of these are aimed primarily at Black youth. However, to the extent that these are state-funded, or primarily respond to state or market-driven aims, such as improving achievement test scores or preparing young people for "the world of work," they fail to focus on the primary counterpublic aim: instilling in Black youth a strong sense of collective identity and commitment, and affirming their full humanity as individuals *and* as Black people. It might seem unfair to suggest that institutions cannot simultaneously serve both functions—public and counterpublic—and I have no concrete evidence to assert that this is impossible. However, part of the problem I recognize in the historical trajectory of school desegregation politics is that public priorities and public discourses quickly overshadowed and supplanted counterpublic ones.

At GRACE, parents pay a very low tuition, and Mother Wanda and Jamal Farr develop a curriculum to meet the needs of the fewer than 10 students who attend the school. The curriculum is able to shift to respond to the students' needs and intellectual curiosities, and to address current events in the community and in the world. Since the school is effectively a middle school, its educators do have an eye on preparing students to succeed in traditional public high schools, where most of them go after some time at GRACE. However, Mother Wanda is able to combine her three decades of experience in public schools with her understanding of the needs of Black children to determine the kind of preparation the young people need, rather than being constricted by the state's determination of what her program should consist of.

The challenge in initiating such counterpublic projects is the absence of a vibrant Black counterpublic sphere. In other words, how will crucial conversations begin, and how will a broad range of Black people learn of them, and find a way to participate? These are admittedly serious and formidable questions. However, as I have argued, we still have sites and moments of counterpublic possibility. The only way to begin is to begin everywhere we can.

Public education projects

Public Black education projects are those that make demands of the state and/or that engage the broader public in deliberation over the meaning and function of public education. The civil rights movement was, in the main, a public project. I have argued throughout this study that we have moved to a post-civil rights moment, one in which, frankly, the public is no longer interested in Black people in relation to social justice. New tactics are needed.

Public projects must promise improvements for the whole society, even as we may understand that they may indirectly improve educational opportunities for Black children.

Justice Kennedy provides a useful place to start. His use of race consciousness relies on the use of race only at the general level of strategic district planning, where it is not directly connected to the fate of individual children. This certainly addresses the legal issue, and may even blunt some of the criticism from parents who believe their child has been targeted for "exclusion" on the basis of race. However, Kennedy neglects to consider that *white* race consciousness is already operational at this level, and in fact, may be more hidden at the higher levels of desegregation/diversity planning than it is at the level of the individual school. That is, corporate interests and community groups in a city's more affluent white communities (as in Seattle's north end) are able to craft anti-democratic "private" spaces within the public sphere, where they are able to ensure that their interests are represented, and represented as in the broader public interest. Thus, while Kennedy's proposal may sound encouraging, it too falls prey to the limitations of liberal social policy, and liberal conceptualizations of the public sphere.

Richard Kahlenberg's (2006) argument for class-based school integration is getting a fresh look in the wake of the racial tiebreaker ruling. Although analysis of class-based integration is beyond the scope of this study, it is clear in Seattle (and in many other cities) that predominantly Black (or Black and Latino) schools are also overwhelmingly poor schools. Thus, addressing class imbalances between schools may address some of the racial resegregation as well. A counterpublic discussion on class within Black communities may be a place to address and come to a greater clarity about the benefits of Kahlenberg's approach with regard to the education of Black children.

In general, I would argue that in a post-civil rights period, public political projects must be pursued as part of broader multiracial coalitions (Wilson, 1996). As such, certain counterpublic concerns will not be addressed. Building and sustaining a strong counterpublic sphere ensures that a Black agenda will at least be part of public deliberation, and provides the necessary space to consider those questions that may never be of concern in the public sphere, or in other counterpublic arenas.

The Black educational imagination beyond rights

The Supreme Court has made clear that Black people cannot be constitutionally recognized as a group, and are therefore not entitled to rights as a people, but only as individuals. To the extent that Black people have focused on securing the right to sit next to white children, we have in effect, had to participate in a public discussion that was unconcerned with the liberation and survival of Black people, but rather, with extending opportunities to individuals. In this way, school desegregation has improved the life chances of individual Blacks, while legislators, policymakers and even education researchers have remained largely indifferent to the broader counterpublic questions that circulate in Black communal spaces.

The narratives of Black leaders, educators and activists in Seattle, and the historical data I examined reveal an increasing awareness among many in the Black community that the state did not imagine Black people as a *people* in their discourse on education. White people, on the other hand, did regard Black people as a group—one that was a threat to the educational advantages they had grown accustomed to enjoying. Thus, just as the state could not make room in its analysis to consider the structural effects of white (collective) racism, white people refused, or simply found it impossible to abide by the state's mandate that

Black persons were simply individuals (and not a collective). Ultimately, this meant that Black people individually and collectively were left without the rights that were supposed to have been extended through *Brown* and subsequent efforts to integrate schools.

The Black educational imagination, by focusing so squarely on securing rights, may have undermined its own radical counterpublic potential, because it allowed those outside of Black communities to determine and limit the terms of debate over Black education. In doing so, questions about collective identity, cultural survival and liberation became marginal, and regarded as less important than changing social policy (which, I would argue, was seen as related to changing the hearts and minds of white people[26]). I believe—and heard in Seattle—that now that we have reached a moment in which rights are being turned back, and most whites have retreated on the issue of racial enfranchisement, we may need to be open to other ways of imagining and realizing the potential of Black education. This does not make the struggle for school desegregation any less important. It simply means there is much more to do.

[26] On the one hand, it could be argued that implementation of school desegregation policies and practices requires that white people abandon, or at least set aside, certain racist beliefs. However, some Black political actors, and far more liberal whites, believe that integrated education are necessary in order to begin to address racial fears and prejudices. In either case, a Black education politics focused primarily on desegregating schools means that Black political actors spend a significant—perhaps excessive—amount of time and energy ruminating on, and reacting to what white people are thinking and feeling.

APPENDIX 1. Participant consent form

Ph.D. Program in Urban Education

The Graduate School and University Center
The City University of New York
365 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10016-4309
TEL 212.817.8280 FAX 212.817.1515
E-MAIL urban-ed@gc.cuny.edu

CONSENT FORM

My name is Michael Dumas and I am a student in the Urban Education Ph.D. Program at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York, and Principal Investigator of this project, entitled, "School Desegregation and the Cultural Production of the Black Educational Imagination." This is a research study of how Black leaders, educators and activists in Seattle made meaning of and attempted to influence school desegregation policies and practices from the 1960s to the present. I would like permission to interview you about your experiences in/with Seattle Public Schools and your involvement in advocating for educational opportunities for Black youth in Seattle in the past 30-40 years.

This interview will take from one to two hours, and I may ask to interview you again to follow up on topics discussed in the first interview. With your permission, I would like to audio-tape this interview so I can record the details accurately. The tapes will only be heard by me and my advisors. At any time you can refuse to answer any questions or end this interview.

There are no known risks to participating in this study. The benefit of your participation is that you will increase our understanding of a critical moment in the history of Black education, and contribute to our understanding of how Black communities make meaning of and actually shape the formation and implementation of specific education policies and practices. Approximately 50 participants will take part in this study.

I may publish results of the study. Unless you give me permission to use your real name, I will refer to you by a pseudonym and conceal details that would make your identity apparent. I ask you to allow me to use your real name in these publications, since my work is also meant to serve as an historical record of Black life in Seattle, and I want to acknowledge your role in that history. If you would like a copy of the study, please provide me with your address and I will send a copy in the future.

If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me at (917) 699-2927 or at mdumas@gc.cuny.edu or my dissertation chair, Dr. Jean Anyon at (212) 817-8280 or janyon@aol.com. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact Kay Powell, IRB Administrator, The Graduate Center/City University of New York, (212) 817-7525, or kpowell@gc.cuny.edu.

Thank you for your participation in the study. I will give you a copy of this form to take with you.

Graduate School & University Center / CUNY
IRB
Approved
06-02-0944
Approved: 4/4/06 To: 4/3/07 Expired:

I agree to have this interview audio-taped [circle one] Yes No

I agree to have my real name used in published work [circle one] Yes No

Participant's signature Date

Investigator's signature Date

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