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Article *in* Urban Education · September 2009

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Urban Education 2009 44: 571
DOI: 10.1177/0042085908318779

Urban Education
Volume 44 Number 5
September 2009 571-607
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10.1177/0042085908318779
http://uex.sagepub.com

Facing the Rising Sun

A History of Black Educators in Washington, DC, 1800-2008

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Over 50 years after the monumental decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*, many U.S. schools remain separate and unequal. This includes schools in the nation's capital, Washington, D.C. The article discusses how in the two centuries of public education in Washington, D.C., Black educators used a variety of subversive tactics to educate their children. This article chronicles critical milestones in educational policy that affected Black educators working in segregated, all-Black schools in Washington, D.C. The authors demonstrate that, in the face of the oppressive sociopolitical conditions and racist policies, Black educators continued to serve in their own interests by fostering liberatory spaces for their children.

Keywords: *Black education; exemplary Black teachers; Washington, D.C.; history of the District of Columbia public schools*

Washington, D.C. (DC), the nation's capital, provides a striking example of the ways in which many African American educators created liberatory spaces both historically and presently by struggling against racist policy and an oppressive sociopolitical context to instill cultural consciousness, promote academic excellence, and provide the tools for racial uplift. Many Black educators built their own schools; fought against racial policy; convened parents; and fostered spaces where their students were culturally affirmed as well as guided, loved, and educated. In particular, these educators, with limited professional opportunity, used subversive and aggressive measures to instill in Black children notions of self-reliance and giving back to the community in spite of the barrier that they faced.

While there is emerging research on excellence among African American educators (Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Siddle-Walker, 1993) from historical perspectives (Anderson, 1988; Foster, 1997), few of the stories

focus on DC. Using a critical race lens, we examine the practices of African American educators who worked to create liberatory spaces for their students throughout the history of DC Public Schools. It is our expressed intention to shed light on four critical junctures in the over 200-year history of schooling for Washington's African American children. We will examine selected Black educators in DC during four chronological stages: 19th century (1800-1900, "Jim Crow" 1900-1953, "Integration" 1955-1970, and "De Jure segregation," 1970-till date. Though we do not attempt to capture all of the stories of these educators, we hope to offer a case of how African Americans serve themselves and foster liberatory spaces for their own.

The History of Black "Educators" and Their Subversive Practices

Black teachers and the ways that they foster liberatory spaces are rarely presented in scholarly accounts or in popular culture. Depictions of White teachers saving urban or rural youth are more readily seen in movies and books such as *Conrack* (1974), *Dangerous Minds* (1995), *Music of the Heart* (1999), and more recently, *Freedom Writers* (2007). In general, images of Black teachers committed to the education of Black students are rare (notwithstanding recent films such as *The Great Debaters* and *Akeelah and the Bee*). When Black teachers are represented, especially in sociological and anthropological literature, one-dimensional stereotypical images dominate, demonstrating the "prototypical" Black woman teacher who neither identifies nor relates well with her students of African American descent (Foster, 1997; Lynn, 2001). Such accounts, in a sense, provide a cursory analysis of Black teachers; however, examining the experiences and practices of Black teachers and their ability to foster liberatory spaces is complex and necessitates a deeper understanding of the social context and pressures in which these teachers work and live.

Countering the many accounts that present Black teachers' practices as inferior, a small body of literature has emerged that provides multiple representations of Black teachers. With the growth of these studies, produced by historians and some educational researchers, the literature has now come to re-present more promising accounts of Black teachers. For example, Foster (1997), in her quest to render a narrative of the experiences of Black teachers, devoted an entire book to the lives and practices of Black teachers who taught before, during, and after the Civil Rights movement. In her text, *Black Teachers on Teaching,* she interviewed 20 Black

teachers, whom she refers to as the elders, the veterans, and the novices, born between 1905 and 1973.

This book draws from a life history approach to seek understanding as to "how teaching has been experienced and understood by Blacks engaged in the profession" (p. xx). In this re-presenting, Black teachers became what Fairclough (2001) referred to as double agents because they utilize overt and covert forms of resistance for the purposes of serving the Black community and Black children. They also served as political activists and advocates for their Black students.

Revisionist and educational scholars present stories about transformative Black teachers. By doing this, they capture the spectrum of differences of Black teachers with hopes of countering the one-dimensional image that historically dominated the literature. These stories represent the complex experiences that many Black teachers faced within a raced, gendered, and classed environment (Fairclough, 2001; Foster, 1997; Fultz, 1995; Littlefield, 1994) and are used to demonstrate attributes such as caring and high expectations in the segregated all-Black school (Siddle-Walker, 1993). These stories disclose the ongoing sacrifices and public and private forms of resistance and struggle Black teachers ensued to demand quality education for Black students (Anderson, 1988; Shujaa, 1994). These stories, tied to larger stories of oppression, resistance, and liberation, provide a voice for those historically marginalized in the literature and demonstrate how teachers acted as double agents to manipulate the system to empower their Black students. More recently, these representations capture the progressive practices of Black teachers by demonstrating both culturally responsive (Ball, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994) and emancipatory teaching practices (Ball, 2000; Henry, 1998; Irvine, 2000; Lynn, 2001; Mitchell, 1998). Taken in total, these stories seek to contribute to the growing body of literature that portrays the countless dimensions of Black teachers, their experiences, and their liberatory practices. To the extent that these teachers were consciously and deliberately subverting the dominant perception that African children are unlovable, unteachable, limited to narrow life outcomes, and second-class citizens, these teachers were, in fact, subversive.

Methods

This qualitative study uses primary source data analysis to trace the education history of DC; we sifted through newspapers, archival records, census data, and meeting notes in an attempt to uncover the stories of Black

educators and the ways they strived to create spaces for their students to learn. In addition, we highlighted educational policies such as the Appropriations Act of 1901, *Bolling v. Sharpe* and *Hobson v. Hanson* and racialized structures, such as the educational site (macrolevel) and the ongoing responses and resistance by Black educators (microlevel). Most important, we interviewed teachers and students who attended the District of Columbia public schools (DCPS) to capture their personal experiences in segregated settings. Finally, when possible, we analyzed teaching practices and learning within DCPS and cite instances of Black teachers continuing to educate their students in spite of the racial and classed barriers that limited access to resources.

The 19th Century: 1800-1900s

In 1802, at the request of its DC residents, Congress gave the city a charter requiring periodic renewal and modifications—with limited home rule (Melder, 1997). Shortly after the federal government moved to DC, the first public schools in DC were established in 1804. In accordance with the provisions in the city charter for the "establishment and superintendence of schools," the city council, on December 5, 1804, passed an act "to establish and endow a permanent institution for the education of youth in the City of Washington," which provided for a board of trustees of public schools for White children. The act also provided an annual appropriation not to exceed $1,500 for the support of the schools, to allow for the instruction of children of the poor, who alone received free tuition (Hurlbut, 1981). In 1805, Thomas Jefferson was designated the first DC school board president. By the late 1880s, public education had become one of the basic services the White majority expected from the district government.

During the early 19th century, African Americans constituted one fourth of the population of DC (McQuirter, 2003). In DC and in Northern states, prior to widespread slave revolts and the rise in antislavery sentiment, enslaved and free African Americans availed themselves of formal education—largely through the self-help efforts of their fellow free, usually church-based, African Americans (Collins, 1959; Melder, 1997; Special Report, 1871). As early as 1807, there was evidence that three Black men, recently freed from enslavement, risked their lives to establish the first Black school in DC. George Bell, Moses Liverpool, and Nicholas Franklin, "who knew not a letter of the alphabet" organized this school close to the DC waterfront (Fitzpatrick & Goodwin, 1999). In order to strategically quell White opposition, Bell placed an advertisement in the newspaper stating,

"No writings are to be done by the teachers for a slave, neither directly or indirectly, to serve the purpose of a slave on any account. . ." This school did serve the Black community and was the first in a long line of educational institutions developed by Black educators and for members of the Black community (Hutchinson, 1981) and serving as early examples of the educators subverting a social and economic system that was intended to oppress rather than liberate Blacks.

DC attracted many freed Africans. Although the importation of enslaved Africans was not outlawed in the DC until 1850, Washington, D.C. was among three cities where "free [B]lack people attain[ed] a majority in the [B]lack community before the Civil War. Free [B]lack people outnumbered [enslaved Blacks] in Washington by three to two in 1830, and by more than five to one by 1860. . . . When free men and women of color journeyed to Washington, they came to the 'freest place in the South'" (Melder, 1997, p. 50). Although their freedom was tightly constricted by so-called Black codes, laws that restricted the civil rights and civil liberties of Black residents, those African Americans located in DC quickly established businesses, churches, and other community institutions. As a result, many Black people moved to the North for "a better life," referring to better jobs, formal schools, and a less racist environment. At the beginning of the Civil War, 11 schools in the DC and Georgetown (then a separate jurisdiction) operated for 1,100 African American students. In the same year that the DC Emancipation Act of 1862 made DC the first free jurisdiction in the South, an act of Congress created in DC the first public schools for African Americans anywhere in the South; they functioned independently of the local municipal government until 1873 (DC Public Schools, 1976; Kluger, 1975). By the war's end, the city's African American population had grown from 11,000 to more than 35,000 (Horton & Horton, 1993), 30,000 of whom were newly freed and only 2,000 of whom were receiving any schooling (Haycock, 1949).

With new and enforced civil rights laws during this period, DC quickly became a bastion for impressive levels of Black wealth, giving rise to its own cultural renaissance. The Congress's Reconstruction Act of 1867 gave African American men the right to vote and the first municipal office holder was elected in 1871. Native luminaries in the disciplines of writing, dancing, singing, and music left indelible marks not only on DC but also on the larger nation (Green, 1976).

The early 1870s marked an important period not only for the educational aspirations of African Americans living in DC but also in their quality of life. The rising Black population of DC, numbering 48,000, were mostly

rural migrants (Green, 1967). The push for African American suffrage was perceived to be settled by way of the 15th Amendment insuring voting rights for Black men, and the Black middle class (including six African American city council members) began to believe their long-standing industry ingrained in education, institutions, and manners would finally be rewarded with social and political equity (Cary, 1996; Green, 1967; U.S. Capitol Historical Society, 1993). Civil rights laws were enacted that forbade racial discrimination in all sectors in the DC; these laws were intended to supercede the "Black codes" (Melder, 1997).

This period, however, was short lived as the local separate jurisdictions of Washington City, Georgetown, and Washington County were unified under one territorial government, conferring few U.S. citizenship and voting rights, due precisely to the city's significant African American presence (Melder, 1997, p. 166). In addition, the four separate school administrative systems—one for African Americans and three for the Whites in what was formerly Washington City, Washington County, and Georgetown—were merged into one. By 1874, Congress ended the territorial government, replacing it with an unelected three-man commission appointed by the president. The ostensible reason was that the territorial government was corrupt and had run up objectionable debts in an effort to modernize the nation's capital (Cary, 1996; U.S. Capitol Historical Society, 1993). However, overwhelming evidence indicates that White Washingtonians had grown hostile to Reconstruction policies and were willing to forego all local governance (home rule) to avoid the rising political power of African Americans (Collins, 1959; Green, 1967; Horton & Horton, 1993; Johnson, 1987; Melder, 1997). In addition to having no elected representation in the U.S. Congress, DC residents had no budget or legislative controls over local affairs. Middle-class African Americans took a small measure of comfort in the fact that the so-called colored schools had an African American superintendent from 1868 unto 1900, providing one arena of advancement as other political and social arenas closed rapidly during the same time period.

Legal Sanctions, Racialized Policy, and Black Resistance: 1900s-1950s

In 1896, the Supreme Court ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that all public accommodations be "separate but equal," across racial lines (known as "Jim Crow" policies). As a result, the first two decades of the 20th century were brutal years for the once-hopeful Black middle class, and worse for poor and working-class African Americans. Following each of the World

Wars, the Northern migration of Southern Blacks dramatically increased the school-age population, severely overcrowding segregated schools. The consciousness and activism of Blacks took a variety of forms including "making lemonade" out of the bitter lemon of racial segregation, protest, and civil disobedience. This section describes the arc of the Jim Crow era as it affected schooling and educational policy for Black children in DC over the next 50-year period.

By 1900, Congress reorganized the board of education and revoked much of the autonomy the "colored" schools had enjoyed for 32 years. In a separate act, while codifying district laws in 1901, Congress overlooked the portion containing municipal civil rights regulations (Melder, 1997). Briefly, as recompense, Washington's African American public schools—considered nearly equal to White schools in terms of teacher pay, financing, supplies, and so on—became the pride of (and source of employment for) many of the African American elites. For the most part, both Black and White educators defined high-quality schooling by the inputs: "facilities and equipment, teacher-student ratios, administrative and supervisory systems, the curriculum, the qualifications of teachers, and the like" (Diner, 1982, p. 52).

However, in 1901, the Appropriations Act legally sanctioned a separate race-based dual-schooling system that laid the groundwork for unequal resources, funding, and expectations. The Appropriation Act for Washington, D.C. public schools set up a board of education to have control over all of DC's public schools with one superintendent and two assistant superintendents. One of the assistant superintendents would assume leadership over the Black schooling system.

In 1910, only 10% of children from "alley areas" (largely poor and African American) continued their education past the age of 14 in 1910. However, 42% of 17-year-old African Americans in 1910 were still enrolled in school (Mintz, 1989). In fact, the number of all students, including African Americans, pursuing high school and postsecondary education grew dramatically during this period. This was due partly to the increased migration of rural families, the rapid development of the professions, the development of scientific and engineering university programs, higher workplace-entry standards, the popularity of high schools compared with private schools and academies, and child labor and compulsory education laws that held students in school for longer periods (Haycock, 1949). For African American students, the conjunction of a well-financed segregated school system with a wide array of public employers also spurred the enrollment growth (Mintz, 1989). It was also during this time that high

schools become more democratic institutions than the elite, college preparatory schools for the upper classes of previous decades. The transformation of high schools was dramatic, with a particularly cutting twist for African Americans. In 1899, the Supreme Court ruled that Southern school boards were not required to offer public secondary schooling for African American youth, and most did not do so until after World War II (Anderson, 1988). Thus, in the early decades of the 20th century, DC schools became a ticket to the promised land for Black Southern migrants.

In 1913, Black residential dispersion in DC came to a halt. President Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921) enacted his vision of segregationist racialized practices in DC, which, over the next 20 years, led to the sharp erosion of the Black community's social, political, and economic rights (Manning, 1998). In addition, government agencies (nationally and locally) were formally racially segregated. As a result, Blacks living in DC were restricted to and overcrowded into neighborhoods in the inner city; White residents spread to the outer zones of the city and to the suburbs.

The majority of African Americans lived within a 2.25 mile radius of the business district (Landis, 1948). **"**Negroes" were distinctively defined as those with identifiable African ancestry, phenotypical features, or "known socially as colored" even if they could "pass" as White (Landis, 1948). In this case, laws and unwritten policies functioned to design a system of discrimination based on biologically determined characteristics. "Whiteness" as a racialized privilege was legitimated and embraced through this unwritten doctrine (Harris, 1995).

At the same time competition for scarce housing in DC was exacerbated by the influx of White workers. "Jim Crow" laws governed African American life post–World War I. Restrictive housing covenants prevented members of the Black community from moving to the suburbs. Thus, African Americans began to cluster into pockets in compressed, less desirable inner-urban zones (Manning, 1998). In the 1940s, Manning, a historian, noted,

> The government promoted passive segregation policies that affirmed this tenuous social geography. These include restrictive covenants for preventing property transfer to specified groups, denying construction permits, and/or financing to African American housing developments outside the designated black zones, condemning Black-owned residential property in the "public interest" (highways, public buildings, parks, White housing), permitting suburban communities to reject federal funds for public housing, and administering federal mortgage loan [FHA, VA] programs so that Blacks would not be able to purchase homes in the suburbs. (Manning, 1998, p. 335)

Table 1
Population Characteristics: Washington, D.C., 1947

	"Negro" Increase	White Increase
Inner zones	38,136	21,873
Outer zones	17,062	99,141
Suburbs	5,836	104,699
Metropolitan	61,034	225,713

Source: Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Population Characteristics, July 1947.

Census data on population characteristics between 1930 and 1940 show the contrast between living conditions (see Table 1).

In spite of these laws, those members of the Black community living in DC recalled how the Black community and many of the schools thrived and flourished within these segregated pockets. Insulated, Black people created a self-sufficient society in DC where Black-owned businesses, newspapers, churches, and educational and civic institutions prospered. Black parents and educators shielded their children from the harsh reality of racist practice rife in DC. Oral narratives of members of the Black community reveal that DC was a national magnet for Black culture. As Howard Lincoln, 88, recalled, "The DC theatres attracted big black stars like Duke Ellington, Nat Cole, and Count Basie. Even White folks would come from the suburbs to see these acts" H. Lincoln (personal communication, April 10, 2004). The Black community thrived as they developed and maintained strong social networks and a sense of self-reliance.

Although the social relations within the DC Black community flourished, the dual-schooling system remained intact, separate, and unequal. For example, school buildings for Black students were inferior to those facilities of Whites. Most of the Black schools were built prior to World War I. A third of the buildings were built before the Spanish American War. Playgrounds, gymnasiums, athletic fields, auditoriums, classrooms, desks, maps, blackboards, shop fixtures were all inferior (Landis, 1948). Jim Crow laws may have felt less onerous to DC's Black community compared with other parts of the South. In fact, it was not until the first Northern migration of rural Blacks, following World War I and the subsequent overcrowding of schools, that African American Washingtonians complained loudly about the condition of their schools (Anderson, 1988; Haycock, 1949; Melder, 1997; Mintz, 1989; Moore, 1999). Nevertheless, the relative economic, political, and social advantages dispensed to the White community

under systematic White supremacy in the nation's capital were reinforced through patterns of segregation and oppressive policies.

Paradoxically, Dunbar High School, renowned nationally for its focus on high academic achievement and outstanding alumni, was considered during this period to be a model for Black education not only in DC, but in the nation. Initially founded in 1870 as the 1st Preparatory High school and later renamed the M Street School and then Dunbar High School, Dunbar was best known for its esteemed faculty, its focus on academic excellence, its sense of racial pride, and its place as a laboratory for fostering Black student leadership who understood the importance of "giving back" to the Black community.

A former student, teacher, and administrator in DC, Julius West, 81, reflected on his relationships with Black teachers while a student at Dunbar High School in the 1940s:

> The Black teachers at Dunbar High School were highly respected. They inspired us . . . I lived up to my potential. My teacher was interested in me as a person . . . they expected us to learn and to make a difference in our community. (personal communication, April 10, 2004)

West viewed his teachers as strong role models. He also recollected their dedication to their Black students. He received the message from his teachers that learning was not only for knowledge's sake, but that the end goal of education was to transform the Black community.

Many Black teachers who came to Dunbar High School were highly educated. These Black instructors held PhDs and masters and had attended schools such as Oberlin College, Harvard University, and Minor Normal Teaching College (Hutchinson, 1981). As West remembered, "They brought their skills back to the school."

West continued to explain why Black teachers at this time were so educated: If you were Black, college-educated, and living in DC you could only be a messenger or clerk for the government, or you could become a teacher in a segregated school. Dunbar High School was a premier institution; therefore, it attracted highly qualified teachers. Black teachers came from all over the country to work at Dunbar for both social and financial reasons. DC was a magnet for Black teachers because it was a premier city ripe with social opportunities. Therefore, after attending prestigious universities, these educators purposely chose to teach in DCPS and at the most respected Black high school in the country. Another former student, Sally Thomas, a 1936 graduate of Dunbar High School remembered,

> Most of the teachers I had held masters and PhDs. Black teachers taught Greek and Latin, in addition the basic skills of reading and writing. As part of the overarching philosophy of the school, teachers and administrators alike believed that the purpose of education was to prepare students for service to the Black race. (personal communication, March 22, 2004)

As Thomas recollected, Black teachers pushed their students to attend the large, endowed Northeastern universities where they could become doctors and lawyers and utilize their talents within the Black community. Southern White colleges would not accept Black students and most historically Black colleges and universities were not yet accredited. There was little hope otherwise for Black students to enter the mainstream as professionals. Therefore, Black educators working at Dunbar High taught with the expectation that their Black students would matriculate through a mainstream institution and return to the Black community for professional opportunity and service. Many Black students graduating from Dunbar High School during the late 1800s attended Harvard, Yale, Brown, Amherst, Dartmouth, and Radcliff (Hutchinson, 1981). Dunbar High School remained a premier institution throughout the first half of the 20th century.

While many students recalled positive memories of their Black educators and of their educational experiences in DCPS, there were ongoing institutionalized challenges. For example, in spite of the rise in the numbers of Black teachers in the teaching force, overcrowding in the Black school system remained a critical issue. In 1930, 34% (1,062) of DC teachers were Black. By 1948, the percentage of Black teachers employed by DCPS rose to 41% (1,384; Hutchinson, 1981). A report conducted by the National Negro Congress in 1941 found that on average there were 40 students per teacher in the Black schooling system as opposed to the Board of Education standard of 36 students per teacher (Washington Council, 1941). The report also found severe overcrowding in the elementary, middle, and high schools located within the Black schooling system. The following chart (Table 2) highlights the number of classes with overcrowding within the elementary schools.

The failure of DCPS to address the overcrowding in classes, according to the critique by the National Negro Congress, “represented more than an effort to economize, it reflected deliberate racial discrimination” (National Negro Congress, p. 4). As this study found, there was little attempt to respond to this inequity by the DC Board of Education (Washington Council, 1941). Between 1946 and 1947, White schools were only three quarters filled (Landis, 1948).

Table 2
Black Elementary Schooling System: Reports of Overcrowding, 1941

Classes	Number of Students
213	41 or more pupils
61	46 or more pupils
16	51 or more pupils
2	56 or more pupils

Source: Data taken from *The Critical Situation in the Negro Public Schools*, Washington Council, 1941.

A 1947 *Washington Post* article entitled, "School Produces Good Citizens in D.C.'s Most Neglected Area," captures conditions of the Black school system. Old, dilapidated buildings and limited resources, in addition to overcrowding, plagued Black teachers and administrators. Referring to the deplorable conditions at Terrell School, the article's staff writer states,

> Constructed in 1890 as a high school, the building was later condemned as unfit for use and abandoned. Built originally for 200 students, its capacity is now 673, the enrollment is 734. The extra children sit on cafeteria stools without backs, on the window sills or on the floor.
>
> The academic work is no less handicapped by overcrowded classrooms with bad lighting. There is no library . . . the hole in the wall that contains what few books the library boasts would deter anyone from the pursuit of knowledge. As none of these old schools has a playground, the children play either in the street, a main artery, and fire land. Diagonally across from the school, there is a large enclosed playground for white children. Nobody uses it, as only a handful of white families live in the apartment nearby.

In spite of the physical barriers and other dire conditions, Black teachers an administrators rose to the challenge. According to the *Washington Post*, active parental involvement, high expectations, strong academics, and holistic approaches to education became part of the informal mission of this school. For example, the PTA, composed of more than 2,000 members, participated in lectures by leading experts in nutrition and health. The reporter found that highly educated Black teachers and administrators were committed to providing for and educating their Black students. The staff writer quoted the school principal as saying of most importance to her was the "deep and humane compassion, which she had for her race, especially for the children who suffer most acutely from the White man's conscious and unconscious repression of that race." As evidenced by the quote, the

principal's subversive practices seemed to be grounded in the desire to create a safe space for her students most deeply affected by the explicit and institutional racism afflicting her students. Teachers, parents, and administrators worked diligently to ensure a productive environment for their Black children. For example,

> When the children leave school at 5:30, the teachers' hardest work begins. They have meetings with the parents of problem children either at the school or at their home. The PTA with a membership of 2,000 includes not only parents but also cousins, aunts, and uncles who enjoy the lectures by leading experts in nutrition and health and the socials at which the lectures are discussed.

The reporter also found that teachers fostered an environment where their students developed a spiritual foundation.

> In addition, the teachers believed it was their responsibility to attend to their students' basic needs. The staff writer found that these Black teachers would sacrifice their own well-being in order to provide food and clothing to their students.
>
> [Teachers] paid for breakfast for the children who come to school hungry. They are not only able but warm-hearted people. Often they go without new shoes and dresses to clothe the pupils, especially when some poor youngster would have to stay away from graduation. ("Schools Produces Good Citizens," 1947, p. F19)

This *Washington Post* article provides a striking example of how many Black educators worked to subvert the physical and social confines of this DC elementary school located in the segregated system. In addition, it also demonstrates how these teachers relied on principles of communal self-help to create a space where their students could receive physical, spiritual, and intellectual nourishment. This school and the efforts of its educators were not unlike many schools in DC during this time period. Many educators resisted the sociopolitical contexts and the lack of resources to insure that their students were educated.

Black Educators Versus Jim Crow: Activism and Struggles of the 1950s

Although many Black teachers continued to educate their Black students within the inequitable conditions of the all-Black segregated schools, the lack of access to knowledge and overcrowded, dilapidated schools became

a growing concern for members of the Black community located in segregated areas. Throughout this time, parents and community members fought incessantly for high-quality educational resources, often to no avail (Baratz, 1975).

In 1950, a barber and parent, Gardner Bishop, became frustrated by his son attending the Black school across town that was described as "forty-eight years old, dingy, ill-equipped and located across the street not from the velvet green of a golf course but from The Lucky Pawnbroker Exchange. Its science laboratory consisted of one Bunsen burner and a goldfish (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2000)." One day, he walked his son, along with 10 other Black children, to the newly built junior high school in their neighborhood and demanded admittance:

> On September 11, 1950 Bishop led a group of eleven African American children to the city's new high school for white students. The school, named for [John Philip] Sousa, was a large modern building, boasting spacious classrooms and multiple basketball courts. When the group reached the high school, Gardner Bishop requested admittance for the African American students that had accompanied him to see Sousa High School. It seemed clear that the building could accommodate a higher enrollment. His request was denied, ensuring the African American students a continued unequal educational experience. (Kansas State Historical Society, 2003, p. 4)

Denied solely on the basis of racial identity, Wilson filed a petition, which, 4 years later, resulted in a lawsuit, *Bolling v. C. Melvin Sharpe,* landing in the Supreme Court alongside *Brown v. Board of Education.*

Bishop can be considered one of a long line of Black educators who resisted the inequalities prevalent in DC public schools. In general, most African Americans had never fully endorsed the "separate but equal" doctrine even as they worked to create excellence within their separate society. The quest, however, was not for integration for the sake of sitting next to White children; rather, the desire was for equitable educational and social opportunity in the United States. In this case, Bishop who championed the cause of education, sought to change policy by disputing the racism ingrained in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision.

Public schools were both the last hold-out for legal segregation in DC and the first line of attack in regaining limited home rule for District citizens. When the Supreme Court outlawed segregated public schools nationwide in 1954, Washingtonians took pride in engineering a smooth, "model" transition (Green, 1976; Kluger, 1975). However, the Southern Democratic segregationists ("Dixiecrats") who dominated the Congressional District Committee

were determined to discredit "race mixing" through incendiary investigations, limited school financing, resistance to building new schools, and other tactics. In addition, the decision to overturn segregation led to extensive movement of Whites to the suburbs, leaving in its wake not only legal segregation but also socially and culturally sanctioned segregated housing patterns and schools (Baratz, 1975). Black activists and liberals angered over years of inequality and by the continuing inability of the schools to raise student achievement also attacked the schools (Diner, 1982). As a result, Black students within DCPS continued to suffer from chronic problems such as attending dilapidated schools, overcrowding, and inadequate resources. The push to integrate, paradoxically, served to aggravate the already inequitable social and economic conditions pervasive in DCPS for many Black residents, as more Whites and a handful of privileged Blacks with economic and political resources pulled their children out of public schools ("School Improvement Is Urged by Torbriner," 1957; Wolters, 1984).

Until *Bolling v. Sharpe*, "protection" seemed to be the dominant theme in that teachers protected their students from the hostility of racism and racist practices. Black children in DC seemed highly unaware of the policies and practices in place. In fact, the prevailing theme among those individuals interviewed was, "We were safe, we were protected, we were affirmed." Thus, teaching during this period in DC reflected pride, racial uplift, high expectations, and rigorous academics. This would all change when the White and Black communities intersected. Racism, once ingrained in policy, became a way of life, and the teaching methods of many Black educators began to reflect ways in which students could navigate the broader, ostensibly desegregated, DC school system.

Academic Tracking: Institutionalized Racism Reconceptualized (1955-1970)

Much changed after the *Brown v. Board* decision of 1954. Schools that were all White, became integrated, and within a decade became all-Black. In the 20 years between the *Brown* Supreme Court decision and home rule, Whites—and increasingly middle-class African Americans—fled the city. Racism, class animosity, suburbanization, equal opportunity housing laws, urban renewal, poverty, the growing pains of the new local government, and general social unrest created instability in the public schools. For example, an article in the *Washington Post* demonstrated the changing demographics at McKinley Technological High School. The article states:

> McKinley Tech continued to lose Whites at a dizzying pace. In 1954, 404 Blacks and 562 Whites attended McKinley. Four years later 1,375 Blacks and 114 Whites did, according to a school report. By 1964, there were nine white students. Integration at McKinley Tech was dead. (Wee, 2004)

Jenee Sampson, an oral history interviewee, recalled vast changes in the educational system as well as in the schooling process for Black youth attending DCPS schools. Before the *Brown* decision, she had wonderful Black teachers as role models and several all-Black social outlets such as the movies, parks, and restaurants:

> Family and teachers shielded us from the hurt and isolation that would come with racism. It did not affect the way I felt about myself. Our intelligence was affirmed. There were certain places that we could go and certain places that we could not go but that did not bother us because we had everything that we needed in our own society. After the [*Brown*] decision, it seems as though society changed, schools changed and yet, things remained racially segregated. (personal communication, April 18, 2004)

During this time, DC experienced a new wave of Southern Blacks who migrated to pursue job opportunities and better housing. Between 1950 and 1960, the number of Blacks increased from approximately 284,313 to 411,737 (Manning, 1998). Simultaneously, the number of Whites living in DC fell from approximately 518,000 to 352,000, making it the prototype "chocolate city" with "vanilla suburbs" characteristic of U.S. cities at this time (Manning, 1998).

To avoid racial mixing within schools, the policy of academic tracking was enacted and approved by the DC Board of Education in 1959 (Hurlbut, 1981). Interestingly, the definition of high-quality education broadened to include student outcomes—what students knew and could do as a result of their schooling (Diner, 1982) and as measured by test scores. An official system of academic tracking became the way to solve the disparity in educational attainment among the children in DC Public Schools (Baratz, 1975). With academic tracking, racial segregation became reconceptualized. As opposed to separating students of different races between schools, students of different races were separated within schools. Black and White students were separated within the same buildings based on four educational tracks: remedial/basic, general, college preparatory, and honors. Placement on a track depended on motivation, past classroom performance, and scores on achievement and aptitude tests (Southern School News, 1958; Wolters, 1984).

At first, academic tracking seemed to be a good idea for all of the stakeholders seeking to alleviate the racial disparity in academic achievement within schools, as middle-class African American parents expected their children to be placed on the higher tracks (Wolters, 1984). However, the desire to address the racial disparity had less to do with a growing concern for the education of Black children and more to do with racism and with the notorious reputation DC schools developed nationally and internationally for low academic achievement (Diner, 1982).

Disparities persisted in access to educational resources and quality education between Blacks and Whites because the majority of Black students were confined to tracked schooling that was beneath their expectations (Diner, 1982; Washington Post, 1958; Kluger, 1975). More important, the majority of students in the DC public schools, that is, African Americans from low-income families, were condemned to a curricula and school buildings that held little to no expectations for success. Shortly after its implementation, the DC public school's tracking system met with opposition from Black educators, parents, and community members. Black community members sued the superintendent of schools in 1967, in the case of *Hobson v. Hansen*. The courts found that "ability grouping as presently practiced in DC is a denial of equal opportunity to the poor and a majority of Negroes attending schools, a denial that contravenes not only guarantees of the Fifth Amendment but also the fundamental premise of tracking itself." The court ordered that the tracking system be terminated (Hurlbut, 1981). This court case also provided an opportunity for members of the Black community to protest the legality of unequal school funding and resources, arguing that unequal spending led to unequal educational opportunity. The court responded favorably to the Black community's concerns and found that Black students received considerably less funding than White students; Black schools were generally overcrowded; reading scores for Black children fell increasingly behind the national norm; aptitude tests were culturally biased; Black students were assigned to tracks for reasons other than ability; testing procedures were irrelevant and invalid; curriculum in the lower tracks led to "blue collar" jobs; and honor tracks were only available at certain schools (Skelly Wright, 1967). To remedy the situation, Judge Skelly Wright ordered that DCPS must provide transportation to bus children attending overcrowded schools to White underenrolled schools, to integrate faculty and to eradicate all racial and economic discrimination. Once again, DC Black educators subverted the dominant institutional racism by demanding equality in DC schools.

The Fair Housing Act of 1968 encouraged many middle-class Blacks to leave Washington, D.C. and move to the Maryland suburbs. They left behind a city firmly rooted in segregation and a Black school system grossly unequal in comparison to the historically "White schools." As noted on the Explore DC Web site under the Struggle for Civil Right:

> Almost half a century after the demise of legal segregation, the black and white communities are still separate in a number of ways. Many residential neighborhoods are predominantly black or white, with Rock Creek Park serving as a divider. Each side of the park is lined with neighborhoods of large homes on beautifully landscaped grounds, yet Washingtonians understand that the phrase, "west of the park," means white neighborhoods, while "the Gold Coast" refers to the equally splendid African American homes on the east side. "East of the River" is the phrase for all-black neighborhoods at the far north- and southeastern reaches of Washington that are home to the city's poorest residents and some of its lowest-achieving schools.
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> With housing covenants a thing of the past, many middle class blacks have left the city. Tightly-knit neighborhoods like Shaw, where African Americans of all economic levels made a community, withered away with the end of desegregation and particularly with the devastating riots that followed the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968. While schools are no longer legally segregated, the public school system is more than 97 percent black. (Ghost of the Past section, paragraph 1; WETA, 2001)

By this time, many of the protective factors that sheltered Black children from the harsh indictments of race and class oppression had diminished. Black families who remained in the city were left to recreate an educational system that met the specific needs of their children. Black educators continue to work within and without DCPS. Although many Black teachers in the period between 1950 and 1970 held high expectations for their students and attempted to instill self-esteem, many Black students still attended antiquated, overcrowded schools where irrelevant curriculum prevailed (Baratz, 1975). Civil rights activists perceived the school board and superintendent as unresponsive, if not hostile, to the educational needs of poor Black children (Diner, 1996).

Two educational phenomena are worth noting during this time period: the appointment of Barbara Sizemore, considered a brilliant educator, who became the first female African American Superintendent of DC public Schools' troubled system in 1973, and the development of African-centered schools.

Barbara Sizemore served as superintendent of DCPS from 1973 to 1975. At the core of Sizemore's educational philosophy lay a commitment to decentralization and individualized teaching and preference for open classrooms. In addition, she called for the elimination of standardized national tests and more courses on Black history and the socioeconomic problems of the urban ghetto. Here she reconceptualized the importance of culture in a system built on privileging high-quality education for its White students. Due to her administrative experiences in Chicago, she was perceived as having keen insights to the education of poor Black urban youth. A *Washington Post* article stated, "Dr. Sizemore made no secret that she was particularly interested in raising the academic achievement of African American students and stirred controversy when she said in a speech that she had "a higher calling than educating children, and that was uplifting my race (2004)." She was highly critical of standardized tests referring to them as "the new lynching tool" for the aspirations of African Americans, fundamentally believing that they were systematically created to separate the winners and the losers. Her educational ideas were consistent with the reform tenor of the times and her observations of the local bureaucracy were welcomed.

While Sizemore's ideas matched the desires of many of the Black parents, she was an outsider attempting to decentralize a hardened bureaucracy using a top-down approach. Her obituary that quoted from a *Washington Post* article written in 1975 stated that

> Mrs. Sizemore assumed center stage in an arena that was wracked by social ferment, political battles and court fights during the two decades of civil rights struggles and the District's drive for home rule [political self-determination, including Congressional voting rights]. The campaign for self-government ended only last year with the city's first elected mayor and Council in more than a century. (*The Washington Post*, 2004)

Her controversial tenure as superintendent lasted until 1975. However, she left an indelible mark as one in a long line of Black educators and freedom fighters who struggled to foster liberatory spaces in DC public schools.

The development of independent African-centered schools in DC was another important example of liberatory spaces during this period. African-centered schools also "rest on the legacy of the Black Studies movement" (Lee & Slaughter-Defoe, 1995, p. 356), spawned by the efforts of politically conscious Black educators at the university level. They were created

as an alternative education for African American children in urban settings (Madhubuti & Madhubuti, 1994). As important, these schools, which were founded to insure high educational achievement, underscored the necessity of a strong cultural foundation for children of African descent. During the 1970s several schools such as NationHouse Watoto Shule/Sankofa, Roots Activity Learning Center, and Ujima Ya Ujamaa School were designed to instill positive cultural esteem in African American children who otherwise faced new forms of racist oppression within DC public schools. Teachers in these African-centered schools transformed their teaching to reflect the cultural values of their students. Carson (1981) remarked, "The freedom school teachers eliminated traditional classroom rules and developed innovative teaching strategies designed to encourage free expression of ideas" (p.119). Instead of critically adopting White cultural values evidenced by the curriculum and pedagogical styles, these teachers desired to preserve their African heritage, promote active civic engagement, and create community uplift. As affirming as these schools strived to be, they continued to attract only a small percentage of DC's school-aged Black children.

By late 1980s and early 1990s, the DC Committee on Public Education (DC COPE) published comprehensive reports on the status of the public school system in DC. At the time of the DC COPE report, DC had a higher percentage of adults in jail than any other jurisdiction in the United States—more than 1,500 people incarcerated for every 100,000 residents. It had the largest police force per capita than any other city in the country. Approximately 30% of all children in the District under 16 years of age lived in poverty. Four out of ten students dropped out of school before earning a diploma. Three fifths of the students in the elementary schools came from families whose income was low enough for them to qualify for free school lunch; 25% of the elementary school population were welfare dependent. African American children comprised 91% of public school students; 4% were White; and 5% were Asian, Native American, and Latino. The conditions of public school for DC's Black children had changed very little in nearly a century of race- and class-based policy. The continuing challenge for Black educators was to subvert the low expectations for success for Black children.

The Current Context

In 2007, DC maintains predominantly White affluent, Black middle-class and Black impoverished enclaves. There is a small but growing Latino and other population. Even as a growing high-wealth city, where rising

property values and gentrification (the movement of middle- and upper-middle-class Whites into poor neighborhoods) and an influx of middle-class Whites have transformed the economic and social character of certain areas of DC, large pockets of poverty still remain.

Neighborhoods in DC illustrate that vast racial and class differences still exist for poor Black students. Where students attend school located East of the River, liquor stores, check cashing facilities and pawn shops disproportionately litter the neighborhoods as compared to neighborhoods on the west side.

In 1999, recognizing the immense inequalities that exist between schools, DC enacted a policy that vastly altered the way funds would be disseminated to each school. According to an employee in Academic Services, central administrators enacted this policy for two reasons: that schools could retain more local control and funding per school became more transparent and more equitable (personal communication, February, 19, 2004). Instead of parceling out money to individual schools, DCPS began using a per-pupil formula to distribute the state and federal funding allocated to each school based on the weighted average assigned to each student. For example, in 2003, each student received $4,115.21 to support their education. However, early elementary grades were given top priority, or a weight of 1.19% or $4,897. High school students in DC received a little more than 1%, $4,115. Special education students, second-language learners and free- and reduced-lunch recipients received considerably more funding per pupil. This funding provided support for all expenditures from staff salary and school curriculum to minor facility repairs and toilet paper. Any supplemental funding would need to be initiated by schools in the form of fundraising efforts, corporate or community donations or parental support; in neighborhoods with affluent White populations, schools stood to benefit from several thousand dollars in extra funding.

In spite of this systematic change in 1999, race and location in DC public schools still dictate access to resources and, in turn, access to knowledge as they did 100 years ago. For example, in many cases, informal tracking, and unequal curriculum differentiate schools west of the park from those east of the park where Black students are located. In part, resources needed to support DC public schools remain dependent on student enrollment. In addition, the U.S. Congress maintains line-item veto of the DCPS budget as it has since 1874.

Experimentation and educational innovation remain a reality in DC. Conservative policies such as vouchers and charter schools are making their mark. For example, in 1996 DC opened its first charter amidst the

backdrop of political conflict, appalling conditions in DCPS, and the strong support of a Republican-controlled Congress. In 2006, with well more than 20% of all students located in charter schools, traditional public schools, who rely on student enrollment, struggle to maintain basic resources like technology teachers, computer teachers, and librarians. One young Black principal of a struggling majority Black junior high school noted,

> When we lose students, we lose staff. Over the past few years we have had to cut down on the bare essentials. Therefore, we go without art, music and PE in order to keep the academic program running.

Thus, the time period has shifted, but remaining unresolved is the challenge of accessing much-needed resources on the institutional level. At the intersection of low socioeconomic status and Black children lay disparate conditions, limited resources, and an ailing system. Like many urban schools in the United States, high turnover rate among the leadership in the central administration remains a critical issue. Over the past 20 years, DC has had 7 superintendents, about 1 every 2.9 years. With each change in leadership, came a new vision, new policies, and a new set of faces. Levy, an educational researcher and DC historian has concluded that

> Changes in the structure of governance have not so far resolved the conflicts or cured the complaints about the performance of the school board, nor have they resulted in the hope-for improvements in resources or management. Fifty years of accelerated changes in the constitution of school governance have actually seen a worsening of poor student achievement, school dropout, and discipline, as well as more frequent superintendent turnover, management failures, and frequent changes and identified deficiencies in the instructional program. (Levy, 2004)

Despite the prevailing governance structure, teachers working in DCPS are challenged by shrinking student population, changes in leadership, obstinate policies, low student achievement, and limited resources. Yet many seasoned Black teachers remain committed to education for liberation. To be clear, we are not arguing that all Black teachers are exceptional or that no White, Latino, or Asian teachers can ever promote subversive education for Black children. But we believe that there is much to be learned from many Black teachers who are educating their students well within the ongoing challenges and inadequate resources that still beset many public schools located in DC.

Subversive Black Educators in the 21st Century

Many Black educators believe in the power of education as a liberating vehicle (Anderson, 1988). Much like Black educators of the 19th and 20th centuries, these teachers' mission was to maintain their own social networks and make personal sacrifices to offer students necessary resources, skills, and knowledge. They guided and facilitated their Black students' transition through school so that they could negotiate the dominant culture. Finally, they held an explicit race/class analysis of Black students within a dominant White power structure, acting as "double agents" (Fairclough, 2001; Foster, 1997; Fultz, 1995; Littlefield, 1994). The following vignettes highlight examples of teaching practices of three DCPS Black teachers who demonstrated love, guidance, and sociopolitical critique. In doing this, these Black teachers continued the legacy of subverting the idea that Black children are incapable of excellence and unworthy of investment.

Kathy Jones

Kathy Jones has been teaching in DCPS for 16 years. She taught all levels of graphic arts in an inner-urban high school East of the River DCPS. During observations of her classroom practice, she assumed the position of "Other mother" as Hill-Collins (1990) refers to women who assist blood mothers by sharing parental responsibilities. Jones attempted to nurture a strong classroom community among her Black students in the face of mandates from the central administration that commanded that she spend the majority of her time teaching the standard curriculum. However, Jones taught the DC curriculum and much more.

Most important to her was the desire to connect her teaching directly to her Black students' personal and cultural lives. Like the Dunbar teachers described previously, she fundamentally believes in racial uplift and holistic approaches to educating Black youth. For example, during one observation Jones began offering statistics that countered the negative images about the plight of the Black community. Reading from literature disseminated by the McDonald's Corporation, she shared with her class the following empowering statistical data about Black Americans:

> Jones: There are 37 million African Americans in the United States and 52% are female. There are 96,000 Black engineers; whether they be mechanical, electrical or what have you; there are 41,000 Black physicians; there are 47,000 Black lawyers. . . . .

Although this was not a part of the DCPS arts curriculum, Jones worked hard to give students insight and a more nuanced account of Black socioeconomic reality. By naming the above statistics about the Black community's economic status, she challenged the prevailing stereotype that most African Americans receive welfare or use drugs. As important, she provided an opportunity for her students to believe that they could become a doctor, lawyer, or homeowner, although they may not see many examples in their immediate surroundings. Jones wanted her students to transcend the pervasive negative and limited images generated by mass media and controlling ideologies in order to seek more positive identities for themselves.

Jones held herself personally responsible for purchasing much-needed materials for her class. She relied on her own strategies to creatively bring money and additional resources into the classroom. She often used personal funds, such as her tax refund check, as well as outside grants to buy paper, supplies, printer ink, and so on for the classrooms in order to provide opportunities for her students. Throughout the year, she would enter her students' work in art contests throughout the DC area. With the money that she was awarded, she would purchase much-needed supplies in order to maintain her art program.

When asked why she dedicated so much time and resources she responded that she saw herself as a surrogate parent to her students. During an interview, Jones further explained how she developed holistic relationships with her students. She explained,

> I would see myself as a momentary guide and a family member and I wish them well. And I look forward to seeing the growth spurts. I have individual goals for each student. I try to get into their little personalities and I look into their faces. I tell them in the beginning of the year that I do not know them, but that I look forward to meeting them and I watch their little faces and see when they are happy or sad or down. I tell them that I will not bother them or drive them nuts until I find out what I need to know so that they can be the best person that they need to be. And they know that I will do that.

Jones used her keen insights in conjunction with ongoing dialogue in order to stay in tune to her students' emotional well-being. Like educators of the past, her job seemed to transcend that of imparter of knowledge and assessor of her students' work to include striving to get to know the whole student. Jones developed personalized systems as well as a protective environment to meet the needs of her students located in a struggling DCPS school. Most important, she provided opportunities for her students to

debunk negative Black stereotypes as well as to become exposed to a more comprehensive understanding of cultural identity.

To illustrate, in the beginning of the semester students seemed to have limited understandings of themselves as people of African descent. Mrs. Jones provided opportunities for her students to engage in in-depth study and writing about their history and culture. She began by presenting a timeline that connected her African American students to ancient Kmt. The timeline included pivotal periods that led through the 1960s. She then introduced her students to the Middle Passage and showed the movie "The Amistad." Students were required to produce a drawing and editorial statements about any part of the movie that resonated with them. Collectively the class designed an interpretive mural of the Middle Passage. The mural, along with the drawings and editorials were to be displayed at various locations in DC in honor of their ancestors. Coincidentally, a replica of the Amistad was docking in DC as part of a national tour. Mrs. Jones decided that a teachable moment would include a trip to the Amistad. In what follows, we share the events that took place on the field trip.

Upon arriving at the replica of the Amistad, Mrs. Jones called her students to order. She introduced the tour guide by saying, "This is Mrs. Alexander and she is going to allow four of us to go on the ship before the tour begins to allow us to take pictures of the ship." Since this was the first day that the tour was opened to the public this opportunity was significant because few residents of the DC area had set foot on the ship.

Mrs. Jones chose a few students to take pictures of the ship before the rest of the class boarded. She asked students to capture the experience of seeing the Amistad as if they were seeing the ship for the first time. As the students approached the ship, they cautioned each other to be aware of the lighting and supported each other in handling and managing the equipment. The students took their time deciding which parts of the ship to capture. Some focused on trying to capture the whole ship. Others went below deck, anxious to find connections between what they saw in the movie and learned in class and what they found on the ship. They took pictures of the picture of Sengbe, of the replica of the ship, and of the poster board profiles of Africans shackled together. As soon as we came out Mrs. Jones asked the students how they felt. The students' comments ranged from neutral to utter disgust.

Student 1: It was okay.
Student 2: It was not what I was expecting.
Student 3: I am not going back on that ship, it was very disappointing.

The class then began the official tour. We proceeded to the dock area in which a crowd of forty (including our class) began to gather. As the tour guide began his talk, Mrs. Jones' students corrected the tour guide on his pronunciation of the name Sengbe. As the tour guide asked questions in a dialectical fashion, the class responded with many correct answers. At certain points the students challenged the guide.

Guide: How many slaves were on the Amistad.
Class responded: 53.
Guide: Actually, there were no slaves on the Amistad. There were 53 people on board the Amistad. But those people were not considered slaves because they were captured illegally.
Sam (a student) responded: Actually during the Middle Passage the Africans on the ship were considered and treated like slaves.

The tour guide quickly dismissed the group after bringing his talk to a close after approximately 2 minutes. We were then asked to board the ship 15 people at a time. We walked through the boat in groups and walked right back off; I noticed that comments from the students were minimal. We then left the boat, we walked through a market area in which Amistad hats, pins, and t-shirts were for sale and then proceeded to the area in which their class mural would be displayed.

Mrs. Jones said, "Class, let's gather . . . what did you think about this experience?"

Students echoed complaints. Comments included:

They had wax on the floors
This is not what we learned about
Man, it was too modern . . .

With regard to the initial tour guide one student commented, "Did you see how that tour guide made it seem as though this was not a slave ship. He made it sound as though the Africans were illegally stolen. They were enslaved!"

One young man was so frustrated that he stated that he felt like cussing out the people in charge of the tour. He echoed the responses of his classmates exclaiming that this was a waste of time and that the boat was too modern.

Privately, Mrs. Jones expressed disappointment that her students had put in months of work creating a presentation to show at this event and they did not think that this was worthy of their work and how they saw the Amistad.

However, she saw the value in their reactions. Her students developed a pride in their work and in their African culture.

This trip sheds light on how Jones' students transformed throughout the semester. Her students resisted negative ideologies of African culture and resisted the dominant cultures attempts to minimize the monstrosities of enslavement. Most important, her students re-presented their images of African culture to reflect a more authentic experience.

Michael St. John

Michael St. John taught in the only school in DCPS designated for emotionally disturbed students (ED). According to the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, students with ED exhibit one or more of the following characteristics: An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; and a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2004). The school was comprised primarily of Black boys, many of whom had poor experiences with traditional DC schools.

St. John was born in the 1950s in Guyana, a society, he argued, which was built on a racial caste system. As a child, he noticed distinctions in the life chances of children based on race and class. He found that the Guyanese educational system not only limited opportunities for poorer Black students but, more importantly, stunted their educational growth and potential. By the age of 16, he actively committed his life toward working to challenge institutionalized structures such as the educational system. To him, the educational system represented a structure that disenfranchised many Black youth. He actively worked toward transforming the learning environment for those most marginalized by the educational system, that is, Black, males, labeled.

St. John imparted a strategic education based on his belief that meaningful and realistic instruction provided his students with the ability to make informed choices. He empathized with his students who did not view conventional education as a worthwhile activity. At the same time, he was analytic about the systematic threats that occurred daily that reminded his Black students that jail is a likely possibility. St. John recognized that too many of his students observed friends, family, and neighbors being sent to jail. He used classroom time to address the realities and consequences of being in jail, and he debunked notions that being in jail is "cool" and a

necessary "rite of passage." Instead, he posited that losing one's rights and ability to make choices is inhumane.

Similarly, St. John worked within schooling institutions that reified and perpetuated the marginalization of Black students. He lived within this contradiction by proactively providing for his students meaningful educational opportunities that allowed them to grow. For example, St. John assumed the role of a fictive father, serving the same purpose as Other mothers, with the students is in his care. St. John, like Ms. Jones, sacrificed his time and money to provide for his students in ways that affected his biological family. He shared the story of his wife removing several old computers and other materials from her kitchen table that St. John had placed there to repair. She playfully commented, "I can compete with other women, no problem, but I can not compete with these kids." Her joking comment revealed the blurring of St. John's professional and personal life. For him, the two were inseparable. His students represented an extension of his biological family.

Every weekend, St. John ventured to the surrounding suburbs in search of books, equipment, second-hand computers, and other resources to bring to his classroom. To illustrate he pointed out,

> I would go to the libraries in Montgomery County [Maryland] to buy books that are discarded. . . . Caucasian parents buy books for their kids and read the book a couple of times and then give it to the library. I go there and buy books for 24 cents and I bring them to the classroom. These kids treat the books like gold because they have never seen them before.

St. John also took full advantage of opportunities to solicit donations from local organizations. For example, during one classroom observation after mentioning that a friend at a local nonprofit was giving away computers, he made arrangements the very next day to leave school and pick up the equipment, some of which needed to be rebuilt. He arrived at school early, worked through lunchtime and after school to be sure that the lab was up and running for his students the following day. During an observation the following week, a complete computer lab set-up appeared, with four additional computers; including the three computers given to St. John, there was one for each student.

St. John was resourceful, self-reliant, and desired to counter racialized stereotyping, in order to uplift his students. His Black male students—who were labeled emotionally disturbed and presumed unteachable and lacking in skills—were able to have access to resources that were not readily available as well as to thrive in a space that fostered positive self-perceptions.

Christina Cooper

Cooper worked at a DC middle school, ironically at one of the highly contested sites for the battle for equality during the 1954 *Brown* decision. Today, the middle school is 100% African American with well over 50% of the students on free and reduced lunch.

Of all the teachers interviewed and observed, Cooper seemed to express the sharpest criticism of institutionalized racism and the ways it manifested itself in regard to the inner-urban schooling for Black youth. Like Barbara Sizemore, she criticized the school curriculum and limited course offerings made available to her Black students at the middle school arguing that "a lot of the course offerings are basic because [the school] serves mostly low-income, Black students in a certain part of the city." Thus, she argued that the levels and quality of the courses offered at Ward were not competitive with schools in more affluent areas of DC. In addition, she criticized the curriculum and textbooks because she believed that they failed to authentically reflect the cultural and personal realities of her students. Furthermore, she rejected the overreliance on standardized testing as the primary means of assessment, believing that high-stakes tests lead to the elimination of "good teaching." Threaded throughout each conversation was evidence that Cooper was someone who not only "talked the talk," but she also "walked the walk."

Like the other transformative teachers in this study, Cooper thought of teaching as more than a job (Foster, 1997; Lynn, 2001; Siddle-Walker, 1993). Cooper believed that the "personal was political." In other words, politics permeated every sphere of her life. In turn, she developed her curriculum in ways that linked to larger systems of social structures. Amidst her demanding schedule as a classroom teacher, union representative, and student advocate, Cooper ran for union president of DCPS. She was also an active member of several organizations, including The Washington, D.C. Writing Project, Teaching for Change, and Washington, D.C. VOICE. This strong political activism and union affiliation is not uncommon for Black women teachers. Many Black educators of the past remind us that political activism is a trademark for many Black, female teachers and helps us to understand further the multifaceted nature of teaching practices of African American teachers (Fairclough, 2001; Fultz, 1995; Littlefield, 1994).

Cooper assumes the positionality of a Black womanist pedagogue, defined by Henry (1998) as one who opposes dominant structures to guide their students toward Black liberation. Henry refers to these women as womanist because they are simultaneously "cultural, political, educational

and spiritual" (p. 3). As with many other past educators, Cooper helped her Black students name their own reality and to make good choices while living in a White, racist society.

For instance, Cooper fundamentally believed that "it's not enough for [her Black students] to be as good as their White counterparts. They are going to have to be better because they are brown. Sorry to say, but it's true." "Being better" in this case demonstrated Cooper's acknowledgment of the institutionally raced and classed nature of society. She debunked the notion of meritocracy arguing that her students' "Blackness" and class location limited their opportunities in relation to their White counterparts. Therefore, she attempted to push her students to become more independent, more self-aware, and more analytical than when they entered her classroom.

Observations of Cooper's classroom practice revealed a resource rich environment. However, she endured a long battle with the administrator to attain 25 computers, one laser printer, two color printers, and contemporary furniture. She shared how she resisted the directives of her principal to acquire computer technology and accessories for her Black students:

> I was the only teacher teaching vocational education in this school. I found out that $30,000 came into our school for vocational education. That meant that I should be the only teacher to use it legally, according to the federal guidelines. So I asked my [supervisor] and he told me that was too much money for one teacher. "But I'm the only teacher in the building who teaches vocational education," I responded. We had to go through some steps that he did not particularly like which required me to bring in [central administration] and have the budget analyst reprogram all of the money. The [supervisor] said, "no" at first and the second time he said, "Hell no! You will not spend $30,000." So I said, "I need to see how it's being spent so that when I make a report to the Department of Education, I will need to identify how the money was used." The central administration did not want to be a part of a scandal because I sent them the guidelines so that they would know how the money should be spent.

A call was made by central administration to the school. Cooper continued to add,

> After that year, I was the only teacher that could use that money. So I've been able to purchase the computers, the scanners, the printers, and supplies for other teachers that I'm doing collaborative projects with. I've gotten this money for 3 years.

Since she had more than enough resources in her classroom, she provided computers and other resources to her teacher colleagues. Thus, her struggle was not for personal gain, rather she saw her struggle as one toward collective empowerment. She would not stop her advocacy until all classrooms serving Black students were fully equipped. Historically, this sense of collective responsibility and racial uplift was not uncommon. Hill-Collins points out that formally educated Black women of the 20th century saw themselves more as "uplifters" than as working women. Educating poor Black children was part of their moral and social obligation (Hill-Collins, 1990, p. 151).

Cooper also shared information about opportunities to gain additional resources with other DCPS teachers. It was not surprising that Cooper spends her time e-mailing teachers in DCPS about different grant opportunities or informing them of their rights as teachers. Cooper explained,

> A lot of the teachers don't have computers, books or materials. I saw an opportunity for every school in DC to get them because that organization promised a laptop lab to every underserved child in the nation, actually in 29 states. I thought to myself that would be 99% of our school. So immediately I saw a lab in every DC school and it was just a matter of getting the teachers to apply for it and getting the information to the students.

Thus, Cooper made it her responsibility to disseminate the necessary information to her teacher colleagues in DCPS. Many teachers applied to the grant. To illustrate, Kathy Jones was able to provide three computers to her students as a result of both students and parents alongside Jones working together to complete the application.

Conclusions

Love, guidance, and sociopolitical critique are persistent themes in these stories about DC educators. This legacy is worth preserving because it contributes to our understandings of how to foster liberatory spaces for Black children in urban schools in spite of shifting policies and administrations.

Love. High expectations and care define love in the context of schooling. To illustrate, Mrs. Jones nurtured a strong classroom community, purchased much-needed materials for class, saw herself as "momentary guide" and a family member with the individual goal of reaching each student. In this same vein, St. John assumed the role of fictive father by sacrificing time and money to insure that his students had the necessary resources for their

education. He also exhibited a stubborn refusal to lock materials in the classroom closets, resisting the common belief that new equipment and materials were "too good" for his students. Like Jones, he personally gave up his time and resources by spending weekends soliciting resources for students. Although we find that love is critical to all of these stories, it is only a beginning point for creating liberatory spaces for urban youth.

Guidance. Guidance as evidenced by teachers of the past refers to Black educators making explicit the implicit rules of society, thus helping students to navigate schools and the larger society. These teachers believed in building skills for the sake of liberation and transformation of their students, but/and they were explicit about the need to develop high-quality skills. Mrs. Jones brought in guest speakers to introduce students to new information and knowledge; it was not uncommon for students to develop internship and job opportunities from these connections. St. John encouraged students to actively critique and rethink their athletic aspirations in light of their own abilities, the statistics on the number of professional athletes hired, the physical and nutritional demands of professional athletes, and so on. Cooper stated explicitly that as Black students in a racialized society they would have to be better and achieve more.

Sociopolitical critique and transformation. The teachers exhibited an acknowledgment and understanding of the racialized structures that exist. Mrs. Jones raised consciousness of African identity through multifaceted imaging of Black people for her students to see beyond contemporary media portrayals. St. John understood and acknowledged racism and White supremacy because of his lived experiences in Guyana, which influenced his worldview and his teaching. He fundamentally believed in strategic education—helping his Black male students with emotional disturbances make choices based on their racialized and class positionality in a depressed urban environment. He addressed the realities and consequences of what his students faced on a daily basis (such as jail, athletic aspirations, and the economic meaning of a high school diploma) and used it as a text in the classroom. Like St. John and Jones, Cooper acknowledged that race and racism impacted her teaching. Everything Cooper did emerged from her desire to make a difference in the lives of her students at the systemic, macrolevel. She refused to work in isolation and understood the importance of having collective capital and social networks that would create power. Her critique of racism played itself out in her assessment of the curriculum and the textbooks, which she believed did not authentically reflect the lived

reality of her students. As a result, these conversations with her students became an explicit part of her pedagogy.

From 19th century George Liverpool to 21st century Mr. St. John all of these teachers went above and beyond to transform students by any means. In some cases, it required activism and overturning racialized policy like *Plessy v. Ferguson*. In other cases, educators demanded a reconceptualization of student achievement as in the case of Barbara Sizemore. The stories of these Black educators shed light on the realities of teaching in the inner-urban school in DC. In general, these stories capture racial uplift as Black educators provide calm spaces where their Black students can learn in a larger climate of inconsistency and change. For many Black teachers, being a teacher includes creative ways of locating and maintaining an environment of racial uplift, offering explicitly encouraging messages and gaining access to resources necessary to provide their students with a high-quality education.

Implications

Paying close attention to the historical context of segregation in DC illuminates the contradiction in ideals prevalent in educational policy—policies that negate history and the experiences and the voices of educators who use subversive tactics to invest in the education of their Black students. This case example of DCPS shows that the tapestry that members of the Black community weave to support high-quality education is consistently unraveled by constructs of racism and classism. Historically, schools in DC served as a means to structure inequalities predicated on Black subordination and, in some ways, restricted the life chances of many Black children, for example, an all-Black schooling system founded on differentiated resources and Jim Crow laws. Subsequent policies such as academic tracking based on race served to systematically sort and limit Black students' economic opportunity upon graduating from high school (Oakes, 1985).

However, within these spaces, Black educators protected, advocated, and taught. For example, Black teachers created safe spaces for their students to become educated. They used holistic approaches often educating the mind, body, and spirit. These educators held high expectations and fostered an environment of respect and care not only for the students but also for the larger community. They were activist. And they redefined notions of academic achievement and standardized testing. Most important, they focused on racial uplift and notions of lifting as they climbed. Much can be learned from examining the plight of Black educators living and working in DC. To be

clear, this exploration systematically sheds light on only a handful of the many nameless, subversive educators who transformed education for Black students and who stood on the shoulders of historic Black educators like Nannie Helen Burroughs and Anna Julia Cooper and many predominately Black institutions of higher learning. Sharing the stories of transformative Black teachers in urban schools could provide insights into exemplary "wisdom of practice."

Many teacher educators, practitioners, and researchers have good intentions in that they believe in holding teachers accountable, providing additional funding to schools, and supporting parents in the education of their children. However, we believe that positive change requires a shift in thinking about the ways we are truly investing in the welfare of children attending U.S. schools, especially those who are colored or poor. One way is to examine the contributions, history, experiences, and insights of Black educators changing the lives of Black students. This could, in turn, propel the development of meaningful conversations about exemplary education. These stories could offer insights and strategies about successful teaching practices not only for Black students but for all students who are in the current school system. Until such time as institutionalized racism and structural poverty are eliminated as barriers to the educational achievement of Black students, an important component of their advancement will be teachers who perceive the structural barriers; who love the students for themselves; and who seek to guide students over the hurdles, to face the rising sun, as freed people.

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