# Dear Zora: A Letter to Zora Neale Hurston 50 Years After *Brown*

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This article reports on the extensive qualitative and quantitative findings of a multimethod participatory study designed to assess urban and suburban youths' experiences of racial/class justice or injustice in their schools and throughout the nation. Constructed as a letter to Zora Neale Hurston, who was immediately critical of the Brown decision in 1955, the article lays out the victories of Brown and the ongoing struggles, what we call "six degrees of segregation" that identify systematic policies that ensure an opportunity gap.

The article theorizes the academic, social and psychological consequences of persistent inequity on youth of color and White American youth—all adversely affected by systematic educational inequities that persist 50 years after Brown.

#### Dear Zora,

Sorry that it has taken so long to respond. Actually it's been 48 years. For the benefit of readers, we'll reprint your prophetic letter to the editor of the *Orlando Sentinel* and offer a rather lengthy response:

Editor: I promised God and some other responsible characters, including a bench of bishops, that I was not going to part my lips concerning the U.S. Supreme Court decision on ending segregation in the public schools of the South. But since a lot of time has passed and no one seems to touch on what to me appears to be the most important point in the hassle, I break my silence just this once. Consider me as just thinking out loud . . . .

I regard the ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court as insulting rather than honoring my race. Since the days of the never-to-be-sufficiently-deplored Reconstruction, there has been current the belief that there is no greater delight to Negroes' than physical association with whites. The doctrine of the white mare. Those familiar with the habits of mules are aware that any mule, if not restrained, will automatically follow a white mare. Dishonest mule traders made money out of this knowledge in the old days.

Lead a white mare along a country road and slyly open the gate and the mules in the lot would run out and follow this mare. This ruling being conceived and brought forth in a sly political medium with eyes on '56, and brought forth in the same spirit and for the same purpose, it is clear that they have taken the old notion to heart and acted upon it. It is a cunning opening of the barnyard gate with the white mare ambling past. We are expected to hasten pell-mell after her.

It is most astonishing that this should be tried just when the nation is exerting itself to shake off the evils of Communist penetration. It is to be recalled that Moscow, being made aware of this folk belief, made it the main plank in their campaign to win the American Negro from the 1900s on. It was the come-on stuff....

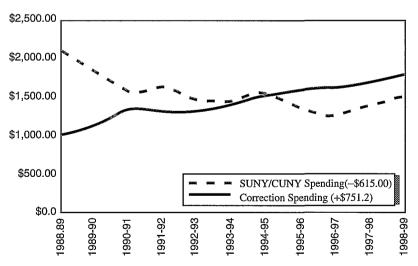
It is well known that I have no sympathy nor respect for the 'tragedy of color' school of thought among us, whose fountain-head is the pressure group concerned with this court ruling. I see no tragedy in being too dark to be invited to a white school social affair. The Supreme Court would have pleased me more if they had concerned themselves about enforcing the compulsory education provisions for Negroes in the South as is done for white children. .. Thems my sentiments and I am sticking by them. Growth from within. Ethical and cultural desegregation. It is a contradiction in terms to scream race pride and equality while at the same time spurning Negro teachers and self association. That old white mare business can go racking on down the road for all I care. Zora Neale Hurston, Eau Gallie, (August 11, 1955, Orlando Sentinel)

In 1955 you understood what few were willing to acknowledge; the relentless persistence of White privilege and the endurance of structures of oppression. More than that, you dared to speak aloud, in unpopular dialect, about the white mare that seduces with promises of equality, freedom and choice as it guarantees continued oppression and betrayal. As you suggest, promises of racial equality in public education in the United States have historically been covert operations that reproduce privilege. Nevertheless, we use this letter to argue, a bit, with your position; to suggest that the White mare is not, itself, integration, but racialized oppression; to distinguish between the spirit of *Brown*, embodied in social movement and the

law, and the implementation of *Brown* that was, as you forecast, a disappointment extracting much sacrifice from the African American community. And so in this piece, perhaps with the wisdom of hindsight, we view *Brown* with a DuBoisian dual consciousness: as a radical interruption of law and educational practice, subverted almost immediately by the white mare of persistent racism.<sup>4,5</sup>

Fast forward: Today, African American and Latino youth learn about the *Brown v. Board of Education* victory 50 years old as they daily confront largely segregated, underfunded schools (Orfield & Lee, 2004). High-stakes testing regimes proliferate, in the name of accountability, spiking drop out rates disproportionately for students of color and poverty. A publicly financed welcome mat for African American and Latino youth sits at the barbed-wire rim of America's prisons as college tuition rates rise, financial aid dries up and the promises of military life seduce those most vulnerable (Bloom, 2004; Fine, Torre, Boudin, Bowen, Clark, Hylton, Martinez, Missy, Roberts, Smart, & Upegui, 2000). Somewhere in their souls, though the numbers may be unknown, young people in New York know that in 1994, for the first time in history, New York State expended more of the state budget on prisons than on public universities.

Higher Education Funding vs. Prison Funding in the Empire State, 1988–1998. (in the millions) (Schiraldi, Gangi, & Ziedenberg, 1998)



<sup>\*</sup> Table reprinted with permission of the Correctional Association of New york, 1998.

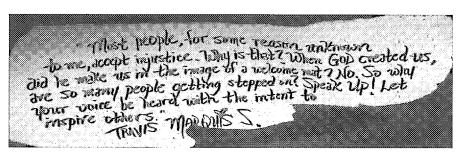
The radical realignment of the public sphere requires serious reflection on *Brown*, it subversion and its progeny. The consequences for public education, racial justice and democracy are severe.

In this political context, we write to honor what has been rich and powerful, to canvass the topography of *Brown* then and now, to "out" the duplicitous white mares of today and to excavate the puddles of radical educational possibility that survive, carrying a genetic trace to the spirit of the *Brown* decision. These sites of possibility, as you will see toward the end of our article, embody commitments to racial justice in education. They may, in some narrow sense, be integrated or not—but they carry forward a mission breathed and enlivened by *Brown:* That all youth deserve challenging education in spaces of democratic participation, that mobilized struggle, in communities and schools is as American as racism. The white mare remains, Zora... but she is under siege.

### ECHOES: THE FAULTLINES OF RACIAL JUSTICE AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

"I am no fool; and I know that race prejudice in the United States today is such that most Negroes cannot receive proper education in white institutions ... a separate Negro school, where children are treated like human beings, trained by teachers of their own race, who know what it means to be black in the year of salvation 1935, is infinitely better than making our boys and girls doormats to be spit and trampled upon and lied to by ignorance social cimbers, whose sole claim to superiority is ability to kick 'niggers' when they are down." (Du Bois, "Does the Negro Need Separate Schools?" 1935)

We write inspired and haunted by the words of Du Bois in 1935, Hurston in 1955 and Travis Marquis, age 21, of the South Bronx in 2002, because 50 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, we continue to confront what is



Travis Marquis, age 21, 2002

called an "achievement gap" across racial and ethnic groups, and social classes (Anyon, 1997; Bowles, & Gintis, 1976; Fine, 1991; Fordham, 1996; Ferguson, 1998; New York ACORN, 2000; Orfield, & Eaton, 1996; Wilson, 1987; Woodson, 1972).

In 2001, a series of school districts within the New York metropolitan area, in suburban New York and New Jersey, joined to form the Regional Minority Network Consortium to address this question of the "gap" and invited us to collaborate on research. We added urban schools from New York and New Jersey to our research team so that by intentionally crossing the lines separating suburbs and urban areas, integrated and segregated schools, deeply tracked and detracked schools, we could document the educational consequences of the co-dependent growth of the suburbs and the defunding of urban America. Revealing the fracture lines of inequity, we could also unearth the pools of possibility that fill the topography of 'desegregated' suburbs and urban communities.

We undertook the Opportunity Gap Research Project committed to a multi-method, multi-site, multi-generation analysis of urban and suburban schooling designed to speak back to questions of racial, ethnic and class (in)justice in American education. To reach deep into the varied standpoints that constitute these schools, we created a participatory action research design with youth representing the full ensemble of standpoints within these urban and suburban desegregated settings (Anand, Fine, Perkins, Surrey, & the class of 2000 Renaissance Middle School, 2001; Fals-Borda, 1979; Fine, Torre, Boudin, Bowen, Clark, Hylton, Martinez, Missy, Roberts, Smart, & Upegui, 2001; Freire, 1982). Drawing on critical race theory (e.g., writings of Bell, 1980; Crenshaw, 1995; Hurtado, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Matsuda, 1995; Morrison, 1996), justice studies (Apfelbaum, 2001; Deutsch, 2004; Fanon, 1967; Friere, 1982; Opotow, 2002) and on the political science writings of Ron Hayduk (1999) we conceptualized an ethnographic regional analysis of the political economy of schooling as lived by youth in and around the New York City metropolitan area.

We began by conducting a series of "research camps" for high-school students from the New York metropolitan area. At the first research camp, a two day overnight at St. Peter's College, in Jersey City, New Jersey, 25 very diverse youth from six schools participated in "methods training," learning about quantitative and qualitative design, critical race theory and a series of methods, including: interview, focus group, observation and survey research. Graduate students who had been working in six schools (two urban schools in the Performance Based Assessment Consortium, one large New Jersey urban high school and three suburban schools in the Regional Minority Network Consortium) selected four to five students per school to represent the broad range of diverse academic, demographic, political and personal styles within any one school. A rich, jazzy and thrilling collection of urban and suburban students, from AP classes through special education, White, African American, Latino, Asian/PI and African-Caribbean, all the hues and mixtures, wealthy and poor, joined those of us from the Graduate Center for our first intensive weekend to design a survey on the "gap," incorporating some of Tony Bryk's (Bryk, & Driscoll, 1988) items on school community and trust, some of Constance Flanagan's (Flanagan, Bowes Jonsson, Csapo, & Sheblanova, 1998) items on civic engagement. From the start, the youth insisted that we call the project the Opportunity Gap and not the Achievement Gap Project, shifting emphasis from youth who lack to structures that deny.

The youth researchers played a vital role in determining the research design, questions, methods, interpretations and products of our work. Collaboratively we created a survey focusing on youth views of distributive, procedural and inclusionary (in)justice (Deutsch, 2004; Opotow, 2002) in the nation and their schools. They insisted that the survey not look like a test and be broadly accessible. The final edition of the survey was made available in English, French-Creole, Spanish, Braille and on tape to accommodate recent immigrants and students with disabilities, and it included photos and cartoons for respondents to interpret, a chart illustrating the achievement gap in college graduation rates by race/ethnicity, and open-ended questions such as, "What is the most powerful thing a teacher has ever said to you?"

Student respondents were drawn from: 11 district high schools in the Regional Minority Network Consortium (schools in inner ring suburbs, "desegregated" with 25% to 55% African American or Latino student body); 4 small urban high schools in the Performance Based Assessment Consortium (a consortium of well established small alternative schools in New York City dedicated to high academic challenge, no tracking and performance based assessments; one school in the sample was desegregated, while the others were largely Latino, African American and African-Caribbean); one large high school in New Jersey with a student body that was primarily Latino, recent immigrant and native born African American; and one activist community based organization, Mothers on the Move, in the South Bronx.

The survey was completed by 9,174 ninth-and 12th-graders from this range of schools and school districts (in an attempt to document experiences and perceptions of students entering and exiting the schools). Taking standpoint theory seriously, we also conducted 24 focus groups with students at the margins, in the centers and at the intersections of margins/centers in their schools. Thus we interviewed, for example, high/middle/low achieving students, Seniors, members of student government, ESL students, Gay/Straight Alliance members and high achieving students of color in schools where most Black and Latino students were in bottom tracks. Using these same selection criteria for center/margin/intersection (Crenshaw,

1995), we interviewed 32 individual students across social and academic lines within schools and communities, completed a systematic transcript analysis of all seniors in four districts tracking race/ethnic differences in enrollment in AP/honors courses, and we designed and facilitated data feedback sessions in eight sites. With youth researchers we conducted participant observations within four suburban and two urban schools, and we interviewed 12 White and African American elders active in/affected by the history of Brown (footnote 2 for details on elders). And while we were surveying, interviewing and visiting across zip codes, seven school/community youth-research teams undertook their own original research projects for academic year 2002-2003, on topics including: finance inequities; history of racial equity in the town; student relations with faculty within a small academy; how students receive help when they are in academic need; race, ethnicity and suspension policies; oral histories of local educational activists, and a follow up study of high school graduates now in college (see Bloom, 2004; Fine, Bloom, & Chajet, 2003). These projects grew out of the three small urban schools involved in the survey, the large New Jersey urban school, two suburban high schools and Mothers on the Move, in the South Bronx in which youth researchers conducted oral histories with activist mothers and grandmothers.

After an article appeared in Education Week detailing the Opportunity Gap research and the research camps, a number of additional districts and schools contacted us and asked to be included in the survey research. An additional 4,700 surveys were completed by students in number of urban and suburban schools outside of the initial Consortium and urban small schools.

The data presented here reflect the surveys, focus groups, individual and elder interviews conducted with Regional Minority Network Consortium schools, the youth from Mothers on the Move, and students from the small schools in New York City.

### Opportunity Gap Participatory Research Design

DESIGN ELEMENT	DESCRIP- TION	SAMPLE	RESEARCH TASK	
Research	Four camps: Survey Devel-	Diverse youth drawn from	To build a core of participatory	
camps Spring 2002	opment	Consortium	youth research-	
Summer 2003	Data analysis I	high schools,	ers/leaders in	
Fall 2003	Data analysis II	small urban	their schools	
Summer 2004	Social research,	high schools	and across ur-	

DESIGN ELEMENT	DESCRIP- TION	SAMPLE	RESEARCH TASK
	arts and social justice	and large urban high school 4 camps/25 youth each	ban/suburban lines
Regional Minority Consortium Network Surveys **60% parents have some college	9th and 12th graders in 11 desegregated districts (be- tween 25% and 55% students of color)	N = 4474 Students who identify by race/ ethnicity: 50% White Am., 18% Latino, 16% Afr-Am., 9% Afr-Car. and 9% Asian/PI	To map quantitatively experiences/perspectives on race/class (in)justice in suburban/urban schools
**21% of parents have some college	Large Urban HS	N = 171	
**32% of parents have some college **	3 Small Performance Based Assessment Urban High Schools Several additional HS Joined data base, Spring 2003	N = 392 Students, 58% Latino, 30% Afr- Am., 10% Wh Am. or Asian/PI N = 4700	
Focus Groups	24 groups of 4—8 in 7 schools and one community based org., Mothers on the Move (MOM) where youth researchers conducted oral histories of their mothers/grandmothers who have been activists within	10 groups of High/mid/lo achieving students (4 schools); 4 groups of Student council members, Black-Latino student organizations, Gay-Straight Alliance, etc.; 3 small urban	To analyze deeply the racial/ethnic experiences in these schools; to determine how "merit" and "deficit" were produced; to interview students working on questions of equity/justice; to assess sen-

DESIGN ELEMENT	DESCRIP- TION	SAMPLE	RESEARCH TASK
	the South Bronx for years	groups; 2 large urban; 1 at MOM; 6 groups of racially ho- mogeneous Consortium Seniors	iors' retrospec- tive accounts of education and prospective an- ticipations by race/ethnicity
Individual Interviews	32 students across academic levels some post-graduate interviews	Racially diverse students from Consortium, large urban and small urban schools and MOM	To document how individual students negotiate privilege, need, education, peer relations, etc. within contexts of suburban desegregation, urban poverty and small, rigorous urban schools
Senior Tran- script Analysis	Analysis of senior transcripts for AP enrollment by race/ethnicity	4 Consortium districts	To determine the "value added" of a high school education for racially distinct students graduating from the same school
Elder interviews	12 elders active/involved in the <i>Brown</i> struggle or its aftermath	4 White men, 1 White woman, 3 African American wom- en, 4 African American men 10 in their 80s; 1 in his 40s; 1 in his 50s	To hear from elders the immediate impact of <i>Brown</i> , and to theorize the resistance, the sacrifice, the struggle and the shrinkage of

DESIGN ELEMENT	DESCRIP- TION	SAMPLE	RESEARCH TASK
School Feed- back Sessions	8 sessions	4 Consortium schools 3 small urban 1 large urban 1 at MOM	the dream over the past 50 years To assess how schools incor- porate data about students' educational yearnings, ex- periences, sense of betrayal and racialized access to rigor
Graduate Follow Up	Intensive tracking, via surveys and interviews, of 2 graduating classes	2 small urban HS graduation classes	To assess college-readiness/persistence of students from performance based HS
Site Specific Case Studies	7 locally generated projects: 2 consortium schools 3 small urban schools 1 large urban school 1 at MOM	e.g., studies of finance inequi- ty, race and suspension da- ta, tracking, oral histories of educational ac- tivists (Mothers on the Move)	To create opportunities for students to investigate the local nature/history of the "gap"
Multi media performance: Video, DVD, Book May 15, 2004 "Echoes of Brown" Performance	13 students from Consorti- um, MOM, small urban schools	Fine, Roberts, Torre, Bloom, Burns, Chajet, Guishard and Payne, Echoes: Youth Documenting and Performing Brown 50 Years Later, 2004	To perform public scholar-ship based on our original research and the spoken word/movement of youth

#### THE CHILDREN OF BROWN

Although the history of today's desegregation is a complex montage of victories and disappointments, we gathered an inspiring layer of evidence about how youth in desegregated settings think about education and racial justice. Zora, you may think this is simply cooptation, but the evidence reveals that youth in desegregated schools believe strongly in the power of multi-racial democracy in their schools and the nation. In these data you can find the proud progeny of *Brown*, and, as you anticipated, you will sight the white mare of betrayal.

Drawing primarily from the New York/New Jersey metropolitan database (N = 4.474), with 9% identified as Asian/Pacific Islander. 16% African-American, 50% White American, 9% African-Caribbean and 18% Latino students), young people who attend desegregated schools hold uniformly high aspirations for college, and strong values for multi-racial justice and education. They appreciate attending desegregated schools, but they recognize and bemoan that their classrooms remain, largely, segregated. With a deep generational endorsement of desegregation, African-American, African-Caribbean and Latino youth are significantly more troubled by the ripples of injustice that flow through the nation and their schools than are White American and Asian American youth. On each item of academic and civic commitment, you'll notice a parallel trend: high levels of generational endorsement, and then substantially greater concern about inequities noted by African American, African-Caribbean and Latino students—especially those in high-track classes. They smell the white mare, Zora, but choose nevertheless to believe, to speak out and to struggle.

As a group, the young women and men we surveyed are dedicated to attending college, with over 90% of the respondents from each racial/ethnic group indicating that "college" is important to my future. African American and Latino students, particularly those who are not in AP or "honors" level courses, worry significantly more than their peers, that high stakes testing and finances could obstruct their academic pursuits.

Students from desegregated high schools, overall, endorse high levels of civic commitments to "helping those less fortunate," "environmental issues" "working to make my community a better place" and "ending racism." More than 60% of all students strongly agree that "[i]t is very important to help my country," (with no race/ethnic differences). But in response to the item, "We need to create change in the nation," African American and African-Caribbean students are almost twice as likely (61%, and 60%, respectively) as White American (32%) students to say we need to change the country, with Asian Americans (43%) and Latinos (52%) in the middle.

When asked the importance of "ending racism" more than half of African-American, African-Caribbean and Latino students, and 47 % of Asian/

Pacific Islander students selected "very important" compared with a third of White American students. To assess strength of conviction about civic engagement, students were asked whether or not they speak up "[i]f I hear something that is racist or offensive to a group of people . . . " to which 55 % of Asian/Pacific Islander, 42 % of White American, 67 % of African-American, 62 % of African-Caribbean, and 58 % of Latino students agree or strongly agree. Thus, we document a strong generational endorsement of civic commitments and concerns about racial justice, with an overriding belief among students of color (African American, Asian American, African Caribbean and Latino) that the nation has to change to be true to its democratic principles, and a willingness, from these same youth, to speak out against injustice.

Turning to youth attitudes toward school desegregation, the evidence suggests that an overwhelming majority of students who attend desegregated schools are strong advocates for desegregation: 76% of the sample agreed that "Attending a school that is 'mixed' or integrated is very important to me". However, many register concern about academic inequities within these schools: almost 60% agree that there is an achievement gap; over 50% agree that "classes are not as mixed as the school," and over 40% believe that "students do not have an equal chance of getting into the hardest classes." While equity concerns are cross-sectional, African American and African-Caribbean students are again most likely to rate their schools critically. (Table 1)

Table 1. Views of Racial Justice in Schools (% agree/strongly agree)

Question	Asian	White	African-Am	African-Car	Latino
Classes not as mixed as school	50%	47%	70%	73%	49%
Everyone in my school has an equal chance of getting into hardest classes	67.5%	63.6%	39.2%	45.6%	58.1%
School not good at equal opportunity	18.9%	17.7%	40.9%	41.4%	35.6%
There is an achievement gap in my school	60.9%	60.4%	70.4%	71.6%	59.1%
If I mess up, educators in my school give me a second chance	53.4%	50.9%	37.6%	38.8%	47.8%

Equal Chance of getting in:  $\chi^2=74.09$ , df=4, p<.001; School not good at providing equal opportunities:  $\chi^2=119.02$ , df=4, p<.001; Classes not as mixed as they should be:  $\chi^2=78.11$ , df=4, p<.001; Achievement gap:  $\chi^2=15.93$ , df=4, p<.001; second chance:  $\chi^2=23.459$ , df=4, p=.000

Confirming the writings of Braddock, Dawkins and Wilkins (1995), Robert Crain and Amy Stuart Wells (1997), Oakes, Wells, Yonezawa and Ray (1997), Bok and Bowen (1998) and others, there are significant civic, as well as academic consequences for White, Black, Asian, Latino and African American youth attending desegregated schools. Yet, the struggle for racial justice and equity within public education remains far from over, and different bodies worry differently about the inequities.

Elsewhere we have written on the "six degrees of segregation" that undermine the spirit of *Brown*: finance inequity, tracking, racialized suspension practices, high-stakes testing with disproportionate impact on students of color and students in poverty, distinct experiences of respect and recognition in school based on race/ethnicity, and a national retreat from desegregation. For this article, we review two of these policies, studied by youth research teams, that pave the way for the white mare-finance inequity and school tracking. (3) While students of this generation share much in terms of aspirations, civic engagement and belief in integration, they depart sharply by race/ethnicity in terms of their perceptions of opportunities, experiences of respect and security about their American dreams. (Hochschild, 2002) And they collectively, if differentially, despair the enduring structures, practices and consequences of injustice.

### STUDYING THE STRUCTURES AND PRACTICES OF THE WHITE MARE

As the surveys reveal, desegregation has brought with it a rich set of opportunities for academic challenge and civic responsibility, if distributed unevenly by race, ethnicity and class. The youth researchers at the first and second "research camps" were eager to investigate these social policies that undermine Brown, produce the "gap," and accommodate the white mare. Below we provide a look at two of these youth-generated studies.

### INTERROGATING EDUCATIONAL FINANCE INEQUITIES

At the first research camp, "differences" of class, geography, race and ethnicity were most obvious, if only politely explored. Just after the camp, students from one of the small urban schools told their teachers that they were "shocked to hear what school sounds like when the kids from suburbs talk." These students decided to learn more about finance inequity, see it first hand, and document the causes, justifications and consequences of finance inequities in New York State. Lori Chajet and Janice Bloom, former teachers at East Side Community High school and now graduate students working on the Opportunity Gap Project, designed a high school elective on Youth Research at East Side Community High. These students met biweekly at the Graduate Center to study original documents, determine who to interview, analyze state records, plan "site visits" and collect original information about the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit in New York City. East Side Community High School is a small, de-tracked urban school on the Lower East Side of New York City, where most of the students come from poor and working class families. Many are recent immigrants from the Caribbean, Puerto Rico, Central and South America. Resources are low and academic expectations high. These are neighborhood kids who are lucky enough to find an "alternative" school committed to rigorous education for all.

After a weekend of hearing about schools with football fields, computer labs, modern gymnasiums ... these students couldn't quite believe that "separate and unequal" was the standard in New York State. They reviewed legal documents, interviewed activists, scholars, students, organizers, lawyers and educators about the case. They read Justice Leland DeGrasse's 2001 decision in the Campaign for Fiscal Equity Case:

This court holds that the education provided New York City students is so deficient that it falls below the constitutional floor set by the Education Article of the New York State Constitution. The court also finds that the state's actions are a substantial cause of this constitutional violation.

And then they learned that just seventeen months later, based on an appeal filed by Governor George Pataki, Justice Lerner of the Appellate Division, overturned DeGrasse's decision:

A "sound basic education" should consist of the skills necessary to obtain employment, and to competently discharge one's civil responsibility. The state submitted evidence that jury charges are generally at a grade level of 8.3, and newspaper articles on campaign and ballot issues range from grade level 6.5 to 11.7... the evidence at the trial established that the skills required to enable a person to obtain employment, vote, and serve on a jury, are imparted between grades 8 and 9.

Dismayed by this reversal, the youth researchers set out to document the consequences of finance inequity on students and graduates of high and low resource schools. These students decided to visit three suburban schools (two in Westchester County and one in Northern New Jersey) as well as a large comprehensive high school in the Bronx. Students from one of the suburban schools also visited East Community High School to experience the school community, and the curricular and pedagogical practices that the East Side students spoke about. In this way, students co-investigated the

distinct educational opportunities available in districts that receive approximately \$7,000 per child, and districts that receive more than \$15,000.

Well rehearsed in their "researcher identities," these juniors traveled from East Side to several wealthy Westchester and New Jersey communities and documented differential access to computers, books, libraries, AP classes, etc. Although they noted that "there's like no minorities in those top classes," seeing privilege up close was disturbing. All too familiar with racist representations of "them," on the visits they confronted what they couldn't know—the striking material and intellectual capital accumulated through privilege.

Sitting on green grass waiting for their train back to the city, students expressed amazement at the differences between their own school and the large suburban complex they had spent the day visiting. "Did you see the auditorium? Okay, our auditorium looks like ... [crap] compared to that one." "Because they have money, they could actually have a darkroom that they can do photography in," another exclaimed. Others focused on the library, "They have a lot of books!" "It's like a regular library." "The computers!" One student highlighted the difference in access to technology within the classroom and its effect on student learning: "I went to [a science class where] a girl gave a presentation about abortion. She had slides to show everyone [on a slide projector and a computer] ... when we had that in our school, we just did a poster." Several, having also visited science classes, followed-up with remarks on the "real" science laboratories: the lab equipment, the sinks in the rooms, the materials for experiments.

As seniors, this same group visited another Westchester high school. Now adrenalin-filled with the terror and excitement of their own college application processes, they toured the building with a sense of awe, depression and disgust. Nikaury mumbled, "This school is college." Jose continued the conversation, "They already take psychology and advanced math and English." Emily, perfectly assessing the gravity and reality of the stituation, stated, "We're going to compete with these students when we get to college?" A confrontation with profoundly unjust social arrangements provoked a psychological glide between outrage to shame; a rainbow of emotions spilled onto the sidewalks, and consumed the air on the train ride back home.

These students live, with hope and a better chance than many, at the intimate, jagged edges of racism and global capitalism. In the name of neighborhood gentrification of the Lower East Side, they witness as their parks, homes, schools, neighborhoods and dreams are "improved"—in the language of the city; "destroyed"—in local talk. With these visits to wellfinanced suburban public schools, their fantasy of education as the relatively uncontaminated space for mobility was shattered. They were shocked by what privilege looked like up close. Traveling across county lines, they walked into a mirror that marked them as worthless. About to confront a

series of high-stakes exit exams at the outer rim of their senior year, they bumped into the recognition that they were being failed by a state and set up by a school system both of which have slipped surreptitiously off the hook of "accountability." In their work as critical youth researchers they came to appreciate the courage of Brown, and the CFE lawsuits. At the same time, they came to recognize the depth of our national refusal to grant them deep, full citizenship in the moral community called America. Their works have been published as youth poetry, youth research (Acosta, Castillo, DeJesus, Geneo, Jones, Kellman, Osorio, Rahman, Sheard, & Taylor et al., 2003) and educational reform policy documents (Fine, Bloom, & Chajet, 2003).

With little room for doubt, unjust social policies and practices convey to low income youth that they are worth-less. Not only does inequitable financing adversely affect the quality of educational opportunities and futures available to youth; knowledge of inequity burns a hole in the souls of affected youth.

## WITHIN SCHOOL TRACKING: RACIALIZED ACCESS TO ACADEMIC CHALLENGE

If finance inequity was the white mare on the minds of the urban students, suburban students spoke as forcefully about the ways in which "tracks" or "levels" racially segregate students within their desegregated schools. In the suburban high schools, diverse bodies pass through the integrated school doors, and then most students funnel into classes largely segregated by race, ethnicity and social class. Within these buildings, race, ethnicity and class graft starkly onto academic tracks, over-determining who has access to academic rigor, and who doesn't. The question of tracking took on prominence within the survey analysis, the focus groups and the participant observations.

Drawing from the Consortium survey data and the Senior transcript analysis from four Consortium schools, we were able to measure the sharp racialized edges of tracking within schools by the extent to which suburban students from distinct race/ethnic groups participate in AP/Honors courses (see Table 2). As Table 2 reveals, Asian American and White American students are significantly more likely to be enrolled in AP/Honors than are African American, African-Caribbean and Latino students in the same schools. The Senior transcript analysis confirmed these patterns.

For the full sample of suburban youth, race and ethnicity significantly over-determine who participates in AP/honors courses. We decided to analyze the enrollment patterns through the lens of race/ethnicity and class (as measured by parental levels of education).

We conducted an analysis of AP/honors enrollment by educational level of parents, and found that similar race/ethnicity patterns persist, even for

•		•	•		
· ·	Asian/PI	White	African- American	African- Caribbean	Latino
Total Sample: percent in AP/honors	58%	56	, 33 ,	.35	27
Students with college educated parents: percent in AP/Honors	69	65	42	42	43

Table 2. Participation in AP/honors by Race/Ethnicity and Parental Education

 $(\gamma^2 = 387.43, df = 4, p < .001 \text{ for total sample}; (\gamma^2 = 87.85, df = 4, p < .001 \text{ for}$ students with college educated parents).

students with relatively well educated parents. While all students (across race/ethnicity lines) are more likely to be enrolled in AP/honors if they have college educated parents, African American, African-Caribbean and Latinos with parents who are college graduates (or beyond) are still significantly less likely to be in AP/honors courses than Asian/PI or White American youth with similarly educated parents.

The race/ethnic and class-based imbalances in access to rigor are especially prominent for students at the class extremes: those who have parents who have not graduated high school, and those whose parents are college graduates and beyond. For every level of parental education, African American students are least likely to be enrolled in AP/honors classes. This finding is particularly troubling given that students in AP/honors classes report significantly more responsive relations with faculty, feel better prepared for college, more challenged by the curriculum and are more likely to report that they get a "second chance" if they mess up. Not only is enrollment in AP/honors courses inequitably distributed by race/ethnicity/ class, but also we find that the relative privilege of being enrolled in AP/ honors courses facilitates further opportunities for privilege, e.g., enhanced exposure to PSAT/SAT preparation courses. Students in AP/honors are significantly more likely to enroll in PSAT/SAT prep courses than students in regular or remedial courses. Looking at the interaction of "track placement" and race/ethnicity. White American and Asian/PI students not in AP/

Table 3. Participation in AP/honors courses by students' race/ethnicity and parental education

	Asian/PI	White Am.	Afr.–Am.	Afr.–Carib.	Latino
9th to GED	31%	29	14	36	16
HS Grad	23%	28	17	20	15
Some college	39%	36	31	31	29
College grad+	72%	64	<u>4</u> 5	46	46

White and Asian/PI students		Afr-Am, Afro-Car and Latino students		
AP/honors	Not AP/honors	AP/honors	Not AP/honors	
73%	56%	56%	39%	

Table 4. Student Involvement in PSAT/SAT Preparation Courses by Race/ Ethnicity and AP/honors Track

honors were as likely as African-American, African-Caribbean and Latino students in AP/honors to be enrolled in PSAT/SAT preparation courses.

These patterns, repeated across the desegregated school districts, demonstrate that African-American, African-Caribbean and Latino students are multiply disadvantaged, within even desegregated schools. They have significantly less access to rigorous courses than White and Asian American students—even when parents are well-educated. These same students have significantly less access to supplemental test preparation—even when they enroll in AP/honors classes. The Senior transcript analysis confirms these discrepancies by race/ethnicity, with 36–44% of White American seniors enrolled in AP math, compared with 11–12% of Latinos and African Americans. With respect to challenging educational experiences and supplemental supports, students of color are operating at a distinct disadvantage. These data should not be read as the failure of desegregation, for so many accrued benefits have been documented. These data do signify, however, the challenges that face desegregated schools once all of America's children arrive inside their doors. (3)

Given the differential access to rigor, it came as no surprise that students of color, and students in lower tracks are significantly more worried about the potential consequences of high-stakes testing than peers. Across schools and communities, African American, African Caribbean and Latino youth—especially those in low tracks—expressed the most consistent fear that standardized tests could prevent them from graduation—a poll tax of sorts for the 21st century. When asked if they strongly agree/agree/disagree/strongly disagree with the statement, "Standardized tests can prevent me from graduation," almost half of the African-Caribbean, Latino, and African American students, one third of the Asian Americans and just over a quarter of White Americans agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. And, consistent with our track findings, students in AP/honors are significantly less anxious that standardized tests could prevent their graduation.

When we started this work, we had little idea of just how profoundly and consistently, across communities, academic "tracks" organize and racialize suburban schooling. And yet in each quantitative analysis, and with every focus group and interview we conducted, we learned of the significant impact of "track" on student engagement, motivation, confidence, identity,

peer relations and achievement, and the troubling interactions of track and race/ethnicity (4)

On the Positive Influence of Educators scale, students in AP and Honors courses are significantly more likely than their peers to feel challenged academically, experience educators as being more responsive, to report that they are known and understood by educators, and to express confidence that they are being academically well prepared for college. But again, track and race/ethnicity interact in troubling ways. Fifty percent of White and Asian students in AP/honors classes and 47% of White and Asian students in "regular" and "remedial" classes vs. 37% African American, African Caribbean American and Latino students in "regular" and "remedial" classes and then 31% of AP/honors African American, African Caribbean American and Latino students report strong positive ratings of their educators. Students of color in the highest tracks feel least connected to their teachers.

Being placed in high track classes bears obvious positive consequence for academic and civic well being. It is thus doubly troubling that most students of color (African American, African Caribbean and Latino) are placed in regular or remedial classes, and further, that those who are placed in the highest tracks most consistently report alienation from and experience of racialized bias in their schools.

To understand these dynamics more fully, we conducted a focus group at one of the research camps to discuss academic tracking.

Chuck: My thoughts? When we just had [one group in a class] ... you really don't get the full perspective of everything. You know what I mean? If they were in tracked classes, they wouldn't get to interact. And like .. when you're in class with like all white people, because I know the same thing happens at [my school] like sometimes I'm the only Black male in class, and you do feel sort of inferior, or you do like sort of draw back a little bit because you have nobody else to relate with, you know. If it's more integrated, like, you know, you feel more comfortable and the learning environment is better . . . you just get more sides of it because, I don't know, it's hard to even with math, everybody learns the same thing in math, but if it's all white people, you know what I mean? They're going to learn it somewhat different. It's not that they don't get the same education, but they're going to miss that one little thing that a Latino person or a black person could add to the class . . . .

**Jack**: [I don't think we should detrack entirely], maybe not in like all classes, but that really like what they, like maybe if they just had all freshman classes like that, you know, it would help out a lot sto change it all you know the kids that might not have achieved so much in the past could see like, you know, like 'I do have a chance.' And you know, 'I don't ... I just don't have to stop. I can keep going and keep learning more stuff.' So I don't know, maybe not like every class should be tracked, but **they** should definitely be exposed.

Tarik: It starts from when you graduate 18 grade. In eighth grade they ask you, 'would you want to be in [top track]? It depends on your grades. If your grades are good enough to be in TOP, then you can, but if not, you have to choose the [regular] level.

Jane: Because, like you know, some people even say that, you know, the smart kids should be in a class by themselves because it's more conductive to their learning. But then the other people would say like well the special education kids. they need to be with their kind so they'll learn better.

Chuck (African American, high-and medium-track classes) volunteered to speak in the focus group first, and he chose to open the conversation by revealing his discomfort with racial stratifications in his school. He critically challenged the racial layering of the school (anger and a bit of shame), and he sarcastically inserted that African American or Latino students might have "one little thing" to contribute. Jack (White, high-achieving student) follows, detouring the group's focus onto the [low track? Black?] students' (lack of) motivation. Tarik, who sits at the top of an under-resourced school comprised entirely of students of color, lengthens Jack's line of analysis, foregrounding individual motivation and "choice." Jane, a White girl in top tracks, returns the conversation to school structure, but now—given that low motivation and bad grades are "in the room"—she justifies tracks as responsive to, or "needed" by students at the top and the bottom.

In under two minutes, race was ushered out of the conversation, replaced by the tropes of "smart" and "special education." Black and Latino students were demoted from potential contributors to needy. Tracks were resuscitated from racist to responsive. Sounding like contemporary embodiments of what Morris and Morris describe as the "unusual (read: smart) Negro" of the early 1900s, Marah and Elinor (both biracial, high achieving students) then entered the conversation, challenging how they have been turned into the "unusual Negroes" in their schools:

Marah: Like tracking has been in the whole school system that I've been going to like from beginning, and if you grow up in a tracking system, that's all you can know. So if you grow up and the whole time I've been in honors classes, and a lot of the time, and I'm mixed so a lot of the time when, if you want to hang out with different people and you're forced; and the other students in your classes and you're kind of forced to hang out with some people that you don't normally, wouldn't normally like hang around with. And at the same time, it's like a lot of emphasis is put on by the parents and teacher, I remember a lot of the time, like 'You're a good' . . . like teachers would tell me, 'You're a good student

but you need to watch out who you hang out with, because they're going to have a bad influence on you." They didn't see me doing anything. I was just walking down the hallway talking to somebody. It wasn't like, you know, we were out doing whatever. But a lot of times it is the teachers and the parents' first impressions of their ideas that come off...

**Elinor**: But I want to say like . . . Marah and I are a lot alike because we're both interracial and we were both in like honors classes. But with her, a lot of her friends are black and with me a lot of my friends are white. And I get really tired of being the only one of the very few people in my class to actually speak up if I see something that's like . . . or if I hear something that's not . that bothers me. And then I feel like I'm all of a sudden the Black voice, you know. Like I'm all Black people. And it's not true at all. I... lots of people have different kinds of opinions and I want to hear them. It's just that I think a lot of the time, like Charles was saying, when you're the only person in the class, you do get intimidated. And voices aren't heard any more then because of everyone else overpowering.

Across this focus group, as in their academic lives, youth carve identities individually and privately in relation to state and school practices that stratify by "race" and class. From the awkward perch of the top track in a desegregated school, African American, African Caribbean and Latino youth voice a bold and cutting critique of a system of racialized segregation. They craft identities within a nation, community and in localized buildings where racialized signifiers operate as the organizational mortar for building rigid academic hierarchies. A few openly challenge the seeming meritocracy, even as they trespass with ambivalence across the rungs of a color-coded ladder of opportunity. All witness the unchallenged hierarchy, many through the gauze of alienation.

African American, biracial and Latino students-like Chuck, Elinor and Marah—traverse and negotiate social policies and practices of symbolic and material violence as they survive a torrent of everyday representations within their desegregated schools. Some do beautifully; others—not represented in this group—fall. To this task they import Du Bois' "double consciousness," watching through a veil.

"The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil and gifted with second sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self consciousness but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring idealsin one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."W.E.B. Du Bois, Souls of Black Folks, 1990, 9

The veil connects and separates. The veil doubles as a shield of protection that "keeps (the self) from being torn asunder," and as a mote of alienation. Through the veil, youth of color see, hear and witness. As Chuck admits, he may "draw back a little." Some narrate pain, some pleasure, and a significant group claims they do not allow the words to penetrate.

When asked, "What is the most powerful thing a teacher has ever said to you?" students wrote a range of responses that were coded within categories, e.g., positive/ability, positive/effort, negative comment, no effect, etc. African American and Latino students in top tracks were twice as likely as White and Asian American students (17% vs. 9%) to say NO EFFECT (e.g., "Nothing," "Can't remember a thing," "Nothing they say has affected me." "Not one thing.") and significantly more likely (30% vs. 23%) to mention a negative comment (e.g., "they put me down," "You're all acting like retards!" "Smiled when I failed," "You are different from other Blacks," "Be careful who you hang out with.") Likewise, when asked about their "Worst School Experience," White and Asian American students were twice as likely (36% vs. 18%) to mention problems with friends/peers, while African American and Latino students were almost three times as likely (22% vs. 8%) to mention experiences of negative judgments from educators/being denied a voice (e.g., "I felt written off', "not respected," "They thought they already knew me, before I opened my mouth"). As a sobering side note, none of the White American or Asian American AP/honors students and only 6% of the White or Asian American students in Regular/Remedial mentioned "fears of having no future" (e.g., "no future," "no job" "alone/ no housing") as a worst experience, compared with 16% of AP/honors African American and Latino students and 16% of African American and Latino students in Regular/Remedial classes who wrote narratives of fear about no possible future.

All lives are formed in unequal power arrangements, historic and contemporary, global and local. Our evidence suggests that most youth of color and/or poverty baste their explanations of "the gap" with critique, outrage and the twinned attributions of structural and personal responsibility. When asked to explain a chart that visually displayed the "achievement gap" included on the survey, AP/honors students of color were most likely to write answers about discrimination or denied opportunities as the reason for the gap.

While most students recognize that wealth and poverty pave (and obstruct) the way toward success, high achieving students of color—African American, African-Caribbean and Latino-recognize that with poverty comes discrimination, and that these two elements contribute powerfully to produce the Gap. That is, they know the White mare well. They know that history, politics, the contours of oppression and the power of culture shape their opportunities and their desires. And, they, like you, Zora, dare to narrate it for us all.

	1					
	Money/ Lack of Money	Effort/ Lack of Effort	Family Values	Cultural Values	Discrimi- nation	Support/ Lack of Support
AP/honors White and Asian Am.	45%	14	17	8	8	5
AP/honors AfrAm, AfrCar. and Latino	38%	6	9	9	21	4
Reg/Rem. White and Asian Am.	42%	12	10	11	10	5
Reg/Rem. AfrAm., Afr-Car. and Latino	39%	8	6	6	14	8

Table 5. Coded Open Ended Explanations for the Achievement Gap

N of open ended responses analyzed: 211 AP/honors White and Asian American responses; 223 AP/honors African American, African-Caribbean and Latino responses; 225 Regular/Remedial White and Asian American responses, and 337 Regular/Remedial African American, African-Caribbean and Latino responses.

These youth feel seduced and betrayed, bewildered and a bit silenced, by promises of integration and experiences of segregation or alienation within. They bear witness to the race/ethnicity "gap" that swells through the most penetrating fissures that form America. They recognize that urban/suburban finance inequities live and assure the gap, and, that in suburban schools, academic tracks vivify and produce diverse embodiments of the 'gap.'

In schools and beyond, structures and practices of injustice—inequitable financing, tracking, suspensions, respect, differential access to rigor—live in the bodies of youth. Students may internalize, resist, contest, negotiate, but the penetration is clear. These structures, relations and practices enter the "bodies" accumulating consistently differential outcomes within and across schools, mistakenly viewed as individual caused and/or race-derived rather than institutionally and historically produced. (Gramsci, 1971; O'Connor, 1997)

And yet, just as *Brown* interrupted a century of fortified racism, we have discovered again, that, the 'gap' is neither inevitable nor natural. Schools do not necessarily reproduce social formations. The small set of performance based assessment urban schools included in our study, as you will see below, were designed, like the *Brown* decision, to resist reproduction; not only through integration but always for race/ethnic/class justice.

### SMALL, DETRACKED URBAN SCHOOLS: A FUNNY THING HAPPENED TO *BROWN* ON THE WAY TO THE 21ST CENTURY

Zora, you must be feeling vindicated at this point. It would be easy to conclude from these data, the surveys, interviews, observations and grad-

uate follow ups, that race and ethnicity differences in opportunities are, indeed, embodied in the youth and enduring across contexts. Has *Brown* failed?. We hear often, in whispers, "Is it true that *even* in suburban schools there's an achievement gap?"

The story is complex: Brown v. Board of Education sparked a revolution in social consciousness and policy, as well as important shifts in educational legislation and school-based practices (Kluger, 1977). And yet as a nation we refused to dismantle the structures and guarantees of race and class privilege. Therein lies the dialectical swagger of the white mare—the seduction and the betrayal. The persistence of the Opportunity Gap is sewn into the seams of our national fabric.

And yet tucked away in the recesses of a massive database lie a set of schools that reveal "what could be" if public schools were dedicated to the rigorous education of all, including poor and working-class youth, African American, African Caribbean, Latino, White and Asian American. Surviving on inadequate fiscal resources but enlivened by the spirits and dedication of educators committed to changing the odds, the small-schools movement in New York City and nationally flourishes—despite finance inequities, the assault of high stakes standardized testing, a bureaucracy that refuses to grant intellectual and political space to schools organized for "what must be." Living the visions of Brown, these small schools in the Performance Based Assessment Consortium (see Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Ort, 2002)—well worn and well established—were designed to educate America's poor and immigrant youth to be scholars, critics and engaged citizens (Meier, 2002). These small urban schools are much more than simply small. Organized through commitments to intellectual community, academic challenge, revision, rigor and performance assessments, these schools reflect the spirit of Brown that demanded a radical possibility for the education of African American, Latino, immigrant, working-class and poor students—not only students privileged by wealth.(5) Some of these schools are racially integrated. Most aren't. These schools receive just over half of what their sister institutions receive in the suburbs and yet they educate students whose parents are significantly less well-educated than students in the suburbs.

We included four such schools in our research, three in the survey. All of these schools are designed so that all students receive a college-bound education; there are no tracks or levels in these schools. Students are assessed through student inquiry projects and externally validated performance assessments. Educators in these schools, as noted by Ancess and Darling-Hammond (2003; Gladden, 1998), have committed themselves to beating the odds. With a small N but remarkable consistency, on every measure of student engagement, relations with faculty, graduation rates and college aspirations, students in these small urban schools had higher than average

rates of civic engagement, academic engagement and experiences of teacher responsiveness—especially African-American and Latino students. These findings confirm and extend what others have documented. Students in small, urban, performance assessment schools significantly out perform their peers in *large urban* schools in terms of academic engagement, achievement, persistence, graduation and college going, and now we have evidence that these schools academically engage students at extremely high rates, across lines of race/ethnicity and class.

Table 6. A Comparison of Large Suburban School and Small Urban School Responses

Teachers are responsive to students like me.	62%	80%
Teachers know and understand me.	35%	60%
Teachers give me a second chance.	46%	72%
I feel academically challenged.	63%	76%
N	3,362	392

Most students in small schools (52%) agreed strongly that, "In my school, all students can achieve if they try," while few agreed that, "There is an achievement gap in my school". These students expressed academic ambitions equivalent to those expressed by students in the suburbs, and substantially higher than those expressed by low-track African-American and Latino students in the suburbs.

While these small schools clearly help poor and working class youth beat the odds, the question remains: to what extent are aspirations, engagement, motivation and achievement primarily a function of supports/resources in the home? To investigate this question, we correlated parental levels of education with indicators of youth engagement with educators, academic challenge and aspirations for college. For the suburban students, we found that maternal education and paternal education correlate significantly (but not very powerfully) with student engagement, motivation and aspirations (p<.001.) In these schools, 6% of students report parents with less than high school diploma, 20% with high school diploma and 69% with some college or more. Although there is not much range in parental education (most are highly educated), in these schools students whose parents were better educated were, in fact, more engaged with faculty and curriculum, held higher aspirations for college and felt better prepared for college than youth with relatively under-educated parents. In important contrast, however, in the small urban schools, we found that parental education was not correlated with student level of engagement or aspirations for college. Here, 32% of students report parents with less than high school diplomas

and another 32% report parents with some college. Across these small schools, regardless of parental education, students report extremely high levels of academic engagement (4). This is a most significant finding for urban educators, policy makers and researchers. Researchers have found student engagement to be highly correlated with achievement for poor and working class youth, but less so for middle and upper middle class students (see National Academy of Sciences, 2003). In other words, middle-and upper-middle-class students seem to be able to achieve at relatively high levels even if they are not very engaged in school, but poor and working-class students don't achieve academically if they are not engaged. They must be engaged if they are going to achieve. In confirmation of a substantial literature on the academic power of small, rigorous schools, the small, inquiry based urban schools included in this sample have decoupled the longstanding and stubborn correlation of parental education with student engagement and achievement. (5) While these schools have their struggles, they are graduating and sending poor and working-class youth off to college at unprecedented rates, equipped to succeed, with strong intellectual and civic commitments.

# YOUTH RESEARCHERS: SEEDING A MOVEMENT FOR YOUTH RESEARCH AND EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE

The Opportunity Gap Project documents quantitatively and qualitatively that youth in desegregated settings are strong advocates for academic achievement, for racial integration and for multi-racial participatory democracy. They learn much about academic and civic engagement in these settings, and yet yearn to be educated in contexts of justice, for rigor and with respect. We hear discomfort with the acid rain of finance inequities and tracking, even from privileged youth who seemingly benefit from the stratification (Burns, 2004). We hear the dire price, paid most dearly by urban youth of color in large schools, but also suburban youths, due to inequitable state policies, tracking systems and racialized (mis)representations. And we see the power of youth standing together—across lines of race, ethnicity, class, geography and "academic level"—to speak back to educators and to America. The struggle for racial justice is far from over; the spirit of Brown lives on in the outrage and wisdom of youth, and in the everyday erosion of their belief in their America. The white mare now dresses in vouchers, highstakes testing, No Child Left Behind, accountability schemes with no supports only punishment and humiliation, finance inequity, tracking, zero tolerance, mass incarceration of youth of color .... The promise of privatization serves as the Trojan horse for continued racialized oppression. Youth are watching for how adults will challenge the white mare(s).

We leave you with a scene from a recent "speak back." Youth researchers in a suburban school were presenting their "findings" to the faculty. Quite critical of racial and ethnic stratification in his school's academics and disciplinary policies, Nozier explained to the almost all White teacher group that he, as an African American male, spends "lots of time in the suspension room ... and you notice it's mostly black, right?" Hesitant nods were rapidly erased by awkward comments, "Well, no, actually in June it gets Whiter when the kids who haven't shown up for detention have to come in," followed by "Sometimes there are white students, maybe when you're not there." But Nozier persists, with the courage of speaking his mind to educators who may or may not listen; standing with peers across racial and ethnic groups and a few adults willing to bear witness as he speaks truth to power.

Nozier is no more optimistic than we that in his school, at this moment, his critique will be heard and will transform local policy. In our research camps, we rehearse the school presentations expecting engagement and resistance. In the folded arms of faculty disbelief, the institution declares, "We are integrated, we are fair, it's not about race." But now, skillfully able to slice the school by analyses of race, ethnicity and track, able to read the tables and the discursive analyses, Nozier knows he stands not alone. He insists, "I don't speak just for me. I'm speaking for 1,179 other Black and Latino students who completed the survey and report high rates of suspensions." Suddenly his once dismissible, personal 'anecdote' transforms into fact. He stands tall and represents the concerns of hundreds of African American and Latino students in his school, and from over a dozen other schools, who report that suspensions, and access to rigor, are unevenly distributed; opportunities denied or discouraged. Flanked by White, African American and biracial students—allies, together they have a job to do. They are the legacy of Brown. He writes that he will not "walk away, to swagger to the policies of life ...." He will, instead, continue to deepen his

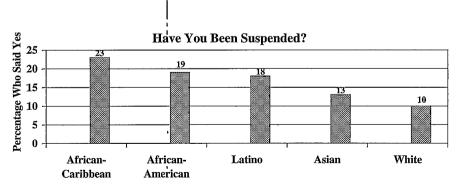


Figure 3. Suspension data by race/ethnicity

analysis and outrage, surrounded by allies and representing hundreds, with the critical skills of participatory research toward social justice.

When asked, "Do you think it's fair to teach students of color about racism and critical consciousness and involve them in this work? Doesn't it depress you?" Jeneusse, a youth researcher from Mothers on the Move in the South Bronx, assured an audience at Columbia University, "We've long known about racism; that's not news. What I know now, though, is that I can study it, speak about, and we need to do something to change it." Nikaury, a youth researcher from the Lower East Side of Manhattan, stunned an audience at the Academy for Educational Development with her astute reflection on participatory action research, and its benefits: "I used to see flat. No more ... now I know things are much deeper than they appear. And it's my job to find out what's behind the so-called facts. I can't see flat anymore."

These young women and men have, indeed, learned to appreciate the complexity of race and class formations in America, to identify cracks in the opportunity structure where justice may breathe, and to develop their own intellectual and organizing capacities to repaint the canvas for the future. Youth who articulate a "critical analysis of the 'gap," speak back to our nation and ask us to view again the very uneven distributions of power, privilege, resources and opportunities upon which the country, the economy, our schools and our fragile sense of selves are premised. And they ask us to imagine, alternatively, what could be. They, like their great, great grandparents, who longed for the *Brown* decision, know that social justice is always just around the corner. And even more then their great grandparents, they can imagine allies of privilege eager to create schools for social justice.

These young women and men are asking for help from adults and from those who look like we have benefited—those of us who own the white mares or have enjoyed their company. The youth plead, in an echo of Fannie Lou Hamer:

I'd tell the white powers that I ain't trying to take nothing from them. I'm trying to make Mississippi a better place for all of us. And I'd say, "What you don't understand is that as long as you stand with your feet on my neck, you got to stand in a ditch too. But if you move, I'm coming out. I want to get us both out of the ditch.

'Zora, let's return to the mules for a moment. We believe, now, because we have been educated by thousands of youth, and elders, that *Brown* and the social movements that came before and after were responsible for opening the gates. The white mare stood then and stands now in waiting. It is however a mistake to believe that *Brown* was the white mare, just as it would

be a mistake for contemporary critics of integration to believe that desegregation has failed. Desegregation as full, quality, rich educational opportunities for all, has yet to be implemented. But the integrated schools in the suburbs, the small performance based schools in the cities, and the many after school programs, progressive youth movements, tiny projects and bold campaigns that dot our national landscape, are struggling to create a nation that must be, but is not yet.

At this moment, today, democracy, public education and integration are all under siege (Haney, 2003; Glickman, 2004; Noguera, 2004; Orfield, & Lee, 2004). Zora, we need how, desperately, a movement of youth, parents, community and educators to make good on the radical vision embodied in *Brown*. Because of you and many others, young people know to beware the white mare. Yet to paraphrase Toni Morrison, "and still they rise." (1996)

We'll write again,

Michelle Fine, Janice Bloom, April Burns, Lori Chajet, Monique Guishard, Yasser Payne, Tiffany Perkins-Munn and Maria Elena Torre

#### Notes

- 1 The schools involved in the surveys, focus groups, individual interviews and participant observations were drawn from The Regional Minority Network Consortium districts which include Mamaroneck, New York; Ramapo/Spring Valley, New York; Bedford, New York; White Plains, New York; New Rochelle, New York; Montclair, New Jersey; Cherry Hill, New Jersey; Summit, New Jersey; Maplewood/South Orange, New Jersey; South Brunswick, New Jersey. Additional schools/students were drawn from the Performance Based Assessment Consortium of small schools in New York City and the high schools in Paterson, New Jersey. Forty-two of these high-school students ultimately earned college credit for their involvement in the research.
- 2 The elders interviewed include former President of Bronx Community College Roscoe Brown Jr.; Professor Emeritus of Social Psychology Morton Deutsch; New York University Professor of History Adam Green; former Deputy Director for the New York State Department of Aging and prison reform advocate Thea Jackson; former engineer on the Hubble Telescope and prison reform advocate Bailey Jackson; Professor Emeritus of Law and co-founder of the Center for Constitutional Rights Arthur Kinoy (1920–2003); former Director of Jersey City Child Development Centers Esther Lee; the internationally acclaimed poet and English professor Sonia Sanchez; educator and children's book author Bernice Davison Schwebel; former Professor of Education, Milton Schwebel and the Honorable Judge Jack Weinstein. Each was interviewed at home or at work, for an hour or two, by a youth researcher, who asked the elders about the "project" of *Brown*, the vision, the history and the legacy.
- 3 The data we present draw some general conclusions about the generation of youth, and then some comparisons by race/ethnic identifications. We recognize that these racial and ethnic classifications are imprecise and indeed problematic ways of viewing student identities, and that many students fall into more than one racial/ethnic group. Nevertheless, the often stark differences in social perceptions that appear between groups force us to rethink how schools and educational policies affect distinct groups of students.
- 4 Students in AP and Honors courses are significantly more likely than their peers to report: feeling challenged academically (F = 28.72, df = 1,2690, p < .001); they experience ed-

ucators as being more responsive (F = 29.340, df = 1,2827, p < .001); they are more likely to feel that they are known and understood by educators (F = 81.775, df = 3,3052, p < .001), and they are more confident that they are being academically well prepared for college (F = 35.538, df = 3,3020, p < .001).

A CHAID (chi-square automatic interaction detection) analysis of race/ethnicity, gender, parents' education and track as predictors of various items of academic engagement, motivation, confidence and achievement demonstrates that on many outcomes track is a stronger predictor than race/ethnicity, e.g., on Importance of education to me: F = 30.09, df (3,3966), p < .001; Importance of civic engagement to me: F = 11.73, df (1,2199), p < .001; School has prepared me as well as any other student for college F = 38.32, df (3,3867), p < .001, and Cantril's ladder measure of satisfaction with where you stand, now, compared to other students F = 26.21, df (3,3531), p < .001.

5 There is a substantial literature on the power of small schools, particularly with respect to narrowing the achievement gap and widening student engagement, persistence, graduation and college going rates for poor and working class youth. For relevant information on student engagement and small schools, see Engaging Schools: Fostering High School Students' Motivation to Learn, Committee on Increasing High School Students' Engagement and Motivation to Learn, National Research Council, Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2003. For empirical research on small schools and academic achievement, see Ancess, J., & Darling-Hammond, L., Beating the Odds: High Schools as Communities of Commitment, New York: Teachers College Press, 2003.

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