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Brown Vs. Brownsville

**Why Today's Black Activists Are Challenging
The School Desegregation Paradigm**

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Abstract

The U.S. Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and early 1960s is synonymous with the struggle for desegregation in every aspect of society, perhaps most famously within the nation's public schools. As embodied in the Supreme Court's historic ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, racially integrated schools were deemed to be an essential component of equal opportunity in education. By the mid-to-late-1960s, however, the consensus around school desegregation had splintered. While the mainstream civil rights organizations stood by their integrationist creed, a rising Black Power movement challenged the old-line leadership and insisted that community control and self-determination were the only path for the liberation of black people. These separatists rejected integrated public schools as instruments of white supremacy. Their proposed alternative was to have schools run by black communities specifically for the benefit of black students. In 1968, this was the animating principle behind the push for community control in Brownsville, Brooklyn, which triggered a notorious, citywide teachers' strike.

More than six decades after *Brown*, U.S. public schools in general have resegregated to the point where there is less integration than in the late 1960s. A new generation of black-led activist organizations, affiliated with the Movement for Black Lives, has all but abandoned the hope or desire for school desegregation. In a reprise of the calls to Black Power, these groups believe that the path to educational equality lies in autonomous public schools controlled by local black communities and run by black administrators and a predominantly black teaching staff. In a rebuke to *Brown*, they assert that only separate can possibly become equal.

The text explains this attitudinal shift through interviews with leaders of the Movement for Black Lives, along with an archival examination of the historical positions on toward school desegregation by both the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power advocates. It addresses its central question through the lens of Critical Race Theory, which reveals the contradiction within liberal approaches to the enduring issue of racial inequality in U.S. schools, and also a fundamental disagreement over the goals of public education.

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

In 1954, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, its decision reflected a consensus among civil rights activists, legal experts, liberal scholars, and leading human rights groups. Desegregation was viewed as the essential and singular instrument to achieve equality between black and white students in America's public schools. Ever since, scholars on education policy reform have debated how school desegregation could best be implemented. In general, however, they have held tight to the core principle that integration is a fundamental component of educational equality.¹ *Brown v. Board of Education* stood for a simple and compelling principle: Separate cannot possibly be equal.

But within black-led activist groups in the United States today, the consensus around *Brown* has splintered.² For the Movement for Black Lives (MBL), the umbrella coalition that includes the Black Lives Matter Network and close to 500 other endorsing

¹ Gary Orfield, et al., "Brown at 60: Great Progress, a Long Retreat, and an Uncertain Future," *UCLA Civil Rights Project*, (May 15, 2014): 13-15; Richard Kahlenberg, "From All Walks of Life: New Hope for School Integration," *American Educator* 36, no. 4 (Winter, 2013): 2-3; Sean Reardon, et al., "Implications of Income-Based School Assignment Policies for Racial School Segregation," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 28, no. 1 (2006): 49-50, 75; Lani Guinier, "From Racial Liberalism to Racial Literacy: Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Divergence Dilemma." *Journal of American History* 91, no. 1 (2004): 92-94; Amy Stuart Wells and Robert Crain, "Perpetuation Theory and the Long-Term Effects of School Desegregation," *Review of Educational Research* 64, no. 4 (Winter, 1994): 531-533, 555; Richard Rothstein, "For Public Schools, Segregation Then, Segregation Since." *Economic Policy Institute* (August, 2013): 18-19.

² "Community Control," Platform, Movement for Black Lives, accessed October 1, 2017, <https://policy.m4bl.org/community-control>.

organizations,³ desegregation no longer heads the education agenda. In fact, it is barely part of their discourse, with not so much as a mention in the coalition's school policy demands.⁴ Among these groups struggling for human rights for black people, *Brown's* axiom is no longer broadly accepted.⁵

How and why has the pendulum swung from the integrationism of the Civil Rights Movement to the separatism of the current period, as evidenced by perspectives of activists within the Movement for Black Lives? My research found two main critiques of *Brown's* once-sacred axiom. The first is the pragmatic recognition that integration has generally failed as an instrument for equity in the nation's public schools. While *Brown* was widely seen as a foundational civil rights victory, its promises remain mostly hollow.⁶ Researchers have noted that public schools today are more segregated than they were in the 1960s.⁷ "Resegregation" is growing more pervasive by the year.⁸

The second critique of *Brown* reflects a more radical departure from the beliefs that propelled the original litigation. It challenges a core premise held by mainstream civil rights groups in the mid-20th century: that school integration is an intrinsic good for black children. A new generation of black activists proposes that integrated schools cannot possibly succeed in a society dominated by white norms and a stubborn history of anti-black racism. For leading voices in the Movement for Black Lives, *Brown* was based on a false premise of white elitism. They have a different vision and strategy for achieving an

³ "About Us," About Us, Movement for Black Lives, accessed October 1, 2017, <https://policy.m4bl.org/about>.

⁴ Movement for Black Lives, "Community Control."

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Rothstein, "For Public Schools," 2, 18-19.

⁷ Gary Orfield and Chungmei Lee, "Historic Reversals, Accelerating Resegregation, and the Need for New Integration Strategies," *Civil Rights Project* (2007), 4-5.

⁸ Ibid.

equitable, high-quality education for black students. They hold that separate can indeed be equal—and, even further, that separatism is the black community’s only realistic hope for educational equality.

1.1 A Shift, A Rift, or A Departure?

In the mid-20th century, mainstream civil rights activists were united behind Thurgood Marshall’s argument in *Brown*: “Equal means getting the same thing, at the same time, and in the same place.”⁹ And behind Coretta Scott King, who said, “Segregation was wrong when it was forced by white people, and I believe it is still wrong when it is requested by black people.”¹⁰ In a period when black people were striving first and foremost for basic economic opportunity, the push for integration was both logical and mostly unquestioning.

The Marshall-King position stands in pointed contrast to the new militant wave of political rebellion in recent years, led by young black activists demanding full equality in every aspect of American life.¹¹ In interviews with leaders of the Movement for Black Lives, legal experts, social scientists, and activists for school equity, fissures among these groups soon became apparent.¹² In its wide-ranging manifesto, the activist cohort proclaiming that

⁹ Linda Greenhouse, “Thurgood Marshall, Civil Rights Hero, Dies at 84,” *New York Times*, January 25, 1993, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/0702.html?mcubz=3>

¹⁰ Carolyn Warner, *The Last Word: A Treasury of Women’s Quotes* Warner, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Direct, 1992), 99.

¹¹ Movement for Black Lives, “About Us.”

¹² Thenjiwe McHarris, “personal interview,” September 8, 2017; Barbara Ransby, “personal interview,” January 17, 2018; Rashida Richardson, “personal interview,” September 24, 2017; Hiram Rivera, “personal interview,” October 14, 2017; Jonathan Stith, “personal interview,” December 4, 2017; Neva Walker, “personal interview,” October 29, 2017.

“black lives matter” makes no room for the goal of desegregation.¹³ In its place is a message steeped in the vocabulary of self-determination, community control, agency, and autonomy.¹⁴ The MBL’s education platform focuses on pedagogy, school funding formulas, child healthcare, and the school-to-prison pipeline. It contains not a single mention of desegregation or integration, and references *Brown* only for its failures.¹⁵ In short, there appears to be a significant disconnect between the old movement and the new. This calls for further investigation.

1.2 Road Map

In Chapter 2, I outline the historical attitudes on school integration from 1954, the year of *Brown’s* litigation, to 1968, the year considered by many to mark the end of the Civil Rights Movement. This chapter reviews historical debates on school desegregation within the old movement. Before we can identify a critical shift on this issue in the Movement for Black Lives, we must first understand the complex and diverse perspectives on educational equality among the MBL’s antecedents.

In Chapter 3, I explore contemporary attitudes on school desegregation within the Movement for Black Lives. While considering the MBL leaders’ stance on educational equity, I also look at contemporary research that either supports or contradicts the views of research subjects.

In Chapter 4, I address the influence of the community control movement within the MBL. I consider the ways in which historical narratives on school desegregation have

¹³ Movement for Black Lives, “Community Control.”

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

diluted the perceived importance of community control struggles in U.S. public school districts. I also discuss the implications of the MBL's stance on school desegregation for the international human rights community, which many MBL members see as a potential ally in the fight for black liberation.¹⁶ Through the lens of Critical Race Theory, I argue that international human rights bodies are effectively supporting a white-supremacist narrative on the path to educational equality. As a result, they are undermining the agency of black-led organizations to define what an "equal" education should be.

1.3 Why the Movement for Black Lives Matters

As the Movement for Black Lives becomes a more established and influential force in civil society, scholars bear responsibility for correcting misconceptions about it and, more broadly, for clarifying our understanding of contemporary black activists' views on equality and self-determination. Too often, social scientists presume that equality goes hand in hand with assimilation into traditional power structures.¹⁷ This prejudice is apparent in college access research grounded in diversity numbers, or in policy evaluations that prioritize standardized test scores.¹⁸ The Civil Rights Movement placed assimilation at

¹⁶ McHarris, "interview;" Ransby, "interview;" Movement for Black Lives, "About Us."

¹⁷ Donna Mertens, *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods*. (California: Sage publications, 2014), 81-82, 323; Linda Darling-Hammond "Want to Close the Achievement Gap? Close the Teaching Gap." *American Educator* 38, no. 4 (2015): 14-18.

¹⁸ Elizabeth Peterson, et al., "Teachers' Explicit Expectations and Implicit Prejudiced Attitudes to Educational Achievement: Relations with Student Achievement and the Ethnic Achievement Gap," *Learning and Instruction* 42 (2016): 123-125; Patricia Gurin, et al., "Diversity and higher education: Theory and Impact on Educational Outcomes." *Harvard Educational Review* 72, no. 3 (2002): 330-333.

the center of most of its education policy demands.¹⁹ But my data shows that today's movement is different.

"Black Lives Matter" is a broad message endorsed by many Democratic Party liberals, if only superficially. Important civil society actors like the Ford Foundation have committed more than \$100 million to support organizations that are advancing the Movement for Black Lives' platform demands.²⁰ It is my hope that this study will be a tool for scholars on educational policy to better understand—and ultimately engage with—the Movement for Black Lives and its affiliated organizations. Given that this three-year-old coalition is still in its organizational infancy, any scholarship making an honest attempt to understand its education policy demands will help to frame how the world perceives the group going forward.

By more deeply explaining the MBL's goals, and how this young activist cohort defines human rights, we will be better able to contribute to the study of equity and access in our nation's schools. We will be better able to use an international human rights perspective to understand the needs of black people in the United States. Moreover, we will be better equipped to answer an urgent question: Who should decide how public schools are run? In a time of growing resegregation and sharp divisions over what to do about it, engaging critically with the Movement for Black Lives becomes even more vital.

¹⁹ Jerome Culp, "Black People in White Face: Assimilation, Culture, and the Brown Case." *Wm. & Mary L. Rev.* 36 (1994): 676.

²⁰ "Why Black Lives Matter in Philanthropy," Equals Change Blog, The Ford Foundation, last modified July 19, 2016, <https://www.fordfoundation.org/ideas/equals-change-blog/posts/why-black-lives-matter-to-philanthropy>; "Black Lives Matter to Raise \$100 Million to Back Agenda," Chronicle of Philanthropy, last modified August 10, 2016, <https://www.philanthropy.com/article/Black-Lives-Matter-Aims-to/237424>.

1.4 Methodology

The first step in explaining the departure from the integrationism that propelled the Civil Rights Movement is to understand how civil rights organizations actually approached this issue during the era of *Brown*. There is abundant scholarship on the history of *Brown's* litigation, its legal implications, and its success as a driver of educational equality.²¹ Until recently, however, little research has focused on clashing stances toward school integration in black civil society during the civil rights period.²² My review of anti-desegregation attitudes during the Civil Rights Movement will be informed by substantive archival research to determine whether public school desegregation was in fact universally embraced within the Civil Rights Movement.

After providing this historical context, I will probe the current policy demands of the Movement for Black Lives. My analysis will draw on interviews with Movement leaders

²¹ Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York: Vintage, 2011); Waldo Martin, *Brown v. Board of Education: A Brief History with Documents* (United Kingdom: Macmillan, 1998); David Garrow, "Hopelessly Hollow History: Revisionist Devaluing of Brown v. Board of Education," *Virginia Law Review* 80, no. 1 (1994): 151-160; Kris Gutierrez, et al., "Script, Counterscript, and Underlife in the Classroom: James Brown versus Brown v. Board of Education," *Harvard Educational Review* 65, no. 3 (1995): 445-472; Kenneth Wong, and Anna Nicotera, "Brown v. Board of Education and the Coleman Report: Social Science Research and the Debate on Educational Equality," *Peabody Journal of Education* 79, no. 2 (2004): 122-135.

²² Yolanda Sealy-Ruiz and Perry Greene. "Popular Visual Images and the (Mis) Reading of Black Male Youth: A Case for Racial Literacy in Urban Preservice Teacher Education," *Teaching Education* 26, no. 1 (2015): 62; Sonya Douglass Horsford, and Diana D'Amico. "The Past as More Than Prologue: A Call for Historical Research," *International Journal of Educational Management* 29, no. 7 (2015): 863-865; Linda Tillman, "(Un) Intended Consequences? The Impact of the Brown v. Board of Education Decision on the Employment Status of Black Educators," *Education and Urban Society* 36, no. 3 (2004): 280-303.

who co-authored the umbrella group's education policy platform and demands.²³ These interviews will reveal how the MBL's constituent groups prioritize education policies. More important, they will serve to explain particular attitudes toward school integration, which are insufficiently addressed in the written platform. Beyond conveying the diversity of opinion on education policy within the Movement, these interviews will delineate theoretical and historical influences on the politics of organizations within the MBL.

Other interviews were conducted with activist members of NGOs that are stakeholders in the MBL's education policy platform, including an educational equity advocate who leads the work on school desegregation within the New York Civil Liberties Union. Specifically, I will seek to define how these individuals and organizations perceive the Civil Rights Movement's legacy around issues of school desegregation and educational equity.

Much of my inquiry will center on how activists within the MBL view individual and group rights, and how their strategies for equality in education align with or diverge from *Brown*. Among the questions I posed:

- Where do these activists land on the critical question of how best to achieve equality for black public school students?
- How do they define equality in education?
- Does *Brown* continue to hold any relevance, or do these organizations reject it *in toto*?

²³ The MBL leaders interviewed for this thesis were: Thenjiwe McHarris, Barbara Ransby, Hiram Rivera, Jonathan Stith, and Neva Walker. Rivera, Stith, and Walker were the primary authors of the education component of the MBL platform. McHarris and Ransby both participated in its authorship through their help developing a framework for the entire MBL platform.

- If they reject it, what mechanism for educational equality would they choose in its place?

1.5 Critical Race Theory and School Desegregation

Critical Race Theory (CRT) offers valuable insights on race as a construct and on black people's evolving perspectives on identity and structural racism. CRT developed out of Critical Legal Studies as a method to question some of the perceived gains of the Civil Rights Movement.²⁴ While many of the most well-known and important civil rights organizations sought social equality through access to spaces and resources that had been denied to black people by law, the MBL prioritizes self-determination and community control as the essential tools for realizing black human rights in the United States.²⁵ Complemented by a historical review of black-led social movements, CRT's critique adds to an understanding of why the Civil Rights Movement and the Movement for Black Lives, though fighting broadly for the same rights, have conceptualized those rights so differently.

As Critical Race Theory is applied to research on educational equality, Decuir and Dixson argue that it is rooted in five tenets:

Racism is permanent. Racism has always played a fundamental role in the sorting of resources and opportunity in the United States. Critical race theorists argue that racism is so normal, and so deeply engrained in every aspect of our lives, that it is often invisible.²⁶

²⁴ Kimberlé Crenshaw, *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 63.

²⁵ Martin Marger, "Social Movement Organizations and Response to Environmental Change: The NAACP, 1960-1973," *Social Problems* 32, no. 1 (1984): 16-17.

²⁶ Jessica DeCuir, and Adrienne Dixson, "So When It Comes Out, They Aren't That Surprised That It Is There: Using Critical Race Theory as a Tool of Analysis of Race and Racism in Education," *Educational Researcher* 33, no. 5 (2004): 27.

They challenge the approach of litigators, whose focus on individual rights in *Brown* ignored the structural racism that transcends the law.²⁷ For example, in the North, which never had *de jure* segregation, racially identifiable schools are more prevalent today than those identifiable by socioeconomic status.²⁸

Counter-storytelling. Moving, beyond the perspectives of those atop the racial hierarchy, critical race theorists use the first-hand experiences of black people to challenge perspectives of racial dominance.²⁹ By allowing victims of racism to tell their stories through their own use of language, CRT liberates perspectives that are typically constrained by hegemony. This thesis gives movement leaders a voice to address the needs of black students from the perspective of liberation, rather than assimilation—a crucial element in understanding why the MBL rejects school desegregation in apparent contradiction to decades of data on educational equality. Several interview subjects pointed to desegregation as serving the needs of American exceptionalism over those of black families and communities.³⁰ As Hiram Rivera put it, “There has been an intentional whitewashing of the civil rights movement and its leaders.”³¹ MBL leaders repeatedly

²⁷ Crenshaw, *Critical Race Theory*, 14-15, 49-50.

²⁸ Martin Carnoy, and Emma García, "Five Key Trends in US Student Performance. Progress by Blacks and Hispanics, the Takeoff of Asians, the Stall of Non-English Speakers, the Persistence of Socioeconomic Gaps, and the Damaging Effect of Highly Segregated Schools." *Economic Policy Institute* (January, 2017): 17, <https://www.epi.org/publication/five-key-trends-in-u-s-student-performance-progress-by-blacks-and-hispanics-the-takeoff-of-asians-the-stall-of-non-english-speakers-the-persistence-of-socioeconomic-gaps-and-the-damaging-effect>.

²⁹ DeCuir and Dixon, “Using Critical Race Theory,” 27.

³⁰ Ransby, “Interview;” Rivera, “Interview;” Stith, “Interview.”

³¹ Rivera, “Interview.”

voiced resentment over this perceived one-sidedness in the telling of the history of school desegregation.

Whiteness is property. Harris' theory of whiteness-as-property argues that U.S. laws grant benefits to citizens for no reason other than that they are white.³² For example, federal law once affirmed that black people were inferior to white people, and therefore could not own property or pursue public office. While this law is no longer on the books, another troubling notion has taken its place: that race doesn't matter. According to CRT, even if U.S. schools were to be desegregated and everyone received the same material resources, there would still be stubborn, residual, and intractable inequality. Whiteness bestows privilege that eludes those who cannot own it.

A critique of liberalism. Brown failed as a silver bullet for desegregation, according to Lani Guinier, because it was grounded in self-serving liberal politics. She states, "The lawyers' assumption and its corollary remedial emphasis were limited by the nature of their allies who wanted to do good without sacrificing any of their own privileges, believing integration was possible without significant resource redistribution."³³ Though many liberals today consider their politics aligned with the Movement for Black Lives, a deeper inspection reveals a yawning gap between the two groups, especially regarding education.

In this context, liberalism protects the status quo by deferring to a racial paradigm that privileges whiteness.³⁴ Liberal white elitism has obscured how segregation has damaged not only black students, but many white students as well, especially after these

³² Gloria Ladson-Billings, and William Tate, "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education," *Teachers College Record* 97, no. 1 (2016): 62.

³³ Guinier, "Racial Liberalism to Racial Literacy," 99.

³⁴ Ladson-Billings, "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education," 62.

students came of age and moved into a segregated work force.³⁵ As Guinier explains, “[T]he psychology of segregation did not affect blacks alone; it convinced working-class whites that their interests lay in white solidarity rather than collective cross-racial mobilization around economic interests.”³⁶ Leaders in the Movement for Black Lives expressed broad concern that the liberal critique has undermined or even precluded the potential for unity between working-class white people and black-led movements.³⁷ More pointedly, critical race theorists like Guinier criticize *Brown’s* ACLU litigators for focusing too narrowly on the impact of segregation on the black psyche.³⁸ She explains, “Racial liberals stressed the damaging effects of segregation on black personality development to secure legal victory as well as white middle-class sympathy.”³⁹ The hope embodied in *Brown* was that white middle-class values would buoy black achievement. “Racial liberals” failed to consider the potential gains from integrated schools for white children and society as a whole. While white liberal parents prized diversity, according to CRT scholars, they emphasized equity and opportunity for black and Latin students—not the value of integration for their own children.⁴⁰

³⁵ Guinier, “Racial Liberalism to Racial Literacy,” 96.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Rivera, “Interview;” Ransby, “Interview;” Stith, “Interview.”

³⁸ The Warren court concluded in May 17, 1954, that, ““To separate them [black children in grade and high schools] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely to ever be undone.” (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954))

³⁹ Guiner, “Racial Liberalism to Racial Literacy,” 95.

⁴⁰ Derrick Bell, *The Derrick Bell Reader* (New York: NYU Press, 2005), 272; Charles Willie, *The Ivory and Ebony Towers* (Maryland: DC Heath, 1981), 27.

Interest convergence. Critical race theorists identify an interest convergence at the center of *Brown*.⁴¹ “[R]ather than serving as a solution to social inequity,” Derrick Bell proposes, “school desegregation has been promoted only in ways that advantage whites.”⁴² Bell’s analysis lies at the heart of much of the cynicism within MBL over the ability of mostly white schools to offer an equal education to black students.

Bell posits that *Brown*’s litigation was successful not because of any moral stance by the Supreme Court, but because it represented a brief moment in the United States when the interests of white elites converged with the interest of black people.⁴³ According to interest convergence theory, *Brown* was propelled by a political need for the U.S. to confront anti-black racism, a focal point of international human rights groups’ concerns from the 1920s through the 1950s.⁴⁴ Lani Guinier points out that the U.S. Supreme Court “gave its imprimatur to the desegregation of public schools to add legitimacy to the U.S. struggle against communism.”⁴⁵ The Soviet Union harped on Jim Crow in the South to undermine the notion of American exceptionalism⁴⁶ and to serve USSR interests in its Cold

⁴¹Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical race theory: An introduction*, (New York: NYU Press, 2017), 24.

⁴² Gloria Ladson-Billings, "Just What is Critical Race Theory and What's it Doing in a Nice Field Like Education," in *The Routledge Falmer Reader in Multicultural Education* (New York: Routledge Press, 2004), 63.

⁴³ Derrick Bell, *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 69, 190.

⁴⁴ Owen Dwyer, "Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement: Place, Memory, and Conflict." *The Professional Geographer* 52, no. 4 (2000): 668.

⁴⁵ Guinier, "From Racial Liberalism," 94.

War competition with the U.S. in Africa and Asia and in the anti-colonial movements of that day.⁴⁷

The Soviets invested significant funds to recruit world-famous black leaders like Paul Robeson and Langston Hughes to the ideological fight against Western capitalism.⁴⁸ As early as 1929, after returning from a visit to the Soviet Union, the black poet Claude McKay wrote, "If the exploited poor whites of the South could ever transform themselves into making common cause with the persecuted and plundered Negroes, the situation would be very similar to that of Soviet Russia today."⁴⁹ Based on Bell's interest convergence premise, the fear of black civil society aligning with the Soviet Union became a catalyst for *Brown's* acceptance.

1.5.1 What *Brown* Left Out

The *Brown*-era approach to desegregation presented a dilemma for black Americans, who sought self-determination even while acknowledging the need for access to opportunities and resources to succeed. Challenging the narrow goals of school desegregation, CRT scholars argue for racial literacy, racial realism, racial reconstruction, and racial reconciliation.⁵⁰ Scholars argue that students who experience racial integration on these terms will be better equipped to challenge racist assumptions.⁵¹ Additionally, they

⁴⁶ Meredith Roman, *Opposing Jim Crow: African Americans and the Soviet Indictment of US Racism, 1928-1937* (Nebraska: U. of Nebraska Press, 2012), 68-69, 147-150.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 126.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 136.

⁴⁹ Claude McKay, "Soviet Russia and the Negro." *Crisis* 27, no. 64 (1923): 321.

⁵⁰ Sonya Douglass Horsford, *Learning in a Burning House: Educational Inequality, Ideology, and (Dis) Integration*. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2011), 566.

⁵¹ Lawrence Blum, *High Schools, Race, and America's Future: What Students Can Teach Us about Morality, Diversity, and Community*, (Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press, 2012), 17-24, 247-248; Willie, *Ivory and Ebony Towers*, 27-30.

will be more likely to value the experience of people from other cultures, and to identify the pathologies that link specific behaviors, qualities, or skills to different hues of skin. Finally, these students will tend to live more integrated lives after their formal education is completed.⁵² Some CRT scholars see integration as a potential benefit to the fight against racism. But the CRT discourse has been generally critical of the position that school integration benefits black Americans.

In *The Ivory and Ebony Tower*, Charles Willie asserts that the pathological elitism bred in white students—“a defect in their education”⁵³—was left unaddressed by *Brown*. He elaborates, “By not experiencing minority status[,] whites have not had the opportunity to erase from their minds for all times the myth of the inherent superiority of all whites, articles of faith that still persist in white-dominated schools, agencies, and other institutions.”⁵⁴

As scholars have noted, the focus on individuals and their constitutional rights have contributed to the evolution and ascendance of colorblind education policies, now the norm among reformers: “*Brown’s* holding became the gold standard for defining the terms of formal equality: treating individuals differently based on the color of their skin was

⁵²Elizabeth Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013), 127; Blum, *High Schools, Race, and America's Future*, 29-30; Amy Stuart Wells, *Both Sides Now The Story of School Desegregations Graduates*, (California: University of California Press, 2009), 8; Willie, *Ivory and Ebony Towers*, 33.

⁵³*Ibid*, 27.

⁵⁴*Ibid*, 28.

constitutionally wrong.”⁵⁵ As a result, *Brown’s* fight for legal equality did not extend to equity.⁵⁶

Beginning in the 1970s, as the U.S. Supreme Court swung to the right, principles affirmed in *Brown* were distorted to advance the myth of colorblindness and equate race-conscious government decisions to promote integration “with the evils of de jure segregation.”⁵⁷ The Court’s shift effectively eliminated lawyers’ ability to use the 14th Amendment (for equal protection under the law) to challenge segregation within public schools, leaving them with the First Amendment as their primary constitutional weapon. In *The Miner’s Canary*, Guinier and Torres state, “The discourse of colorblindness focuses on managing the appearance of formal equality without worrying overmuch about the consequences of real-world inequality.”⁵⁸ The shift to colorblind policies has made *Brown* mostly ineffective as a tool for school desegregation, and the target of criticism from Critical Race Theory scholars and black activists alike.

The shift in attitudes toward desegregation is especially clear in the divergent views of today’s black leaders. Over the last five years, the U.S. has witnessed a new wave of political activism, led by young black activists demanding fundamental change in every aspect of American life.⁵⁹ Their felt need for agency may be a reaction to the realities of

⁵⁵Guinier, “Racial Liberalism to Racial Literacy,” 93.

⁵⁶ Bell, *Silent Covenants*, 4.

⁵⁷ Guinier, “Racial Liberalism to Racial Literacy,” 96.

⁵⁸ Gerald Torres, and Lani Guinier, *The Miner’s Canary: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy*. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009), 33.

⁵⁹ The core groups fighting for this change are: Black Alliance for Just Immigration, Black Youth Project 100, Project South, Southerners On New Ground, Philadelphia Student Union,

desegregation under *Brown*, which prized assimilation over community control.⁶⁰ As far back as 2004, Guinier said, “There is an eerie nostalgia for the feeling of community that was destroyed post-*Brown*.”⁶¹ Where liberal supporters of *Brown* tout its effectiveness in boosting college enrollment and financial success for black graduates of desegregated schools, the MBL confronts the near-annihilation of the black teaching profession in the post-*Brown* era, a lack of culturally relevant curricula, and the pervasive racist violence directed at black students in U.S. schools.

1.5.2 Social Science and Education Policy on Desegregation

Researchers have looked to the 1970s and early 1980s, the period when public school desegregation reached its modern apex and the black-white achievement gap closed more rapidly than in any other period in U.S. history.⁶² There are strong and established links between successful school desegregation and a narrowing of racial achievement gaps.⁶³ Black students at integrated schools are less likely to drop out,⁶⁴ score higher on

Alliance for Educational Justice, Black Lives Matter Network, Dream Defenders, Baltimore Bloc, Freedom Inc., Organization for Black Struggle, BlackBird, Highlander Research and Education Center, Million Hoodies Movement for Justice, The National Conference of Black Lawyers, Black Women’s Blueprint, Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, SpiritHouse Inc., The Worker’s Center for Racial Justice, The BlackOut Collective, Open Democracy Project at Crescent City Media Group, National Black Food and Justice Alliance, Coleman Advocats for Children and Youth, Dignity and Power Now, Center for Media Justice, Environmental Justice Advocates of Minnesota, Blacks in Green, and Mothers Against Police Brutality (“About Us,” Movement for Black Lives).

⁶⁰ Culp, “Black People in White Face,” 676-678.

⁶¹ Guinier, “Racial Liberalism to Racial Literacy,” 97.

⁶² Linda Darling-Hammond, “Restoring our schools,” *The Nation* 290, no. 23 (September, 2010):16-17.

⁶³ “The Benefits of Socioeconomically and Racially Integrated Schools and Classrooms,” Facts: School Integration, The Century Foundation, last modified February 10, 2016,

their SATs,⁶⁵ and are more likely to enroll in college.⁶⁶ Moreover, there is no correlation between gains made by black students in integrated schools and any decline in scores, graduation rates, or college enrollment for their white classmates.⁶⁷

In his research on the long-term impact of desegregation on individual children, Rucker Johnson found that black students who experienced desegregation remedies between the 1960s and 1980s on average fared better than counterparts who attended segregated schools.⁶⁸ For every year black students attended an integrated school, according to his data, their likelihood of graduating rose by two percentage points.⁶⁹ Over the longer term, Johnson found a 30 percent increase in annual earnings, a significant increase in “occupational attainment,” superior health outcomes, and a lower likelihood of incarceration.⁷⁰

According to a 2011 analysis of correlations between academic achievement and racial demographics, achievement for both black and white students was lower in racially identifiable “black” schools than in identifiable “white” schools.⁷¹ The study also showed that the black-white achievement gap was more pronounced among students in “black”

<https://tcf.org/content/facts/the-benefits-of-socioeconomically-and-racially-integrated-schools-and-classrooms>.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Rucker Johnson, “Long-Run Impacts of School Desegregation & School Quality on Adult Attainments,” No. w16664. *National Bureau of Economic Research*, (January, 2011), 17.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 4, 33.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 20.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 2, 8, 22.

⁷¹ George Bohrnstedt, et al., “School Composition and the Black-White Achievement Gap,” NCES 2015-018.” *National Center for Education Statistics* (June, 2015), 4.

schools.⁷² Gary Orfield believes that the resegregation of U.S. public schools has greatly limited the country's ability to close the achievement gap.⁷³

But correlation is not strictly causation, and the data points to additional factors in the achievement gap: socioeconomic conditions, parents' educational attainment, early childhood educational opportunities, student behaviors, teacher quality, and school discipline.⁷⁴ As Lee notes, "The sheer number of factors reflects the complexity of studying racial and ethnic achievement gaps."⁷⁵ More recently, Richard Rothstein has pointed to a range of impediments to school success and narrowing the achievement gap, from low-income student populations and deficient healthcare to biased assessments, counterproductive school goals (especially in No Child Left Behind), and the pervasive under-funding of public schools.⁷⁶

Further, while social scientists mostly agree about the benefits of race-based school desegregation, our society's ability to achieve substantially diverse schools to deliver these gains is a hotly contested issue.⁷⁷ Kahlenberg agrees that racial desegregation benefits all

⁷² Ibid, 4.

⁷³ Gary Orfield, et al., "The Resurgence of School Segregation," *Educational Leadership* 60, no. 4 (January, 2003): 16-20.

⁷⁴ David Grissmer, Ann Flanagan, and Stephanie Williamson. "Why Did the Black-White Score Gap Narrow in the 1970s and 1980s?" *The Black-White Test Score Gap* (1998): 46.

⁷⁵Jaekyung Lee, "Racial and Ethnic Achievement Gap Trends: Reversing the Progress Toward Equity?" *Educational Researcher* 31, no. 1 (2002): 6.

⁷⁶ Richard Rothstein, *Class and Schools*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 17-18.

⁷⁷ Richard Kahlenberg, "From All Walks of Life: New Hope for School Integration." *American Educator* 36, no. 4 (2013): 2; Richard Kahlenberg, "Socioeconomic School Integration," *Poverty and Race* 10, no. 5, (September/October, 2001): 1-4; Gary Orfield, "Response [to Kahlenberg]," *Poverty and Race* 10, no. 5, (September/October, 2001): 5; Theodore Shaw, et al., "Response [to Kahlenberg]," *Poverty and Race* 10, no. 6, (November/December, 2001): 1-10.

students when implemented correctly.⁷⁸ But in his view, U.S. legal prohibitions make it nearly impossible to effectively desegregate schools by race.⁷⁹ In a move to bypass race-based models, Kahlenberg proposes that public school districts use race-neutral approaches like socioeconomic-based student assignment plans to increase diversity.⁸⁰ While some districts have successfully used these plans to maintain post-civil-rights-era desegregation, Rothstein, Orfield, and Theodore Shaw point to a constellation of potential problems in relying on economic class as a proxy for race.⁸¹ Shaw takes this position a step further in claiming that “the core of the school integration issue, whether it is defined by race or by class, is white racism directed at people of African descent.”⁸² If race is left out of the conversation, and race-neutral approaches persist, Shaw fears that we will be left with a deeply segregated society lacking the will or ability to address the black-white achievement gap.⁸³

For this thesis, the most critical deficiency of this debate is its failure to engage leaders of the Movement for Black Lives, the nation’s largest and most influential black-led coalition of activist organizations. A number leaders within the MBL were critical of what has been described as the “bubble” of academic discourse on black success in education.⁸⁴ Despite the ample evidence that integration promotes academic success for black students, the MBL has rejected desegregation as the road toward educational equality. Instead, it

⁷⁸ Kahlenberg, “From All Walks,” 3, 5-7.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 3.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 4.

⁸¹Richard Rothstein, “Socioeconomic School Integration is a Worthy Goal, but Racial Segregation Presents Added Challenges,” (Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, 2014), 2.

⁸²Shaw, “Response,” 1.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴ McHarris, “Interview;” Rivera, “Interview;” Walker, “Interview.”

points to the lack of community control in schools as the essential factor in determining racial inequality in schools.⁸⁵

⁸⁵Movement for Black Lives, “Platform.”

Chapter 2:

Historical Analysis of Attitudes Toward School Desegregation

Throughout my interviews with leaders of the Movement for Black Lives, I found repeated challenges to mainstream representations of the civil rights stance toward school integration in both academic literature and in the media.⁸⁶ Leaders within the movement point to a fundamental disagreement over what the function of education should be for black students. According to the MBL, education should serve to liberate black students in the U.S. from the lingering bondage of racism.⁸⁷ To that end, they are demanding community control, more black teachers, and revised curricula in all public schools to teach U.S. history—and particularly the history of slavery, black activism, and the civil rights movement—in a way that no longer places white Americans’ experience at the center.⁸⁸

Jonathan Stith, national coordinator for The Alliance for Educational Justice and a co-author of the Movement for Black Lives’ education platform, said, “If I could go back and flip education history, it would be [in its] understanding of historical desegregation. In the

⁸⁶ Linda Darling-Hammond, “From ‘Separate but Equal’ to ‘No Child Left Behind,’” in *Thinking about Schools: A Foundations of Education Reader*, ed. Eleanor Blair Hilty (Colorado: West View Press, 2011), 419; Erica Frankenberg, et al., “Choice Without Equity: Charter School Segregation and the Need for Civil Rights Standards,” *Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles* (January, 2010): 4; Gary Orfield, and Chungmei Lee, “Historic Reversals, Accelerating Resegregation, and the Need for New Integration Strategies,” *Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles* (August, 2007): 3-5, 45-49; Nancy Denton, “The Persistence of Segregation: Links Between Residential Segregation and School Segregation,” *Minnesota Law Review* 80, no. 4 (April, 1996): 795.

⁸⁷ Walker, “Interview;” Stith, “Interview;” McHarris, “Interview;” Movement for Black Lives, “Community Control.”

⁸⁸ Ibid; Rivera, “Interview;” Ransby, “Interview.”

retelling, that stuff has gotten so one-sided.”⁸⁹ Hiram Rivera, former executive director of the Philadelphia Student Union and another co-author, added, “There has been an intentional whitewashing of the civil rights movement and its leaders.”⁹⁰ Rivera argues that historians have generally put forward an ahistorical narrative on civil rights, especially where struggles for educational equality were concerned.⁹¹ These young activists are calling for a more thorough examination of how leaders within the Civil Rights Movement changed their stance on school integration from *Brown’s* litigation between 1954 and the mid-to-late 1960s. To address their criticism, I will attempt to explain how, and if, Rivera’s claims hold true in a review of contemporaneous speeches and written works on school desegregation from the period in question. Then we can more accurately identify any shift in today’s black leaders’ perception of how the needs of black students can best be addressed.

2.1 The Years of School Integration Consensus

While the struggle for school integration began well before *Brown*, hope exploded within the black community after the litigation’s success. Black-run newspapers like Harlem’s *Amsterdam News* declared that *Brown* “will alleviate troubles in many other fields.”⁹² The *Chicago Defender* went so far as to suggest that *Brown* meant “the beginning of the end of the dual society in American life and the system ... of segregation which

⁸⁹ Stith, “Interview.”

⁹⁰ Rivera, “Interview.”

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² James Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education and the Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), xiv.

supports it.”⁹³ In a letter to a friend, Ralph Ellison wrote, “The court has found in our favor and recognized our human psychological complexity and citizenship and another battle of the Civil War has been won.”⁹⁴ Contemporaneous popular support for *Brown* in black civil society is well documented during its litigation and through the years of implementation that followed.⁹⁵

Generally speaking, civil rights groups of the 1950s and early 1960s were in consensus that public school integration was essential to the fight for equality for black citizens of the United States. Bayard Rustin, a close advisor to King, once said, “I come to the conclusion that we need quality schools, and we need integrated schools, because I don’t believe it’s possible for people to live together in a ... democratic society and be separated in going to school.”⁹⁶ In a 1954 interview, James Farmer, a preeminent civil rights leader and co-founder of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), said that the organization was based on a “rejection, a repudiation of segregation.”⁹⁷

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Martha Nussbaum, “Invisibility and Recognition: Sophocles' Philoctetes and Ellison's Invisible Man,” *Philosophy and Literature* 23, no. 2, (October, 1999): 257.

⁹⁵ Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education*, 2-4; Kluger, *Simple Justice*, 96-97, 478; Guinier, “From Racial Liberalism to Racial Literacy,” 92-93; Philip Kurland, “Brown v. Board of Education was the Beginning: School Desegregation Cases in the United States Supreme Court: 1954-1979,” *Washington University Law Quarterly* 1979, no. 2 (Spring, 1979): 311-313.

⁹⁶ Bayard Rustin, “An Oral History with Bayard Rustin (Tape 1),” interview by Robert Warren Penn, *RWP Archive*, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, 1964, audio, 29:45, <https://whospeaks.library.vanderbilt.edu/interview/bayard-rustin>.

⁹⁷ James Farmer, “An Oral History with James Farmer (Tape 1),” interview by Robert Warren Penn, *RPW Archive*, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, 1964, audio, 31:36, <https://whospeaks.library.vanderbilt.edu/interview/james-farmer-jr>.

Ella Baker, who began her civil rights career as a secretary with the NAACP, was “the midwife of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)”⁹⁸ and an important organizer in support of school integration. After *Brown*, as civil rights protests began to escalate in the South, Baker joined Rustin and A. Philip Randolph, the most important black labor leader of the period, to form the group In Friendship. It was a pivotal moment for the Civil Rights Movement.⁹⁹ As Baker described it, In Friendship’s mission was to support the Montgomery bus boycott as well as the NAACP’s efforts “to organize parents of Negro children to file petitions with the boards of education regarding the integration of the school system.”¹⁰⁰ It was envisioned as the Southern counterpart to the NAACP, whose leadership was mostly based in the North. In 1957, the group raised funds to establish the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.¹⁰¹

Throughout the 1950s, the struggle for school integration was a core issue for black activist organizations and a crucial theater for the development of the most prominent groups and leaders of the decade. In 1958 and again in 1959, King served as an honorary chairman of important marches for school desegregation, a reflection of the broad consensus in favor of *Brown*.¹⁰² In preparation for the 1959 march in New York City, a support petition was circulated by King, Randolph, Daisy Bates (president of the Arkansas

⁹⁸ Barbara Ransby, “Black Lives Matter is Democracy in Action,” *New York Times*, October 21, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/21/opinion/sunday/black-lives-matter-leadership.html>.

⁹⁹ Ella Baker, “An Oral History with Ella Baker (Tape 1),” interview by John Britton, *Ralph J. Bunche Oral History Collection*, Howard University, Washington, D.C., June, 1968, transcript, <http://www.crmvet.org/nars/baker68.htm>.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Glenn Eskew, *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle* (North Carolina: UNC Press, 1997), 27.

¹⁰² Sekou Franklin, “Black Youth Activism and the Reconstruction of America: Leaders, Organizations, and Tactics in the Twentieth Century and Beyond,” *Black History Bulletin* 79, no. 1 (Spring, 2016): 7.

NAACP), Harry Belafonte, Ralph Bunche (the human rights advocate, UN official, and Nobel Peace Prize laureate), Don Murray (the first black student at University of Maryland Law School), Sidney Poitier, Jackie Robinson, Roy Wilkins (executive secretary of the NAACP), and a number of white and Latino leaders.¹⁰³ The petition read:

Whereas equal rights for all is the central moral issue of our time; ...

Whereas the effort to maintain segregated schools threatens the destruction of our free public school system and embarrasses our professions of democracy around the world; Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the president and congress of the United States to put into effect an executive and legislative program which will insure the orderly and speedy integration of schools throughout the United States.¹⁰⁴

As this document affirms, school integration efforts in the years following *Brown* were widely supported by the Civil Rights Movement's preeminent groups and coalitions. The two marches that followed, King said, would "do much to give courage, support and encouragement to our beleaguered children and adults in the south. Simultaneously it will have a profound moral effect upon the nation and world opinion."¹⁰⁵ For King, the

¹⁰³ Martin Luther King, "The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume IV: Symbol of the Movement (January 1957–December 1958)" ed. Clayborne Carson, (California: University of California Press, 1997), 514.

¹⁰⁴ Martin Luther King, et al., "Petition for Youth March for Integrated Schools," petition, 1958, 2, http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_youth_march_for_integrated_schools_25_october_1958_and_18_april_1959.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

integration of public schools was more than an organizing strategy or a policy reform. It was a moral imperative.

In April 1960, at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, Ella Baker coordinated the Youth Leadership Meeting in partnership with King and other SCLC leaders. Their stated purpose was to evaluate the student movement and coordinate school integration efforts. Out of the conference came a call for a new body to lead student work on desegregation efforts in the South: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, to be known widely as SNCC. It would prove to be one of the most influential bodies in the history of the Civil Rights Movement.¹⁰⁶

In Baker's summary of the conference for *The Southern Patriot*, published in May 1960, she wrote, "Whatever may be the difference in approach to their goal, the Negro and white students, North and South, are seeking to rid America of the scourge of racial segregation and discrimination – not only at lunch counters, but in every aspect of life."¹⁰⁷ The most important organizations of the period agreed that integration—including the integration of public schools—was of paramount importance for the struggle for black human rights. These civil rights groups believed that public school integration was a public good and an essential component of educational equality. But they also held varied perspectives on the benefits, strategies, and goals related to integration. While the NAACP

¹⁰⁶ Southern Youth Leadership Conference, "Recommendations of the Findings and Recommendations Committee," memo, 2, http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/primarydocuments/Recommendations_Committee.

¹⁰⁷ Ella Baker, "Bigger than a Hamburger," *Southern Patriot*, April, 1960, 4, <http://hutchinscenter.fas.harvard.edu/sites/all/files/Bigger%20than%20a%20Hamburger%20-%20Ella%20Baker.pdf>.

focused on legal wins, SNCC concentrated on grassroots organizing.¹⁰⁸ The SCLC directed high-profile struggles to push the federal government to act on important civil rights legislation.¹⁰⁹

It should be noted that some of the best-known civil rights activists were critical of placing integration at the center of the struggle for human rights. Rosa Parks said, “I have never been what you would call just an integrationist Integrating that bus wouldn’t mean more equality. Even when there was segregation there was plenty of integration in the south, but it was for the benefit and convenience of the white person, not us.”¹¹⁰ At the heart of Parks’ assertion was a fear that Derrick Bell later configured into the interest convergence theory: that white Americans’ support of policies ostensibly directed at serving the needs of black people would actually serve the dominant society instead. Nonetheless, through the early 1960s, most civil rights organizations supported the fight for public school integration. Even Malcolm X, who was previously aligned with the separatist views of the Nation of Islam, had joined the struggle for school integration by 1965.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ “Oldest and Boldest,” NAACP, last modified 2018, <http://www.naacp.org/oldest-and-boldest>; Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (Massachusetts: South End Press, 1965), 1-15, 120, 174, 216.

¹⁰⁹ Mark Tushnet, *The NAACP’s Legal Strategy Against Segregated Education, 1925-1950*, (North Carolina: UNC Press, 1987), 61; Aldon Morris, “Black Southern Student Sit-In Movement: An Analysis of Internal Organization. *American Sociological Review* 46, no. 6 (December, 1981): 745-746.

¹¹⁰ Jeanne Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks*. (Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2013), 70.

¹¹¹ Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, “1965: Malcolm X on Front Page Challenge,” Interview. *Front Page Challenge*, CBC, 1965, video, 7:48, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7IJ7npTYrU>.

2.2 A Challenge from Black Power

As a new generation of civil rights leaders emerged, the consensus on school integration began to splinter. By the mid-1960s, both SNCC and CORE were pushing the Civil Rights Movement in the direction of Black Power—a radical change of course. One could argue that CORE, in particular, had been built on the school integration struggle. In 1958, it released a pamphlet calling for a multiracial movement to end segregation. As CORE saw it, mixed groups of black and white people have “something especially valuable to contribute, it is a live demonstration that integration works.”¹¹² But by 1965, CORE’s views on education had veered away from the language of integration and assimilation. Instead, it called for a model of education that foreshadowed the separatist, community control demands of the Movement for Black Lives. In a 1965 “Summer Project Orientation Manual,” the organization stated:

CORE wishes to destroy the traditional concept of education.... Education must instead involve an attempt to question an established pattern of life, the wish to destroy the role which the Negro has traditionally played in order to survive in the white man’s world. Up until the present, education for a Negro has really meant learning how to play a role, learning how to get along with “Mr. Charlie.” It is now the time for this role to be disregarded.¹¹³

¹¹² The Congress of Racial Equality, “A First Step Toward School Integration,” pamphlet, 3, http://crdl.usg.edu/export/html/tnn/npldl/crdl_tnn_npldl_cre-school_deseg-a_first_step.html?Welcome.

¹¹³ Congress of Racial Equality, “CORE Summer Project Orientation – Educational Program Workshop,” Mississippi, (1958), 1. http://www.crmvet.org/docs/6506_core_summerorientation.pdf.

In 1966, facing pressure from a new cohort of militant black activists drawn to the politics of Black Power, James Farmer stepped down as national director of CORE.¹¹⁴ He was replaced by Black Power advocate Floyd McKissick, a militant anti-integration leader. McKissick had soured on desegregation after his daughters went to integrated schools “at a prolific price.... Patches cut out of their hair, pages torn out of books, water thrown on them in the dead of winter, ink all down the front of their dresses...”¹¹⁵ When school desegregation failed to create the equal society that was promised in the post-*Brown* era, it eroded the will of civil rights organizers to promote integration as an all-powerful solution.

In 1966, SNCC’s leadership changed as well. John Lewis was defeated in the group’s annual election and replaced as chairman by a dynamic young leader named Stokely Carmichael, an ideological father of Black Power.¹¹⁶ In his world-shaking piece, “What We Want,” Carmichael outlined the new direction of SNCC’s leadership and philosophy around integration and Black Power:

[Poverty] is what the white society does not wish to face; this is why that society prefers to talk about integration. But integration speaks not at all to the problem of poverty, only to the problem of blackness. Integration today means the man who “makes it,” leaving his black brothers behind in the ghetto as fast as his new sports car will take him. It has no relevance to the Harlem wino or to the cotton-picker

¹¹⁴ Special to the New York Times, “James Farmer Quits Core in Angola Feud,” *New York Times*, February 20, 1976, 48, <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/02/20/archives/james-farmer-quits-core-in-an-golafeud.html>.

¹¹⁵ Foon Rhee, *Visions, Illusions and Perceptions: The Story of Soul City*, (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1984), 4.

¹¹⁶ Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, “What’s Happening in SNCC?” *Miller Civil Rights Collection*, July, 1966.

http://crdl.usg.edu/export/html/usm/crmda/crdl_usm_crmda_mm236.html?Welcome.

making \$3 a day. As a lady I know in Alabama once said, “The food that Ralph Bunche eats doesn’t fill my stomach.”¹¹⁷

Ralph Bunche, an iconic emblem of the Civil Rights Movement’s old guard, was a staunch supporter of integration. Earlier he’d been labeled a hero by SNCC leaders like John Lewis. Carmichael’s stinging criticism of Bunche signaled a blunt rejection of assimilation in favor of separatism and Black Power. Carmichael continued:

Integration, moreover, speaks to the problem of blackness in a despicable way. As a goal, it has been based on complete acceptance of the fact that in order to have a decent house or education, blacks must move into a white neighborhood or send their children to a white school. This reinforces, among both black and white, the idea that “white” is automatically better and “black” is by definition inferior. This is why integration is a subterfuge for the maintenance of white supremacy. It allows the nation to focus on a handful of southern children who get into white schools, at great price, and to ignore the 94% who are left behind in unimproved all-black schools. Such situations will not change until black people have more power – to control their own school boards, in this case. Then Negroes become equal in a way that means something, and integration ceases to be a one-way street.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Stokely Carmichael, “Power and Racism: What We Want,” *The Black Scholar* 27, no. 3, (1997): 55.

¹¹⁸ Carmichael, “Power and Racism,” 55-56.

While there had been previous criticisms around the strategy and philosophy for desegregating U.S. public schools, SNCC was the first major organization to articulate a pathway toward educational equality with separation as a core principle.¹¹⁹ The group's move to Black Power drew intense criticism from many of the more influential black-led civil rights organizations. Roy Wilkins, leader of the NAACP, took a hard stance against Carmichael, SNCC's militant opposition to the Vietnam War, and the use of the already famous slogan. He wrote:

A few months ago the slogan 'Black Power' was introduced into the civil rights struggle. Since then it has created alarm and confusion among Americans of all races and has made it plain that civil rights groups differ not only in strategy and tactics *but also in objectives* [emphasis added]... Our objective now, as then, is the full participation of Negro Americans, without discrimination in all phases of American life.¹²⁰

The NAACP's opposition to the younger, more militant wing of the movement anticipated a rift that swiftly surfaced in other civil rights groups. Martin Luther King was shared the NAACP's concern that Black Power would ultimately divide the movement and the country: "I have... stated in many places and many times that connotations of violence

¹¹⁹ Guinier, "Racial Liberalism to Racial Literacy," 92-98; Charise Cheney, "Blacks on Brown: Intra-Community Debates over School Desegregation in Topeka, Kansas, 1941-1955," *Western Historical Quarterly* 42, no. 4, (Winter, 2011): 481-482.

¹²⁰ Roy Wilkins, "NAACP memo on Black Power," *NAACP Special Contribution Fund*. 1966, http://www.crmvet.org/docs/6610_naACP_blackpower.pdf.

and separatism attached to the 'Black Power' slogan must be resolutely opposed by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference."¹²¹

But while it may be tempting to see the mid-1960s Civil Rights Movement as two conflicting camps, the reality was more complex. Carmichael's characterization as a separatist was often overstated and oversimplified. He wrote, "En route to integration, the Negro community needs to develop greater independence – a chance to run its own affairs and not cave in whenever 'the man' barks ... or so it seems to me, and to most of the knowledgeable people with whom I talked in Mississippi."¹²² Carmichael's politics were a critique of the practice of integration within a white-dominated society, not an irrevocable assault on the possibilities of future integration.¹²³

King's primary disagreement with Carmichael was over the question of nonviolence; King believed that civil rights activists could not possibly win a violent struggle.¹²⁴ But the two leaders also demonstrated significant areas of agreement. King supported SNCC's stance against the Vietnam War, an issue that divided the Civil Rights Movement in the late

¹²¹ Martin Luther King, "Statement by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.," memo, 1966, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/statement-negros-political-and-economic-power>.

¹²² Carmichael, "Power and Racism," 57.

¹²³ Carmichael also wrote in *What We Want*, "There is a vital job to be done among poor whites. We hope to see, eventually, a coalition between poor blacks and poor whites. That is the only coalition which seems acceptable to us, and we see such a coalition as the major internal instruments of change in American society. SNCC has tried several times to organize poor whites; we are trying again now, with an initial training program in Tennessee," 59.

¹²⁴ Martin Luther King, "MLK Speaks Out About Running For President, Stokely Carmichael and Vietnam," Unknown Source, video, 1967, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=snFlsgYtWY8>.

1960s.¹²⁵ Just a year after denouncing the implicit separatism of the Black Power “slogan,” he softened. In a 1967 television interview, when asked for his thoughts on Carmichael, King said:

We agree on some things. Some things we don't agree on. I'm sure we are in agreement on the war in Vietnam, we certainly want to see that war come to an end. And we are in agreement on the fact that Negroes are not free in the United States of America, and we must have a vibrant and dynamic movement alive at all times to make that freedom a reality. But there are other things that Mr. Carmichael would advocate that I would not advocate... Referring to 'black power,' I think there are some positives to that slogan. The psychological call to man, the need to amass political education. Economic power to reach our political goals.”¹²⁶

SNCC's move away from integrationist politics was most clearly described by its leader Jim Forman: “[Integration] means moving Negroes into the mainstream of American life and its accepted value system. I reject this.”¹²⁷ According to a 1966 editorial by Anne Braden in *The Southern Patriot*,¹²⁸ most people in SNCC agreed with Forman: “What white

¹²⁵ For more on the inter-organizational conflicts regarding Vietnam: Steven Barkan, “Interorganizational Conflict in the Southern Civil Rights Movement,” *Sociological Inquiry*, 56, no. 2, (April, 1986): 190-194.

¹²⁶ King, “MLK Speaks Out.”

¹²⁷ Anne Braden, “SNCC Trends: Challenge to White America,” *The Southern Patriot*, May, 1966, http://crdl.usg.edu/export/html/usm/crmda/crdl_usm_crmda_mm246.html.

¹²⁸ The Southern Patriot was a left leaning periodical that had some of the most important coverage on Civil Rights during 50s and 60s. It's run ended in 1973.

“The Southern Patriot Newspaper Index,” *Civil Rights Research*, Valdosta State University, last modified January, 2015, <http://archives.valdosta.edu/research/civilrightssearch.shtml>.

people must realize is that integration has been presented as a matter of Negroes being 'integrated' (or absorbed) into white society. On the face of it this says plainly that what is white is better."¹²⁹ A similar criticism would be made half a century later by the Movement for Black Lives, which views desegregation as a form of assimilation, rather than an intrinsic benefit to black people in the U.S.¹³⁰

As Braden acknowledged, however, much of the Civil Rights Movement rejected Forman's critique. These mainline activists took the implications of *integration* literally: "to make whole' – that is, to make whole the human race...."¹³¹ Through the end of the 1960s, the NAACP and SCLC continued to back desegregation as a necessary step toward educational equality. School integration was a core component of King's last great project, the Poor People's Campaign, which began less than a month after his death in 1968.¹³²

Between *Brown's* initial litigation in 1954 and King's death in 1968, the Civil Rights Movement is often assumed to have fully and unanimously endorsed the principle that "separate cannot be equal." With a deeper look, we have found a more complicated story. While the goal of school integration remained a powerful rallying cry throughout this period, attitudes in some groups had shifted significantly by the late 1960s. We cannot forget that many of the most important civil right organizations developed in response to the perceived need to integrate U.S. schools in the South. Yet only six years after its founding as an instrument of integration, it would be SNCC that led the shift toward Black Power, community control, and self-determination.

¹²⁹ Braden, "SNCC Trends."

¹³⁰ Rivera, "Interview;" Stith, "Interview;" Walker, "Interview."

¹³¹ Braden, "SNCC Trends."

¹³² "Poor People's Campaign," Digital Collections: Civil Rights, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Art and Artifacts Division, The New York Public Library, 1968, <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/c4f61c60-6be8-0135-3b33-3fcb9e513b8b>

Chapter 3:

Contemporary Attitudes on School Desegregation

The Movement for Black Lives' critique of the value of school desegregation lies in stubborn opposition to the current vogue in both government and academia. For many top U.S. officials, the terms "diversity" and "inclusion," alongside the values of *Brown*, remain the standard for framing the needs and responsibilities of our educational system. In 2016, President Barack Obama's administration pledged \$120 million in federal aid to promote public school integration.¹³³ While these federal grants were geared toward integrating children from different socioeconomic classes, race was an important underlying factor.¹³⁴ John King, briefly Obama's secretary of education, was an outspoken advocate for school desegregation. In a critique of growing resegregation within the U.S., he said, "We have not made as much progress on this front as we could have and should have."¹³⁵ Even Donald Trump's education secretary, Betsy DeVos, while far to the right of King, claims to favor diversity and inclusion in U.S. schools.¹³⁶

¹³³ The White House, *President Obama's 2017 Budget Seeks to Expand Educational Opportunity for All Students*, press release February 9, 2016, <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/president-obamas-2017-budget-seeks-expand-educational-opportunity-all-students>.

¹³⁵ John King, interview by The Century Foundation, *Taking Action on School Diversity: Q&A with John King*, April 19, 2016, <https://tcf.org/content/event/taking-action-on-school-diversity>.

¹³⁶ The Department of Education, *U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos Addresses Full Staff*, press release, February 8, 2017, <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-secretary-education-betsy-devos-addresses-full-staff>.

Against a backdrop of increasingly segregated schools, we have seen a resurgence of desegregation research and advocacy. Many of the most cited researchers on school equity and civil rights have concluded that school integration is of profound importance to black students' achievement and opportunity. They have rigorously debated how best to desegregate U.S. schools. Their prescriptions include SES-based desegregation, charters and magnet programs, viable redistricting, and busing from suburban school districts.¹³⁷ Regardless of their feasibility on a national scale, desegregation strategies are back at the forefront in research to address the gap between poor and rich—or black/brown and white—in public schools.¹³⁸

Contemporary arguments for desegregation have been strengthened since *Brown*. While integration advocates in the 1950s were forced to rely on anecdotal evidence to appeal to the moral leanings of the Supreme Court, today's researchers can cite decades of data measuring the impact of exposure to integrated schools on black students.¹³⁹ A recent

¹³⁷ Orfield, et al., "Historic Reversals," 26; Richard Kahlenberg, *The Future of School Integration: Socioeconomic Diversity as an Education Reform Strategy*, (New York: The Century Foundation, 2002), 21-23; Jennifer Hochschild, "Can We Desegregate Public Schools and Subsidized Housing? Lessons From the Sorry History of Yonkers, New York," *Changing Urban Education*, (August, 1997): 2-3, <https://scholar.harvard.edu/jlhochschild/publications/can-we-desegregate-public-schools-and-subsidized-housing-lessons-sorry-his>; Charles Clotfelter, et al., "Do School Accountability Systems Make It More Difficult For Low-Performing Schools to Attract and Retain High-Quality Teachers?" *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 23, no. 2 (March, 2004): 252-255; Sean Reardon, et al., "Implications of Income-Based School Assignment Policies for Racial School Segregation," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 28, no. 1, (Spring, 2006): 50-51, 74-75.

¹³⁸ Kerrin Wolf, "Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow: School Desegregation and Resegregation in Charlotte," edited by Roslyn Arlin Mickelson, et al., (Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press, 2015), 734-736; Gary Orfield, et al., "Demographic Transformation in a Policy Vacuum: The Changing Face of US Metropolitan Society and Challenges for Public Schools," *The Educational Forum* 81, no. 2, (March, 2017): 193-195.

¹³⁹ William Trent, "Outcomes of School Desegregation: Findings from Longitudinal Research," *Journal of Negro Education* (Summer, 1997): 255-257; Jonathan Guryan,

study reported, “A major irony is that we have been abandoning desegregation efforts as the evidence for its value becomes more and more powerful.”¹⁴⁰ Orfield, Kucsera, and Siegel-Hawley point to an “overwhelming amount of larger database studies that show racial segregation is increasing, that it is harmful, and that racial integration of schools has measurable positive effects on things like drop-out rates, academic performance, and lifetime income.”¹⁴¹ According to this view, more than 50 years of research and empirical experience points the way for more successful integration initiatives in the future.

But despite this chorus of pro-desegregation voices, a growing number of leaders within black civil society are skeptical that school integration is necessary, positive, or possible.¹⁴² Researchers may assume that their criteria for educational success are shared by coalitions like the Movement for Black Lives. Based on interviews with the Movement’s leaders on education policy, however, they would be wrong. With many of the most significant black-led activist organizations—the endorsing groups within the MBL—unsupportive of implementing desegregation, it is unlikely that any large-scale initiative will garner the necessary support on the ground to be successful.

To be fair, this is more than an issue of researchers lacking a finger on the pulse of the largest black-led coalition of the day. The historical pull of the half-century-old struggle for school desegregation remains powerful, despite limited adoption and recent retrenchment. Even among well-informed advocates for educational equity, many assume

"Desegregation and Black Dropout Rates," *American Economic Review* 94, no. 4 (2004): 919-943; Frankenberg, et al., "Increasingly Segregated and Unequal Schools as Courts Reverse Policy," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 50, no. 5 (October, 2014): 718-734.

¹⁴⁰ Gary Orfield, et al., "E Pluribus'... Separation: Deepening Double Segregation for More Students," *Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles*, (September, 2012): 6.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² McHarris, "Interview;" Ransby, "Interview;" Rivera, "Interview;" Stith, "Interview;" Walker, "Interview."

that the old alliance that valued integration over community control still holds near-universal sway. Rashida Richardson, the legislative council on civil rights for The New York Civil Liberties Union, said, “You can almost trace all inequities in society back to school desegregation....I don’t think that the Movement for Black Lives doesn’t care about desegregation.”¹⁴³ As the data makes clear, however, the Movement for Black Lives explicitly rejects the premise that black students benefit from school integration.¹⁴⁴

While many advocates frame school desegregation as the root cause of inequality in schools and throughout our society, leaders within MBL disagree.¹⁴⁵ Hiram Rivera argues, “Talking about desegregation of schools is just putting a Band-Aid on [a] gaping wound....”¹⁴⁶ While advocates like Richardson frame desegregation as, “the core issue,”¹⁴⁷ the MBL argues that even if every public school in the U.S. was desegregated today, black students would still suffer from a lack of cultural recognition in schools. Further, the organization argues that desegregation does nothing to advance what they see as schools’ fundamental role for black students: the liberation of black people from racist oppression.¹⁴⁸

Neva Walker, executive director of Coleman Advocates and a co-author of the MBL’s education platform, put it most clearly: “I do not support desegregation.”¹⁴⁹ From my interviews with the platform’s five co-authors, a consensus emerged: School desegregation does not significantly challenge the massive inequality between black and white students in

¹⁴³ Richardson, “Interview.”

¹⁴⁴ Walker, “Interview.”

¹⁴⁵ Richardson, “Interview.”

¹⁴⁶ Rivera, “Interview.”

¹⁴⁷ Richardson, “Interview.”

¹⁴⁸ McHarris, “Interview.” Rivera, “Interview;” Walker, “Interview.”

¹⁴⁹ Walker, “Interview.”

U.S. public schools. These activist leaders propose a different focus in the fight for equitable education, a focus on resources, community control, and black representation in the teaching force, alongside a rejection of racist standards and punitive school policing.¹⁵⁰

3.1 The Resources Gap

These leaders' most commonly voiced concern was the lack of a fair share of resources in predominantly black schools.¹⁵¹ In their critiques of arguments for integration, most argued that the purported benefits of desegregation may in fact stem from better-resourced schools. Leaders within MBL have argued that the historical fight for resources has been lost in a revisionist retelling of school desegregation struggles.¹⁵² According to the standard *Brown* narrative, Hiram Rivera said, "our forefathers and our grandparents ... worked hard and died for [desegregation]. That's the narrative spun to us."¹⁵³ But MBL's leaders reject this version of history. Stith asserts that Civil Rights Movement activists "knew that the only way the state was going to give them money [was] if we held these white kids hostage. Completely different orientation than, 'We want to put our kids into white schools because they'll do better.'"¹⁵⁴ Movement leaders argue that many black communities supported desegregation remedies because it was the only way for them to gain essential resources. Jonathan Stith believes the school integration struggle "was

¹⁵⁰ McHarris, "Interview;" Ransby, "Interview;" Rivera, "Interview;" Stith, "Interview;" Walker, "Interview."

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Rivera, "Interview."

¹⁵⁴ Stith, "Interview."

originally about money, and about resources,”¹⁵⁵ a pragmatic response to the funding discrepancies between majority black and predominantly white school districts.¹⁵⁶

At the heart of school funding inequalities are separate and unequal school districts. On average, 48 percent of public school funding comes from local property taxes.¹⁵⁷ By comparison, the federal government funds less than 9 percent of local school budgets.¹⁵⁸ High-poverty districts spend on average nearly 16 percent less per student than low-poverty districts.¹⁵⁹ The result is an embedded system of gross inequality along socioeconomic and racial lines, and one that supports the claim of critical race theorists that the United States is “a nation conceived and built on property rights.”¹⁶⁰ In poor areas, where students have the greatest need for public school resources, schools are wildly underfunded. The negative effect for poor black and Latino people in the U.S. is compounded by the fact that they are more likely to attend racially homogenous schools with a higher density of poverty.¹⁶¹ The end result is effectively a dual public school system,

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Rivera, “Interview;” Stith, “Interview;” Walker, “Interview.”

¹⁵⁷ “Public School Revenue Sources,” *The Condition of Education*, National Center for Education Statistics, last modified March, 2017, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cma.asp.

¹⁵⁸ “The Federal Role in Education,” Overview, U.S. Department of Education, last modified May, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/fed/role.html>.

¹⁵⁹ “Secretary Duncan, Urban League President Morial to Spotlight States Where Education Funding Shortchanges Low-Income, Minority Students,” Media, U.S. Department of Education, last modified, March 13, 2017, <https://www.ed.gov/news/media-advisories/secretary-duncan-urban-league-president-morial-spotlight-states-where-education-funding-shortchanges-low-income-minority-students>.

¹⁶⁰ Ladson-Billings, “Just What is Critical Race Theory,” 57.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

a sphere where school finance reformers have abandoned the goal of equality and generally settle for separate-but-adequate.¹⁶²

In some respects, Movement for Black Lives leaders are in accord with Richard Kahlenberg, who claims that his research proves that integration by socioeconomic class is of primary importance.¹⁶³ Rivera argues, “You can mix students all you want, but if you take some poor white students from the hills of West Virginia, and you stick them in a classroom in North Philadelphia, not much is going to change.”¹⁶⁴ Most MBL leaders maintain that many purported benefits of school integration actually reflect the extra resources that middle-class white parents bring to a school community.¹⁶⁵ Thenjiwe McHarris, former campaigner at Amnesty International, co-founder of Team Blackbird and a member of Movement for Black Lives’ policy table, contends that the answer for black families searching for better resourced schools can’t be, “Put them with kids who have more, then some of that will rub off on them. There’s a deeper issue in our country.”¹⁶⁶ That deeper issue, according to McHarris and other MBL leaders, is the systemic and institutional racism that blocks our society from delivering an equitable education to black students.

The question of desegregation is conspicuous by its absence from MBL’s education platform, a reflection of the leaders’ conviction that the black/white achievement gap is primarily a resources gap. If black school children had access to equivalent modern buildings, science labs, materials, and support staff, their argument goes, the children

¹⁶² Michael Addonizio, “From Fiscal Equity to Educational Adequacy: Lessons from Michigan,” *Journal of Education Finance* 28, no. 4 (Spring, 2003): 457-458; William Clune, “The Shift from Equity to Adequacy in School Finance,” *Educational Policy* 8, no. 4 (December 1, 1994): 376-378.

¹⁶³ Kahlenberg, “From All Walks,” 2.

¹⁶⁴ Rivera, 2017.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid; Stith, “Interview;” Walker “Interview.”

¹⁶⁶ McHarris, “Interview.”

would perform at least as well as they would in integrated schools.¹⁶⁷ As Rivera explained, “The issue [of integration] never really came up ... for a number of reasons. One, we recognize the problem with schools is not that there are not enough white kids in the classroom. It’s that there [is] intentional disinvestment and [an] intentional and definitely racist attack on public education.”¹⁶⁸ It’s not going too far to say that the Movement for Black Lives views desegregation as a peripheral issue in the face of the urgent funding crisis facing many black schools and districts.¹⁶⁹

While persuasive research claiming measurable benefits from desegregated schools is not hard to find, many within the Movement are not sold on the premise of these studies. Neva Walker argues that studies that attempt to measure equity in schools often begin with the assumption that black schools can’t be as successful as white schools.¹⁷⁰ In most interviews, Movement leaders attributed this problematic belief to researchers’ limited understanding of the history of the school integration movement.

3.2 The Model Black School

MBL leaders reject the idea that all-black schools are part of the achievement gap problem. As Rivera explained, “For the majority of the group working on the educational platform, the idea of having all-black schools wasn’t a bad one....The problem was the intentional disinvestment, abuse, and inequity.”¹⁷¹ As an alternative to integration, the MBL sees enormous potential in what many have described as the “model black school.”

¹⁶⁷ Rivera, “Interview.”

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Rivera, “Interview;” Stith, “Interview;” Walker, “Interview.”

¹⁷⁰ Walker, “Interview.”

¹⁷¹ Rivera, “Interview.”

Recently, a new wave of historians has attempted to remedy what the MBL perceives as pro-integration one-sidedness in the civil rights story's retelling. Charise Cheney recently published a groundbreaking report that complicates the historical attitudes of black communities in cities where desegregation was first proposed. In *Blacks on Brown: Intra-Community Debates over School Desegregation in Topeka, Kansas*, Cheney finds intense opposition in the birthplace of *Brown* to the idea that desegregation was an essential battle for black Americans.¹⁷² Local opposition to the NAACP's work in Topeka shows that support for school desegregation was not universally embraced by black communities where the debate raged.

Before *Brown*, it's a fact that most black communities, especially in the South, sent their children to poorly resourced schools. But for black parents and community leaders who perceived their schools to be well-resourced and high-functioning, school integration was not seen as an automatic improvement. In Topeka during the 1940s and 1950s, the black community enjoyed what they believed to be separate but equal schools. The values of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the 1896 Supreme Court ruling that affirmed that separate-but-equal facilities were constitutional, were thought to have worked in the community's favor. Topeka's black schools were seen as exceptional. Cheney writes, "Washington Elementary was even rumored to have more teachers with master's degrees than any other school in Topeka. So when the local NAACP began organizing against school segregation in the 1940s, some black parents and educators—legitimately concerned that destroying all-black schools would compromise the quality of black education—joined forces to undermine the

¹⁷² Charise Cheney, "Blacks on Brown: Intra-Community Debates Over School Desegregation in Topeka, Kansas, 1941–1955," *Western Historical Quarterly*, 42, no. 4, (2011): 481-500.

organization's efforts."¹⁷³ Some black Topekans were terrified by the prospect of moving their children out of black schools because they understood the scrutiny and racism that would come with desegregation.

St. Louis offers a similar story of black parents and teachers opposing school desegregation remedies in favor of well-resourced, all-black schools. As noted by historian Jessica McCulley, "Those who were victims of the inferior education system in the South or other parts of the country were strong supporters of the *Brown* case in most instances. However, there were members of the pre-*Brown* black society who managed to build separate-but-equal communities, some of which were the most successful at maintaining a separate-but-equal society with equivalent but segregated public school systems."¹⁷⁴ Though the notion of "separate but equal" schools was explicitly rejected by *Brown* and would be considered heretical by most of the old Civil Rights Movement, they apparently existed and even flourished.

We can find parallel examples of contemporary black communities resisting school desegregation where they perceive their schools as high-functioning and well-resourced.¹⁷⁵ Neva Walker argues, "We have black charters that are doing well, why can't we do that in public schools?" She argues that one reason all-black schools fare so poorly is that black communities lack "economically diverse communities." A body of research confirms that

¹⁷³ Cheney, "Blacks on Brown," 482.

¹⁷⁴ Jessica McCulley, "Black Resistance to School Desegregation in St. Louis During the Brown Era," *The Lindenwood Confluence Journal*, (Fall/Winter 2010), 28-37.

¹⁷⁵ Brentin Mock, "Don't Force Us To Give Up Our School: A Mississippi Town is Being Told to Integrate," *The Atlantic*, May 27, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/05/why-a-mississippi-city-is-just-now-being-forced-to-desegregate-its-schools/483249>.

most black communities lag significantly behind their white counterparts in both median household wealth and property values.¹⁷⁶ In the South before *Brown*, as Hiram Rivera notes, black professionals were often stuck in black neighborhoods because of redlining and restrictive covenants. He noted, “So black shopkeepers, black janitors, and black sanitation workers lived next door to these black professionals. And their children went to the same schools”—a great benefit to lower-income black students.¹⁷⁷ Rivera added, “Segregation is just a way of tiptoeing around the issue of the inherent racism in schools. It’s a distraction that moves us away from the issue of class.”¹⁷⁸ A number of prominent scholars support this position, arguing that class diversity is more important than racial diversity in closing the racial achievement gap in schools.¹⁷⁹

Derrick Bell warns that “the danger with our commitment to the principle of racial equality is that it leads us to confuse tactics with principles. The principle of gaining equal educational opportunity for black children was and is right. But our difficulties came when we viewed racial balance and busing as the only means of achieving that goal.”¹⁸⁰ Based on my interviews, the Movement for Black Lives does not subscribe to any inherent moral value in racial mixing in schools. Instead, it favors strategies that do not rely on white middle-class Americans to improve the lives of black students.

¹⁷⁶ Richard Rothstein, “The Racial Achievement Gap, Segregated Schools, and Segregated Neighborhoods: A Constitutional Insult,” *Race and Social Problems* 6, no. 4, (December, 2014): 21-30.

¹⁷⁷ Rivera, “Interview.”

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ Sean Reardon, et al., “Brown Fades: The End of Court-Ordered School Desegregation and the Resegregation of American Public Schools,” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 31, no. 4, (Fall, 2012): 882, 900-902; Arian Owens, et al., “Income Segregation Between Schools and School Districts,” *American Educational Research Journal* 53, no. 4, (August, 2016): 1162-1165.

¹⁸⁰ Bell, *Silent Covenants*, 120.

At the historical Little Rock Central High School in Arkansas, Jonathan Stith argues, “black kids had to walk past a well-resourced school, in their own neighborhood, every day, just to go to a segregated black school. That’s not a question of integration, that’s a question of power: ‘The school is in my community, so my kids should be able to go to the school, and we should have control over it.’”¹⁸¹ That reality, he says, has been “lost in history and replaced by a few kids marching into the schools.” Moreover, he argues, historians have ignored the toll on the black students who inaugurated Little Rock’s integration effort, and on the city’s black community as a whole, ranging from mental health issues to widespread layoffs of black teachers.¹⁸²

Derrick Bell, who litigated a number of desegregation cases while working as a civil rights lawyer, would have agreed at least partially with Stith’s assessment. He wrote, “Regrettably, I paid far less attention to all those students less able to overcome the hostility and the sense of alienation they faced in mainly white schools. They fared poorly or dropped out of school. Truly these were the real victims of the great school desegregation campaign.”¹⁸³ In an interview, Willie “Chuck” Jenkins, the plaintiff in the famous *Jenkins v. Bogalusa School Board* case in Louisiana, described how integrating an all-white school left him alienated from his school and his community: “I caught a lot of flak from the black community, because they used to say, ‘Oh, you think you’re something because you’re going to the white school.’ They didn’t know I was catching holy hell at the white school. I had no friends, you know. So it was just always a conflict.” Though similar experiences were common throughout the history of school desegregation, they are rarely

¹⁸² Stith, “Interview.”

¹⁸³ Bell, *Silent Covenants*, 121.

discussed in research that chooses to emphasize the benefits of mixing classrooms by race.¹⁸⁴

Leaders within the Movement for Black Lives challenge the perceived need to depend on affluent white environments for black children to receive adequate educational resources. Walker believes that black parents feel coerced into sending their children to integrated or predominantly white schools because they have no other way to secure a quality education, or because their neighborhood schools are failing. This prevailing dynamic, she says, suggests that “a handful of black students can go and do well, but we will leave the masses to suffer and end up in the incarceration system.”¹⁸⁵ Walker’s sharp critique of liberalism echoes that of critical race theorists, who see liberals prizing economic opportunity for a chosen few over the guarantee of social and economic equality for all black people. Their perspective not illogically leads them to question desegregation’s ability to create positive change for masses of black students.

A number of younger black activists and scholars fear that the glamorization of *Brown* may have undermined the struggle for equitable resources and community control.¹⁸⁶ As, Rosiek and Krinslow, have warned, “The brief moment in which the ideal of racial desegregation held sway in U.S. schools should not be romanticized. U.S. schools never achieved complete building-level racial integration in its schools and there was never a significant national effort to address classroom-level racial segregation within racially

¹⁸⁴“Civil Rights History Project. School Segregation and Integration,” School Segregation and Integration, Library of Congress, accessed October 22, 2017, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/civil-rights-history-project/articles-and-essays/school-segregation-and-integration>.

¹⁸⁵ Walker, “Interview.”

¹⁸⁶ McHarris, “Interview;” Rivera, “Interview;” Stith, “Interview.”

integrated schools.”¹⁸⁷ Further, a romanticized chronicle of racial desegregation generally excludes a near-forgotten history of a significant and suddenly imperiled sector of the black middle class: black teachers.

¹⁸⁷ Jerry Rosiek and Kathy Kinslow, *Resegregation as Curriculum: The Meaning of the New Racial Segregation in US Public Schools*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 153.

Chapter 4:

Brown v. Brownsville

At its core, Barbara Ransby said, the Movement for Black Lives is, “a fight for self-determination, community control, and political power.”¹⁸⁸ According to the principle of “community control,” black communities cannot determine their own future unless they are led and autonomously governed by black community members. For decades, the demand for more black teachers in black classrooms has been at the heart of the debate over community control. In developing the MBL’s education platform, the issue of racial integration surfaced only once: in a discussion about teachers. Hiram Rivera reported, “When we talked about [desegregation] inside the policy group, the mixing that we wanted to see was with the teachers.” It does little good, he said, to talk about “fair, equal classrooms” when only 2 or 3 percent of a school’s teaching staff is black. The responsibility for desegregating the teaching corps, he added, falls squarely on local teachers’ unions.¹⁸⁹

With hindsight, the 1968 Ocean Hill-Brownsville community control battle in two mainly black neighborhoods in Brooklyn, New York, could be seen to be as critical as *Brown* to the historic fight for school equity. An intense struggle between a community school board and the United Federation of Teachers led to what has been termed the most disruptive teachers’ strike in the city’s history.¹⁹⁰ A primarily black and Puerto Rican school board attempted to gain control over school curriculum and policies, instituting classes

¹⁸⁸ Ransby, “Interview.”

¹⁸⁹ Rivera, “Interview.”

¹⁹⁰ Jerald Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis*, (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2002), 82-84.

that addressed black culture and taught languages like Swahili.¹⁹¹ At the same time, the board claimed that the mainly Jewish teaching force was unable to adequately teach black students.¹⁹² When the board demanded more black and Puerto Rican teachers, it was met with intense opposition from the teachers' union.¹⁹³ Fifty years later, Hiram Rivera said, the Movement for Black Lives is attempting to pick up the Ocean Hill-Brownville mantle: "[B]lack students are not being given resources, their curriculum isn't culturally relevant, and the teachers they have are racists." The solution, he said, lies in community control of black neighborhood schools.¹⁹⁴

Neva Walker argues that much of the knowledge valued in schools overlooks the immense importance of black cultural representation: "There is so much richness in a black school, culturally, that gets overlooked."¹⁹⁵ Walker criticized the lack of studies on the impact of culturally responsive pedagogy.¹⁹⁶ One exception to this neglect is a significant uptick in research demonstrating the benefits of black teachers to black classrooms.¹⁹⁷ A recent study at Johns Hopkins University found that black boys who experience a black teacher between the third and fifth grades increase their chances of going to college by 29

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 67.

¹⁹² Ibid, 124-125.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 7-10, 116-118.

¹⁹⁴ Rivera, "Interview."

¹⁹⁵ Walker, "Interview."

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Richard Milner, "The Promise of Black teachers' Success with Black Students," *The Journal of Educational Foundations* 20, no. 3/4 (2006): 89-94; Douglas Downey and Shana Pribesh, "When Race Matters: Teachers' Evaluations of Students' Classroom Behavior," *Sociology of Education* 77, no. 4 (2004): 267-282; Marvin Lynn, "Critical Race Theory and the Perspectives of Black Men Teachers in the Los Angeles Public Schools." *Equity and Excellence in Education* 35, no. 2 (2002): 119-130; Uvanney Maylor, "'They Do Not Relate to Black People Like Us': Black Teachers as Role Models for Black Pupils," *Journal of Education Policy* 24, no. 1 (2009): 1-21.

percent—and are 39 percent less likely to drop out of high school.¹⁹⁸ The study concludes, “Black students matched to black teachers have been shown to have higher test scores, but we wanted to know if these student-teacher racial matches had longer lasting benefits. We found the answer is a resounding yes.”¹⁹⁹

This scholarship was well received by education journals and popular periodicals, notably in a review titled, “Black Teachers Matter. School Integration Doesn’t.”²⁰⁰ While evidence is abundant that school integration can narrow the black-white achievement gap, a growing number of educational equity advocates are citing diversity in the teaching profession as a more direct way of challenging racial inequities. The Movement for Black Lives is quick to point to data that shows the positive impact of black teachers on black students, even though much of this research remains grounded in narrow measures of achievement that leaders within the Movement reject.

4.1 White Supremacist Metrics and Narratives

One criticism made by every MBL leader I interviewed was that the accepted measures of student and school success are racist by their very nature. These activists voiced cynicism about any methodology that attempted to measure inequality and racism by how specific policies and settings affect the achievement gap or dropout rates. Thenjiwe McHarris argued, “We’ve been sold this idea that if we can pass this, or get this signed, we’ve reached a substantial milestone and victory for our people. But we’ve lost the

¹⁹⁸ Seth Gershenson, et al., “The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers,” (working paper, Institute of Labor Economics, 2017), 3, <http://ftp.iza.org/dp10630.pdf>.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 1-2.

²⁰⁰ Rafiq Kalam, “Black Teachers Matter. School Integration Doesn’t,” *Education Week*, May 10, 2017, <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2017/05/04/black-teachers-matter-school-integration-doesnt.html>.

capabilities to measure success in a way [that] helps the most marginalized people in our community.”²⁰¹ Legal wins (like *Brown*), McHarris says, are victories of assimilation that should not be allowed to marginalize what black communities determine to be an equal education for black students.

If the goal of education policy is to reduce the achievement gap, it is hard to ignore the wealth of data on the positive role desegregation can play when implemented well. But leaders in the Movement for Black Lives challenge some generally held conclusions from this data. The seemingly benign argument that more academically successful white students can drive stronger overall performance in mixed classrooms, Hiram Rivera says, can lead to the racist conclusion that white children “are just inherently smarter, and inherently have this drive for education, [so] they will be a positive role model for their black and brown peers.”²⁰² But if whiteness is property, as Critical Race Theory proposes, a cultural conversion toward whiteness—via proximity in integrated classrooms—cannot possibly address the deficiencies of blackness as perceived by white normative society. The desegregation “fix” denies the fact that black students can simulate whiteness, but never own it.

In general, leaders within the Movement voiced a concern that many arguments for desegregation reinforce a white-supremacist narrative on an alleged pathology within the black family, a position popularized in 1965 by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a sociologist then serving as Assistant Secretary of Labor under President Lyndon Johnson.²⁰³ According to Rivera, the desegregation movement continues to fuel a racist narrative of “a bankruptcy of

²⁰¹ McHarris, “Interview.”

²⁰² Rivera, “Interview.”

²⁰³ Daniel Moynihan, *Miles To Go: A Personal History of Social Policy*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), 222-224.

values and morals inside a black family.”²⁰⁴ This one-way notion—that white families have everything to give but little to gain through integrated schools—is prevalent in desegregation scholarship.²⁰⁵ A narrow focus on quantitative standards lies at the center of much of this research—an especially dangerous assumption in an era when the federal government has grown enamored with test-driven standards as the definitive measure of school success and student progress.²⁰⁶

From the start, advocates for integrated schools have emphasized the presumed benefits of desegregation for black students. In *Brown*, the Warren court determined that separate cannot be equal because it assumed that separate black schools would be worse. The decision argued, “Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children... A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn. Segregation with the sanction of law, therefore has a tendency to retard the educational and mental development of Negro children and to deprive them of some of the benefits they would receive in a racially integrated school system.”²⁰⁷ This assumption of inherent inferiority of black communities, schools, and students has sparked a rejection of *Brown’s* values by the Movement for Black Lives.

Throughout interviews with MBL leaders, one consistent critique emerged: the lack of research on how black students and culture can play a positive role in the lives of white

²⁰⁴ Rivera, “Interview.”

²⁰⁵ Kahlenberg, “From All Walks,” 3.

²⁰⁶ Sean Reardon, “The Widening Academic Achievement Gap Between the Rich and the Poor: New Evidence and Possible Explanations,” *Whither Opportunity* (2011): 91-92; Jaekyung Lee, “Racial and Ethnic Achievement Gap Trends: Reversing the Progress Toward Equity?” *Educational Researcher* 31, no. 1 (2002): 3-4, 12.

²⁰⁷ Justice Earl Warren, “Brown v. Board of Education,” *United States Reports* 347, (1954): 483.

people.²⁰⁸ Recent research has indeed shown that desegregated schools can benefit white students. Racially diverse classrooms lead white students to think about problems more broadly and to back up their arguments with more evidence.²⁰⁹ But rarely has this research acknowledged the inherent detriment of segregated, predominantly white schools: the anti-black racism that indoctrinates white children with a sense of racial superiority. Charles Willie argues, “The court did not recognize the sense of superiority on the part of white children as a defect in their education.”²¹⁰ For the Movement for Black Lives, a decline in anti-black racism is a more reliable measure of school success than testing-based achievement.

At the core of the MBL’s critique of school desegregation lies a distrust of an U.S. education system that has historically catered to the needs of middle-class white Americans at the expense of black students and communities. Neva Walker recounts her experience of going to a well-resourced, mostly white school in Minnesota, while her neighborhood friends attended an under-resourced, mostly black school. She sees little evidence that these inequities have been mitigated: “Even if we get equal schools in San Francisco, you’re still going to have parents on the West Side who have the means to buy the whole classroom laptops. So will Bayview students ever get that same chance?”²¹¹ Movement leaders suspect that white parents will continue to find advantages for their children even when public policies attempt to level the playing field. And when liberal

²⁰⁸ Rivera, “Interview;” Stith, “Interview;” Walker, “Interview.”

²⁰⁹ Angela Kupenda, “Simply Put: How Diversity Benefits Whites and How Whites Can Simply Benefit Diversity,” *Seattle Journal of Social Justice* 6 (2007): 649; Adam Galinsky, “Maximizing the Gains and Minimizing the Pains of Diversity: A Policy Perspective,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 10, no. 6 (2015): 742-748.

²¹⁰ Willie, *The Ivory and Ebony Towers*, 27.

²¹¹ Walker, “Interview.”

white parents send their children to racially mixed schools in black neighborhoods, Hiram Rivera noted, they either raise funds to subsidize the school's deficits or lobby the local school board for more resources, or both: "And so then what happens, the schools begin to 'improve.' And they tell us this myth that, 'Oh, it was because you mixed the school.' Well, no. What you brought was people with access." In this view, the impact of racial integration is often confused with the benefit of an infusion of more resources.²¹²

Another concern expressed by MBL leaders was the overt criminalization of black students in integrated schools—the "punishment gap." While it remains unclear whether integrated schools are more likely to discipline black students than segregated ones, there is no dispute that black students are disciplined at a far higher rate than white students in the U.S.²¹³

A movement as diverse as the Movement for Black Lives is bound to have disagreements on the value of desegregation. Thenjiwe McHarris, is more positive where *Brown* is concerned. Her organization, Blackbird, believes in school integration as a general principle, though it also points to an indisputable reality: that it has never been meaningfully implemented in the U.S.²¹⁴ But other leaders within the MBL have sharply turned away from the integrationist assumptions of most of civil society. They share profound doubts that integration could coexist with their core principles for community control. For a desegregation plan to do so, according to Jonathan Stith, it would need to advance "the fulfillment of the Black Panther Party political point number five on

²¹² Rivera, "Interview."

²¹³ Edward Morris, "The Punishment Gap: School Suspension and Racial Disparities in Achievement," *Social Problems* 63, no. 1, 68-72.

²¹⁴ Ibid; McHarris, "Interview."

education,”²¹⁵ which calls for teaching “the true nature of this decadent American society.”²¹⁶ He adds a caveat, however: “We don’t have sets of data that says teaching white kids the truth of their history is beneficial to them.”²¹⁷ Nor does it seem likely that our public school curricula will feature a thorough indictment of cultural decay within U.S. capitalism.

In general, the Movement appears to hold little hope that desegregation could be implemented in a way that would benefit black students. When asked what would be required to meet this goal, Jonathan Stith argued that it would “quite honestly take damn near a knife to the throat. If you understand Malcolm, who said, ‘Power concedes nothing without demand,’ then to me this is a power game. So black parents and black communities have to deal with political power, social power, economic power first, to get what we need and deserve.”²¹⁸ Stith echoes the calls for Black Power that fractured the Civil Rights Movement in the late 1960s. The MBL’s position on desegregation is a far cry from popular notions of what the black freedom movement in the U.S. has historically fought for. Yet its platform on education is in line with a long political tradition that chooses community control and separatism over school integration.

²¹⁵ Stith, “Interview.”

²¹⁶ The fifth point of the Black Panthers’ “Ten Point Program,” adopted in 1967, reads: “We Want Education For Our People That Exposes The True Nature of This Decadent American Society. We Want Education That Teaches Us Our True History And Our Role In The Present-Day Society.” (Seale, Bobby, *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton*, Black Classic Press, 1991, 67).

²¹⁷ Stith, “Interview.”

²¹⁸ Ibid.

4.2 Educational Equality as a Human Right

Despite the U.S. government's refusal to acknowledge a constitutional right to an equal education, the MBL's platform proposes that an equitable education for black students should be recognized as a fundamental human right. But while many in the international human rights community have argued that nations must provide an equal education to their citizens, based on international law,²¹⁹ they generally subscribe to the 1950s-era paradigm of school desegregation as the essential remedy.²²⁰ Even as support for desegregation has waned among black-led activist groups, the international human rights community has continued to push the narrative favored by moderate, aging civil rights organizations like the NAACP. It has generally failed to recognize the shift within black civil society from desegregation toward community control.

For example: In 2016, after a visit to the U.S., the United Nations working group of Experts on People of African Descent cited racial segregation as the most important factor in educational inequality. While the working group's analysis takes a more nuanced approach to this issue than the U.N. Universal Period Review has,²²¹ and even mentions the

²¹⁹ Krysten Urchick, "US Education Law: Is the Right to Education in the US in Compliance with International Human Rights Standards?" (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 2007), 19-26.

²²⁰ Kalina Arabadjieva, "Challenging the School Segregation of Roma Children in Central and Eastern Europe," *The International Journal of Human Rights* 20, no. 1 (2016): 33; "Human Rights Resources for Educators," Human Rights and Service Learning, Amnesty International, last modified May, 2007, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/pdfs/HumanRightsAndServiceLearningPt1.pdf>; "United Nations' Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, On the Conclusion of its Official Visit to USA," News and Events, United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, last modified January 29, 2016, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=17000>.

²²¹ General Assembly Universal Periodic Review, United States 2nd Session, Recommendations, A/HRC/30/12, May 12, 2015 https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/united_states/session_22_-

need for community control, it argues that the ultimate goal of educational reform is to accelerate “the process of desegregation.”²²²

In *Savages, Victims and Saviors: A Metaphor for Human Rights*, Makau Mutua writes, “The arrogant and biased rhetoric of the human rights movement prevents the movement from gaining cross-cultural legitimacy.”²²³ At the same time, however, the The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) contains language that could point the way to a fresh reconsideration of the desegregation debate. The ICCPR articulates the identical principles that the Movement for Black Lives seeks to address within its education platform. Article 1 affirms that, “All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”²²⁴ Article 3 binds state parties to promote the realization of the right of self-determination.²²⁵

Perhaps most interesting of all, for the purposes of this thesis, is Article 27, which states: “In those states in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.”²²⁶ If we accept that black Americans represent an ethnic minority that has developed its own cultural traditions in counterpoint to dominant,

_mai_2015/a_hrc_wg.6_22_usa_1_e.pdf. Accessed November 22, 2017, 8.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Makau Mutua, “Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights,” *Harvard International Law Journal* 42, no. 1, (Winter, 2001): 206.

²²⁴ “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,” Professional Interest, United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, United Nations, accessed October 24, 2017 <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

exclusionary, and racist white norms, it's not much of a stretch to suggest that this text supports community control over public schools in black neighborhoods.

Chapter 5:

Conclusion

How and why has the pendulum swung from the integrationism of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and early 1960s to the separatism of the current period within the Movement for Black Lives? Black-led activist groups today perceive public school desegregation as a failed reform centered in white supremacist norms. Beyond citing its historical and contemporary failures as public policy, they believe that desegregation cannot possibly achieve educational equality as long as it fails to confront the realities of structural racism against black people in the United States.

To further illuminate this question, the path forward may lie in exploring the complicated history of school desegregation within the black freedom struggle. Charise Cheney's award-winning study of the attitudes of black Topekans toward school desegregation, pre-*Brown*, has shed new light on the diversity of thought within the black community during the period.²²⁷ Historians like Cheney and Jessica McCulley, who wrote the invaluable history, "Black Resistance to School Desegregation in St. Louis During the Brown Era," provide a road map toward a more complete understanding of the intersection between educational equality and black self-determination.²²⁸

The development of Critical Race Theory as a methodological and analytical framework has given new critical life to examinations of historical civil rights policies. As CRT has become more accepted in mainstream scholarship, we have seen young black researchers like Sonya Douglass Horsford deploy its strategies to reorient the discussion

²²⁷ Cheney, "Blacks on Brown."

²²⁸ Jessica McCulley, "Black Resistance to School Desegregation in St. Louis During the Brown Era," (Thesis, University of Missouri, St. Louis, 2009).

around educational equality for black people in the U.S. Her empirical study on schools superintendents' attitudes toward the legacy of school desegregation properly complicates the discourse around the optimal approach for black schoolchildren.²²⁹

Given the recent swell of black activism, triggered by the shootings of unarmed black men by police, research in this area is being conducted in a period of growing awareness and discourse on anti-black racism in the U.S. International human rights organizations like Amnesty International have made some effort to support the MBL's work.²³⁰ But if civil society is to play a significant role in the liberation of black Americans, the ahistorical narrative that makes school desegregation an indisputable principle, to the exclusion of consideration of community control, must be put to rest.

²²⁹ Sonya Horsford, "Mixed Feelings About Mixed Schools: Superintendents on the Complex Legacy of School Desegregation," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 46, no. 3, (2010): 287-321.

²³⁰ "On the Streets of America: Human Rights Abuses in Ferguson," Amnesty International. Last modified October 24, 2014, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/reports/on-the-streets-of-america-human-rights-abuses-in-ferguson>.

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