

Forgotten Voices of Black Educators: Critical Race Perspectives on the Implementation of a Desegregation Plan

JEROME E. MORRIS

The conceptualization and implementation of desegregation educational policies are incomplete when they ignore the voices of Black educators. Through in-depth interviews with 21 African American educators in St. Louis, this article highlights how elements of what is being defined today as critical race theory were embedded in these educators' analyses of a 1983 court settlement that resulted in a 16-year desegregation plan. Through rich and detailed accounts, these educators illustrate how the desegregation plan ultimately protected the overall interests of Whites. Their analyses of the plan—seemingly pessimistic—were realistic. The ending of the plan in 1999 continued to place the onus on Black people to rectify the inequitable education in the city. Suggested is the need for courts and policy makers to begin listening to the voices of African American educators when framing educational policies' intent on improving the education of African American students.

BLACK EDUCATORS are often excluded from the discussion of educational issues facing African American¹ children and their communities (Edwards, 1996; Foster, 1991; Lomotey, 1989). This article highlights the voices of African American educators—as a means of responding to the silence of those individuals affected both personally and professionally by

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the historic *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954) decision (Edwards, 1996). Emanating from an in-depth analysis of interviews with 21 African American educators in St. Louis, this article discusses how these educators' perspectives on the desegregation plan in that city—which was enacted as a result of a settlement in 1983—reflect elements of what is conceptually being defined today as critical race theory (CRT). In many ways, these educators' views reflect their trepidation about the extent to which the desegregation plan could ensure educational equity for Black people in St. Louis and their assertion that the plan was implemented in a manner that primarily protected the interests and the superior status of Whites in St. Louis.

First, because these educators' perspectives center on essential elements of CRT, I briefly review major aspects of CRT and discuss it as an emerging conceptual framework for examining the intersection of race with educational practices, programs, and policies. To historically contextualize the educators' perspectives, I discuss the exclusion of Black educators from the *Brown v. Board of Education* debates and the subsequent educational policies that followed this court case during the 1960s and 1970s. From there, I chronicle the events during the 1970s and 1980s that led to the conceptualization and implementation of the St. Louis desegregation plan in 1983. CRT is used as a guiding theoretical framework for analyzing (a) the interviews with these African American educators,² (b) the social and historic efforts that led to the formation of the plan, and (c) the current issues and events surrounding the desegregation plan. In a later section, I illustrate how specific elements of CRT were embedded in these educators' analyses of the desegregation plan. Finally, I discuss the plan's status during the 1990s and the issues that surrounded the ending of the plan on March 12, 1999. I conclude with policy and theoretical implications for examining the intersection of desegregation policy with CRT.

CRITICAL RACE THEORY AND DESEGREGATION

Derrick Bell, a former civil rights attorney who played a pivotal role in desegregation court cases, is perhaps most instrumental in advancing CRT as a framework for examining the experiences of Black people in America. Specifically, Bell (1987) used story and narrative to analyze how the litigation of *Brown*—which resulted in court-ordered desegregation—affected the education of African American students. For example, in his chapter titled “The Chronicle of the Sacrificed Black Schoolchildren,” Bell argues that desegregation measures ignored the fact that legalized segregation was about maintaining White control of education. If desegregation highly inconvenienced

and threatened White people and their superior social status, then implementation would occur in such a way that ensured that White people still controlled public education (Bell, 1987).

According to Bell (1992), the “analysis of legal developments through fiction, personal experience, and the stories of people on the bottom illustrates how race and racism continue to dominate our society” (p. 144). CRT approaches the analysis of social policies and practices in America with the recognition that racism is natural and permanently etched in the social and cultural order of American society. Consequently, CRT offers a reinterpretation of liberal civil rights practices and laws by examining their limitations in improving the overall quality of life for African Americans and affecting the social status imbalance between White and Black Americans. This critique of traditional civil rights practices, policies, and laws is a major feature of CRT.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) may be credited with officially introducing CRT to the field of education with their article “Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education.” Furthermore, Tate’s (1997) exhaustive review of the historical and theoretical foundations of CRT in education highlights two arguments advanced by Bell in understanding CRT:

(1) *the interest convergence principle* “is built on political history as legal precedent and emphasizes that significant progress for African Americans is achieved only when the goals of Blacks are consistent with the needs of Whites,” and (2) *the price of racial remedies* asserts that “Whites will not support civil rights policies that appear to threaten their superior social status.” (pp. 214-215)

The interest-convergence dilemma posited by Bell (1980) results in Whites, rather than Blacks, being the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation. Examples of such legislation predicated on improving the conditions of African Americans include desegregation plans that have often involved the disproportionate busing of African Americans into predominantly White schools and the creation of well-funded magnet schools to lure White students back into urban schools, as well as affirmative action hiring policies in which the major beneficiaries have been White women (Guy-Sheftall, 1993, as cited in Ladson-Billings, 1998).

In a later article, Ladson-Billings (1998) noted her apprehension in trying to introduce a conceptual framework that specifically focuses on race in such a “nice field” like education and cautions that like many new ideas or innovations in educational research, “it is very tempting to appropriate CRT as a more powerful explanatory narrative for the persistent problems of race, racism, and social justice” (p. 22). This is a valid concern. However, it is also

important to note that the CRT discourse in education during the past 4 to 5 years has primarily been within theoretical and philosophical contexts (see Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn, 1999; Parker, 1998; Tate, 1997). Despite Ladson-Billings's (1998) concerns, there are still far too few applications of CRT as an explanatory framework in field-based research studies and educational policy studies.

Furthermore, CRT discourse is primarily occurring within academic communities rather than among practitioners involved with the day-to-day education of African American students. Relegated to "safe" intellectual and academic environments, often missed are everyday "nonacademic" analyses of race and racism.³ Black people in America have historically recognized racism in its many forms, long before the emergence of CRT. It is for this reason, and also because the qualitative data were not collected using CRT as a guiding framework, that I am using what I am calling "critical race perspectives," rather than CRT, to describe the views of these African American educators. Later in this article, I illustrate how their views resonated with CRT.

Therefore, Richard Delgado, another pioneer in CRT, brings the final point about CRT to the fore. Delgado (1990) argued that a critical element of CRT is valuing the voices of those from marginalized racial groups. "Naming one's own" according to Delgado (1990, 1988), is a theme of critical race scholarship because people of color experience a world in which race and racism permeate all of their experiences. Consequently, CRT presents an alternative framework to traditional educational research and policy analysis through its insistence on a contextual historical and social analysis of policies and scholarship. As the review in the following section illustrates, African American educators' voices were forgotten and ignored in the debates and discussions surrounding the implementation of *Brown* during the 1960s and 1970s. As this article later illustrates, a similar phenomenon occurred with the implementation of the St. Louis desegregation plan in 1983. This article privileges the voices of African American educators in St. Louis to further glean how the desegregation plan has shaped African American education in that city since 1983.

BROWN AND DESEGREGATION: FORGOTTEN VOICES OF BLACK EDUCATORS

Immediately after African American lawyers brilliantly and successfully argued before the Supreme Court the unconstitutionality of maintaining legal segregation in public education, *Brown* became the symbol for eradicating a legacy of legalized segregation in public schools and all aspects of American society. Lawyers, social scientists, and members of various civil rights

organizations played an integral role in affecting the direction of educational policy for African Americans. They offered their perspectives on what were considered the “damaging effects” of Black children attending legally segregated all-Black schools. Prior to the civil rights campaigns of the 1950s and 1960s, Black educators assumed a major role in shaping the political and social experiences of African Americans (Franklin, 1990). Ironically, those Black professionals whose voices were most likely heard in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were ignored as policy makers debated the ways in which *Brown* would become implemented. Throughout much of the proceedings, analyses, and debates, the potential long-term impact of the implementation of *Brown* on the African American community was often dismissed.

Well before *Brown* became law, African Americans vacillated between what is the most effective environment for educating and schooling Black children—separate schools or integrated schools.⁴ African Americans never overwhelmingly believed that receiving education in an “integrated” school would resolve problems associated with inequitable education; they understood the precarious predicament by favoring one position over the other. If one pushed for Black children to attend schools with White children, the chances for Black children and their culture to be totally ignored in the curriculum and the ethos of the school were great. If reserved to attend predominantly Black schools, concerns remained about the lack of resources, lack of exposure to rigorous academic curricula, and lack of facilities. Black educators were no different from the larger African American community on this issue.

Black educators’ support for integration—prior to the passage of *Brown*—was enigmatic. On one hand, they were compelled to support efforts aimed at eradicating legalized segregation in public schools and the broader society, which could possibly lead to the demise of their careers as Black professionals. In fact, many were ultimately displaced, demoted, and dismissed from the teaching profession once courts and school systems began to enforce *Brown* by desegregating public schools (Etheridge, 1979; Haney, 1978). On the other hand, these educators did not wholly embrace the notion that Black children would receive the most effective education by closing Black schools and, subsequently, enrolling Black children in predominantly White schools (Du Bois, 1935; Johnson, 1954).⁵ Many realized that Black children would encounter modified and covert acts of racism in schools that were integrated in student population only, but not in teacher personnel, curricula, and power arrangement. Black educators have always had the pulse of the African American community because historically, they have been intimately connected with Black families and communities (Anderson, 1988; Foster, 1990, 1997; Morris, 1999; Siddle-Walker,

1996). The implementation of the St. Louis desegregation plan in 1983 enables us as researchers, policy makers, and educators to begin listening to the voices of African American educators today.

METHOD

Although I use CRT as an informative framework, the data from which this article emanated were collected from 1994 to 1998—prior to the emergence of a significant body of scholarship that began to use CRT as a conceptual framework for examining the intersection of race and education. The African American educators interviewed were selected from three elementary schools (an African American neighborhood school, a predominantly White county school, and a magnet school). These schools were part of a larger study that focused on how the St. Louis Interdistrict Transfer Plan affected linkages between African American families, communities, and schools (Morris, 1997). The qualitative interview questions were semi-structured, which enabled the educators to freely discuss issues beyond the parameters of the study. Examples of interview questions included the following: (a) How has the transfer plan affected connections between African American families, communities, and schools? (b) To what extent has the desegregation plan benefited the various groups involved? and (c) What are some consequences of ending the 1983 settlement (desegregation plan) for African American students, schools, and communities?

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection (Merriam, 1988). Researchers' identities are essential components of the entire research process (Scheurich & Young, 1997). One cannot discount the race, social class, or political views of the researcher from affecting the research process because researchers bring their own epistemological perspectives—ways of knowing—into the framing of researchable questions, data collection and analysis, and interpretations and conclusions. Rather than minimize this influence, I use my racial identity as an interactional quality to glean theoretical perspectives.

For example, the African American educators that I interviewed were extremely eager to discuss how race and racism affected the implementation of the desegregation plan. I have come to believe that my focus on how the plan affects African American education, as well as my racial identity as African American, enhanced my securing the interviews and contributed to the African American educators' comfort and willingness to discuss sensitive issues regarding race. On several occasions, I was invited into administrators' offices and teachers' classrooms to talk for hours after school had ended. In one instance, I met at a teacher's home and talked with her and her

husband until about two o'clock in the morning about her experiences as an African American teacher in St. Louis, the community work that they both were involved with, and larger issues surrounding the St. Louis desegregation plan.

Of the 21 African American educators interviewed, 17 were female and 4 were male; 13 were classroom teachers, 3 were teacher assistants, 2 were principals (male and female), 1 was an interim principal, and 2 were instructional coordinators. The county school employed only 1 African American teacher, indicative of many of the county districts' failures to desegregate their faculty by recruiting African American teachers to teach in the county schools. With the exception of this female teacher, the other educators were employed in the St. Louis Public School System. Although a few had taught between 5 and 10 years, most had been teaching since the plan began in 1983. Four of these educators—all from the neighborhood all-Black school—have been teaching or have been involved in education for at least 30 years; 1 teacher has taught for the past 42 years.⁶ Before highlighting their voices, it is necessary to understand how the desegregation plan came into existence.

CONCEPTUALIZING AND IMPLEMENTING THE DESEGREGATION PLAN

In *Liddell v. St. Louis Board of Education* (1975, 1979), African American plaintiffs accused the St. Louis Board of Education of contributing to African American children receiving a segregated education. In 1979, Judge Meredith, the judge presiding over the case, held that there was not adequate evidence to prove that the board of education of the city of St. Louis purposefully and intentionally discriminated against African Americans. In March 1980, the order by Judge Meredith was reversed by the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit; it stated there was adequate evidence of discrimination by the board of education of St. Louis and the state of Missouri.

In July 1980, African American plaintiffs including community organizations; the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); the city of St. Louis, Missouri; and a number of the county school systems approved a voluntary settlement to allow African American students to attend the county school systems. This settlement was reached after the plaintiffs and the St. Louis Board of Education accused the county schools of contributing to the mass exodus to the suburbs of White middle-class families. Dissatisfied with the efforts of the settlement, in 1982, the plaintiffs and the board of education of the city of St. Louis sued to gain a court-ordered remedy that would establish a metropolitan systemwide school district.

To avoid a costly trial, 1 day before the scheduled trial in 1983, lawyers for the Black plaintiffs, officials from the 23 county districts, and the St. Louis Board of Education entered into a settlement. The county districts participated in this settlement under threat of litigation and the possible loss of control in how their districts would be desegregated. The settlement comprised five components: (a) the voluntary desegregation of 16 of the 23 county school districts, (b) the voluntary transfer of White county students to city magnet schools, (c) a quality-of-education package for the all-Black schools in the city, (d) a capital improvement package to restore the deteriorated conditions of the city schools, and (e) the hiring of minority staff in the county school districts. The settlement specified that the county school districts accept Black students from the city to desegregate the county schools to achieve a 25% African American student population. The participating county school districts would receive financial compensation from the state equal to the cost of attendance in the respective county schools. Seven of the 23 county school districts already had an African American student enrollment of at least 25%; therefore, they did not have to accept African American transfer students. The transfer plan focused on the remaining 16 districts that enrolled low rates of African American students.

The enrollment of African American students in the 16 county districts that participated in the plan ranged from 13% to 26%. Since the implementation of the settlement plan, only 5 of the 16 county districts reached their planned goal of 25% African American student enrollment. For example, during the 1997-1998 school year, a total of 14,224 students were enrolled in the transfer program between the city and the county school districts. Of these, 12,746 African American students from the city transferred to county schools, whereas 1,478 White students from the 16 participating county districts transferred to magnet schools in St. Louis. As part of the settlement, the court mandated that the composition of magnet schools have at least a 40% White student enrollment; during the 1997-1998 school year, the racial composition of White students in magnet schools was 46% (Voluntary Inter-district Coordinating Council [VICC], 1998).

Since the inception of the transfer plan in 1983, the state of Missouri and the St. Louis Public School Board paid almost \$2 billion into the plan. The state of Missouri paid \$160 million into the desegregation plan during the 1998-1999 academic year. Approximately \$70 million went into funding the St. Louis Public School District's portion of the plan; examples of enhancements included mandating a maximum student-teacher ratio of 20:1. Sixty million dollars went toward funding the student per pupil cost for transfer students into the county schools, and the remaining funds paid for the city and county transportation costs. The state wanted to end the desegregation plan

by declaring that the city district had achieved unitary status—a legal term that means that the state and the city have done all that is necessary to eliminate the vestiges of legal segregation and will not return to these illegal and discriminatory practices (Perspectives, 1995). On the other hand, lawyers representing the NAACP argued that the transfer plan should continue because of the possible resegregation that would result if the plan ended. A panel of judges—as requested by the state of Missouri—began hearing the court case in March 1996 to establish a deadline for settlement negotiations. Missing from these hearings and discussions were African American educators' perspectives on the impact of the desegregation plan and the consequences of continuing or ending the plan. The perspectives of some of these educators from the public school system are highlighted below.

BLACK EDUCATORS: EMBRACING CRITICAL RACE PERSPECTIVES

A critical race perspective permeated these educators' views and analyses of the implementation of the transfer plan, as reflected in the following themes that emerged from the interviews: (a) the stigmatizing of Black teachers as incompetent and the subsequent stigmatizing of all-Black schools as "inferior" institutions, (b) the "creaming" of talented African American students from the schools in the city and students' subsequent disconnection from the neighborhood school and the community, (c) their skepticism of the extent to which transferring into county schools educationally benefited Black children, and (d) the consequences of ending the plan. Each theme is explicated in the following sections.

Stigmatizing Black Teachers and Schools

In the quest to remedy the educational inequities facing Black children at the time of the *Brown* decision, the desegregation of public schools drastically affected African American educators. Many were demoted, lost jobs, and were negatively stigmatized in efforts to desegregate public schools (Foster, 1995; Meier, Stewart, & England, 1989). According to some of the African American educators in St. Louis, remnants of the push to desegregate schools continue to adversely affect the perception of African American teachers and educators today. They have been stigmatized as "unqualified" and "incompetent" in the push to desegregate schools through the transfer plan. Mrs. Burroughs, a teacher in the predominantly African American neighborhood school for 42 years, noted how Black teachers' competency has been challenged since the existence of the transfer plan: "I have enjoyed teaching Black students. It is bad the way Black teachers have been

presented. The busing of Black children out to the county schools has allowed this thinking about Black teachers as incompetent to continue.”

Mrs. Woodson, an African American female principal in the magnet school and an educator for the past 25 years, disagrees with the historic as well as contemporary perceptions of Black teachers as “incompetent” professionals:

Differently from the ways it has been presented, I never believed that Black teachers were not teaching [well] in St. Louis [before the desegregation plan]. I think Black teachers in St. Louis have done that historically in the Black schools—and even today.

The comments by these educators are insightful. One important message gleaned is their critique of the deep-seated belief in the larger society that Black schools before *Brown* employed “inferior teachers” who were not preparing Black students properly. This thinking subsequently fueled the notion that Black teachers’ “inadequacy” in teaching Black students further disqualified them from teaching White students in racially mixed or predominantly White schools (Foster, 1997). The transfer plan’s lack of emphasis in recruiting African Americans to teach in the county schools, further illustrated by the employment of only one African American teacher in the predominantly White county school, affirmed this belief by these educators. The low number of African American teachers employed in the county school districts was one of the original concerns that the St. Louis Interdistrict Transfer Plan was to address. However, this aspect of the plan received little emphasis. Although a significant number of African American students from the city of St. Louis transferred into county schools (VICC, 1998), the focus on a corresponding increase in the numbers of Black teachers in the county schools has been largely ignored altogether.

Closely connected to the historic stigmatizing of Black educators was the way in which their places of employment were also perceived by the larger society. The institutions where they worked, even though many of these schools were grossly underfunded, were also deemed inferior because they enrolled all-Black student populations and employed Black educators. Mr. Steele, the principal of the all-Black neighborhood elementary school for the past 24 years—a school consistently recognized by African American community leaders and the school system for the quality of education provided to students from the surrounding neighborhood (Morris, 1999)—asserts that the belief that all-Black schools are inferior, despite some schools’ success in educating Black children, persists and is buttressed by the methods used to publicize the transfer plan:

Parents have been sold on the idea, and the school system and the courts have assisted the parents with publicity blitz “school of choice” that the [all-Black] schools in St. Louis are not as good as those in the counties. . . . There would be signs everywhere such as “Do you want your child to go out to a good school?” This used to be advertised in the buses on the placards. They would have “Do you want your child to have a good education? Send him or her to a county school. Call your Voluntary Interdistrict Coordinating Committee.” What kind of message is that to send? If you are hit with that, okay, you are going to buy into it. And that is the reason.

As he continued, Mr. Steele paralleled the thrust to persuade Black parents in St. Louis to send their children to the predominantly White county schools to the doll experiment by Kenneth and Mamie Clark, the well-known husband and wife social scientists whose research was used in the *Brown* case. In this experiment, the Clarks concluded that a handful of Black children’s negative preference for the Black dolls (only 14% of the students in the sample made anti-Black statements; 86% of the students did not) suggested Black “self-hate.” Kenneth Clark was later an expert witness in the *Brown* case. Thus, the conclusion drawn by the Court was that legally segregated Black schools contributed to Black “self-hate” (Cross, 1991). Similar to choosing the White doll over the Black doll, Mr. Steele believes that Black parents and their children are encouraged to choose “White” schools over the “Black” schools—despite the quality and reputation of schools like his. He clearly distinguishes between the way the Clarks used their doll example to help eradicate legalize segregation in America and the psychological conditioning that caused some African Americans to value White over Black:

[It is] the same rationale and mentality in why would a Black parent select a predominantly White school. Transform them [the schools] into being dolls. But Kenneth Clark used that argument to say why we need to break it [legal segregation] down. He used it to identify and say this is what’s happening. I am only using it the same way to say that this is why parents choose the White schools. It is the same concept when people are going through the same processes, but you are coming to different conclusions. I had a different goal than what he had. He had a goal to integrate schools; mine is to describe why people choose integrated schools.

Finally, Mrs. Collins, a teacher for 22 years and currently a teacher at a magnet school where she was twice named “Teacher of the Year” in the state of Missouri, shared this critical race perspective of the transfer plan. She contended that African American parents bought into the notion that their children would receive a better overall educational experience in the predominantly White county schools. However, she often heard contrary information

from Black students who described their experiences and considered returning to the schools in the city of St. Louis.⁷

My own personal opinion is, I think African American parents—this is just my perspective—I think they think they [their children] are getting a better education by White teachers; this is necessarily not true. I think that sometimes in going out there, some of the feedback from students that are involved in deseg [the desegregation plan], and they come back just to visit, they tell me, “Mrs. Collins, it is terrible. It’s not what we thought it was going to be.” Most of them, after a year or two, either they come back into the city or either they stay; it depends on the parents. So, I have had numerous kids to come back and say, “I’m coming back into the city.” They say they just weren’t treated fairly. Sometimes the parents think that White is better.

From the perspectives of these African American educators, advertisement practices for the transfer plan explicitly and implicitly perpetuated the belief that Black teachers and the predominantly Black schools in the city were “inferior.” According to them, the interdistrict transfer plan has been promoted by devaluing the quality of education that African American children might receive from schools in the city. Consequently, they assert that many of the African American parents who send their children into the predominantly White county schools have been bombarded with misleading “pro-transfer” plan advertisements and are therefore misinformed about what really happens to their children in the county schools. From their perspectives, the massive transferring of African American students into the county schools—partly fueled by misleading information—also has dire consequences for the schools and communities in the city.

*“Creaming” African American Students
From Communities and Schools*

African American schools once served as the centers of close-knit communities (Anderson, 1988; Dempsey & Noblit, 1993; Irvine & Irvine, 1983; Siddle-Walker, 1996), and in many instances, desegregation policies adversely affected African American students’ and families’ connections with their formerly all-Black schools. These educators—particularly those from the all-Black neighborhood school—assert that the desegregation plan in St. Louis also disconnected African American students from their communities and the neighborhood schools. They expressed concerns about the extent to which Black children participating in the transfer plan were connected to the neighborhood communities where they lived. These educators also stated that often, the high-performing students ended up attending the county schools because of “promises” of a better educational environment.

Mrs. Burroughs, a teacher for the past 42 years at the all-Black neighborhood school, described how the ability levels of students at her school are not as strong as students in previous years: "I would have mostly higher achieving students and a few lower achieving students. Now, I might only have a handful of students that are higher achieving." She attributes part of the change in students' ability levels to the "creaming effect" of students attending the magnet and the county schools. Another teacher who has taught at the neighborhood African American school for 36 years, Mrs. Hall, painfully describes the creaming effect of the transfer plan:

They pulled our best children. . . . They pulled, they took the cream of the crop, basically! So, you know, when a child goes into a magnet school or when he goes into a county school, there are papers that we have to fill out for days and they scrutinize those papers, and if there are things about that child they don't care for, the child shows right back here in public school at Fairmont School [the neighborhood school]. . . . We have a lot of good children here now, but all I am saying is if this became a neighborhood school again, I am pretty sure the school population would change, and I think that the students would come back. [There] would be students who left because they would have done well in any environment, in any situation.

The perception that African American students are "creamed" away from their neighborhood all-Black schools is not only held by teachers at the neighborhood, all-Black school; Ms. Mitchell, a teacher for 16 years and the only African American teacher at the predominantly White county school where she works, shares this view:

The drawback to the transfer plan is that it takes the African American children out of their neighborhoods. They really don't have a good connection; they really feel isolated being out here. That's what I think, and I really believe in going to your school in your neighborhood; you get to know the people better and you get to know friends.

Mrs. Mitchell was originally brought into the county school to direct the School, Home, At-Risk Program (SHARP)—funded through a grant from the state of Missouri. The program involved Mrs. Mitchell working with African American transfer students and their families and required her to make visits to the children's homes; churches; and Matthew-Dickey's, a neighborhood Boys' Club. The program no longer exists because of funding cuts; however, she was eventually hired as a full-time teacher. According to Mrs. Mitchell, the focus of SHARP was initially on developing transferring African American students' academic skills, but the program evolved into one that focused on behavioral issues resulting from the Black students' difficulty in making the transition into a predominantly all-White school.

Whereas Mrs. Mitchell and the other educators note the drawbacks of the plan, the following section examines the extent to which these educators feel the plan has benefited Black students.

Benefits for Black Students?

Numerous debates abound regarding the extent to which Black children benefit from the transfer plan. For example, a report from the VICC—the office responsible for coordinating the transfer plan—revealed that test scores for African American students who transfer into the county schools were relatively the same as those for African American students who remained in the all-Black schools in the city of St. Louis (VICC, 1993-1994 Report).⁸ Furthermore, a report by the Citizen's Commission on Civil Rights (1997), an organization based in Washington, D.C., concluded that African American students who attended schools in the county had higher graduation rates than African American students who attended schools in the city. However, this report did not control for socioeconomic status—a known mitigating factor affecting the school experiences of students. Whereas 94% of the Black students in the regular city schools receive free or reduced lunch, 76% of the Black students transferring into the county schools receive free or reduced lunch; a slightly lower number. Although not noted in the report by the Citizen's Commission, African American students who attend magnet schools have higher graduation rates than African American students from the city who attend the county districts, as well as those students currently enrolled in the schools in the city ("Perspectives," 1995).

When asked about the extent to which they perceive the desegregation plan has been beneficial for Black children, Mrs. Woodson, the African American female principal in the magnet school, responded,

I'm probably not the right person to ask that. I know what the district would want me to say. I've never been a proponent of sending Black children to sit with White children was going to help them to learn. I've never been a proponent of putting Black children on the bus; I've never wanted to teach in South St. Louis.⁹ Never wanted to teach in a magnet school. Whether these magnet programs have been beneficial to Black children? Yes, they are beneficial to all children. This could have been done in all-Black schools; I think any progressive educator would believe that. The former superintendent had a concept such as this. . . . We have benefited from capital improvements.

Mrs. Woodson notes that her school has benefited from the transfer plan's financial support of the magnet school, as well as from the quality of teachers that she "has to work with." Her point, however, is that the magnet school

support should have originally been designed for the all-Black schools in the city, without having to try to “entice” White families from the various counties to send their children to the magnet schools. Mrs. Bethune, the instructional coordinator at the magnet school where Mrs. Woodson is the principal, said that the transfer plan was implemented in such a manner not solely for Black students to “sit next to White children. . . . It also was so that White children could be educated with Black children. That was the intent, which was good. But, somewhere along the line that was forgotten.” This intent may have been ignored by White parents in the county who rarely exercised the option of sending their children to the magnet schools in the city. Only 1,478 White students transferred into magnet schools in St. Louis during the 1997-1998 academic year. This difficulty in desegregating with magnet schools was also experienced by Kansas City schools. For example, in Kansas City, Missouri, desegregation funds focused on turning many inner-city Black schools into magnet schools as a way to attract White students back to the city. The plan has since been abandoned after so few White parents chose to send their children to the schools, and there was no significant change in students’ test scores (see *Missouri v. Jenkins*, 1995).

The extent to which Black children benefited academically from transferring into the county schools is not clear, even among these educators. The magnet schools are well funded and receive additional resources because they are used to desegregate students. In addition, these extra funds also allowed for some of the all-Black students in the schools in St. Louis to be ensured of adequate educational resources. However, major beneficiaries of the desegregation plan have been the county schools. The impact of the transfer plan on the overall revenue for the county districts cannot be ignored. For example, the county school district where Ms. Mitchell teaches received approximately \$68 million by participating in the transfer plan from the years 1984 through 1993. The county districts receive a per pupil expenditure for each Black student transferring into their respective districts, in addition to half- state aid for each of the approximately 1,478 county students who have transferred to city magnet schools. Consequently, buildings have been constructed and staff and faculty hired using these funds. Although there have been some financial benefits for Black students who attend the magnet schools, the predominantly White county districts benefited greatly financially by participating in the plan.

POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES OF ENDING THE PLAN

Some desegregation experts and policy analysts highly encouraged the continuation of the transfer plan because they believe the plan offered African American students from the inner city greater educational opportunities than the schools in the city, and the plan slowly chipped away at the color line between Whites in the suburbs and African Americans in the city (Wells & Crain, 1997). In particular, Gary Orfield's concern is that the "dismantling of desegregation" would result in the resegregation of the city schools and, once again, high concentrations of minority and low-income schools (Orfield & Eaton, & Harvard Project, 1996). Most of their arguments embrace an assimilationist paradigm as the most effective means of removing the vestiges of segregation and minimizing the educational disparities between African Americans and Whites (also see Duncan, 1997).¹⁰ On the other hand, some African Americans questioned the merits of continuing to desegregate by transferring African American students into the county schools. They have been especially critical of the fact that almost \$2 billion have gone into financing the plan, with a significant amount going toward transportation and a per pupil expenditure to the county schools for each African American transfer student.

Furthermore, there have been proposals arguing for a refocus of the transfer plan. The former mayor of St. Louis, an African American, wanted the state of Missouri to consider funding the schools in the city with the money allotted for the transfer plan. He suggested that funds from the state should be targeted toward further improving the all-Black schools in the northern section of St. Louis (Mannies, 1993a, 1993b). Although these educators were also critical in their analyses of the desegregation plan, their views, however, varied regarding the direction the plan should proceed. Most believed that, given the necessary financial resources and support, Black children can still receive a quality education within school environments that would be primarily African American. Others believe that there is some merit in maintaining racial balances in the schools. Seemingly ironic, Ms. Mitchell, the only African American teacher at the county school, embraces the former view:

If the desegregation plan ended today, I think that I would be sad. But to another extent, I would only relish it if the inner-city schools, the schools were redone, new books were bought, and the conditions were like they should be in any school when they sent them [the African American students] back.

Some of these African American educators expressed concerns regarding how the material conditions and funding of the city schools, as well as the racial balancing of students, would be affected by ending the plan:

I think if you end desegregation, you're going to take a lot of money away from a lot of different programs; I think it would. You know, it's not a total waste. It's done some good; there are problems, but it has done some good. I think that a lot of children, if the children are not bussed out there, a lot of times they'll never get to mix with the other people—with the other races. I think they need that, because you need to learn how other people react to different things. (Mr. Miles, teacher at the neighborhood African American school)

In addition to the funds for the predominantly Black schools in the city, Mr. Miles believed that racial balancing was also important because of the exposure it provided children from various racial-ethnic backgrounds. Others were concerned about the logistical problems that might occur if the plan ended, which would include reopening some of the schools in the city and hiring more faculty and staff. Still, some do not believe that racial balancing is essential for a quality education for Black children. They maintain that the Black children in St. Louis can receive a quality education in an adequately funded and supported—albeit predominantly Black—St. Louis public school. These educators' perspectives resonated deeply with elements of CRT and were the most skeptical of the plan.

CRITICAL RACE THEORETICAL ANALYSES OF DESEGREGATION IN ST. LOUIS

Elements of CRT were embedded throughout the interviews with these Black educators. The *interest-conversion dilemma*—grounded in the notion that significant progress for African Americans is achieved only when the goals of Blacks are consistent with the needs of Whites—was apparent in the manner the educators talked about how the plan was implemented. In her assessment of the transfer plan, Mrs. Woodson, the magnet school principal, notes that historically, equality of education has been more about Black people taking pragmatic steps to ensure that their children would have some semblance of an equitable education. For her, Black children benefit only when White people take actions to make sure that their children are the primary beneficiaries:

The focus of *Brown* was the right to go where you wanted to go. Many times, Black children had to leave their neighborhoods and attend schools in other neighborhoods. People were talking about equal. Before desegregation, they were busing Black

children to overcome crowding. It was not my experience that they had all of the things in South St. Louis that people talk about. Yes, people do take care of their own. Black people wanted a decent education. I've got to attach to this to make sure that my children get it because they [White people] are not going to deprive their children.

On the other hand, the county school districts' failure, or difficulty, in hiring significant numbers of minority teachers represented a divergence of interests between advocates for diverse faculty and staff in the county schools and some administrators and school personnel in the county schools who had little incentive to recruit Black teachers into the county schools. Unlike the availability of financial incentives for the recruitment of African American students into the county districts, there were no major incentives for hiring minority teachers—other than to have a diverse teacher workforce in the county schools as well as some Black teachers to teach or deal with the growing numbers of Black students who had transferred into the county schools (this was the case with Ms. Mitchell who was the only African American educator in the county school). This divergence can be attributed to reservations by White parents and school officials about having significant numbers of Black teachers teaching White students (see Wells & Crain, 1997). Black educators have historically faced this realization when it came to teaching in desegregated or all-White school settings (Foster, 1997). In particular, the school where Ms. Mitchell was employed took no extra measures to ensure that its staff and faculty were diverse. From the school's perspective, this would have represented a financial and logistical inconvenience (Morris, 1997).

A significant number of African American students transferred into the predominantly White county schools, in comparison with White students who chose to participate in the city's magnet school program. The disparity between Black students' and White students' participation rates, and the settlement's low expected goal of 1,600 White suburban students to transfer into the magnet schools, may be partly explained by Bell's (1980) argument that "Whites will not support civil rights policies that appear to threaten their superior social status." He termed this *the price of racial remedies*. Although the integration of Black students into the predominantly White county schools might have represented to African Americans a step toward greater social and educational justice, many White families hesitated to disrupt their status by sending their children to the city's magnet schools just so that racial balancing can occur. For these parents, racial balance and equality are secondary to ensuring a quality education for their children (Bell, 1980).

Whites' reluctance to send their children to the city's magnet schools and African American students' high participation rates in the transfer plan also

bring to the fore the notion of “Whiteness as property” as delineated by Bell (1992), Grant (1995), and Harris (1993). Prior to *Brown* and the eradication of legalized segregation, Whites expected their skin color to provide them with tangible and intangible privileges and advantages (Bell, 1992; Grant, 1995). After legalized segregation was overturned, as Harris (1993) asserts, “Whiteness as property” was still White people’s expectation. Today, White people in America know that their “White skin”—as noted by McIntosh (1988/1998)—“opens many doors for Whites whether or not we approve of the way dominance has been conferred on us” (p. 81).

In an unspoken way, many of the White parents in the counties were reluctant to lose this White privilege by associating with those institutions and people who do not represent and reify their Whiteness—solely for the advancement of civil rights policies. For example, the magnet schools had to entice White parents to send their children into the city schools with the reassurance that these schools were unlike the predominantly Black schools that existed in the city. Their children’s attendance at predominantly Black schools, despite a particular school’s quality, would have represented a loss of “White” status. The transfer plan was conceptualized and implemented in such a way that this racial reality was recognized, and the only realistic way that some White parents would consider sending their children to the city schools would be to make these schools “exceptional without question.”¹¹ White students’ presence in the city schools automatically ascribed a greater sense of value to the St. Louis public school system. Unfortunately, this valuing of “Whiteness” resulted in a simultaneous devaluing of “Blackness,” particularly by the manner in which advertisement practices promoted the county schools at the demise of the all-Black city schools and African American educators.

The settlement in 1983 also represented the convergence of African Americans’ continued quest for social and racial justice and equality since the passage of *Brown*, with Whites’ recognition that a long and drawn-out court case could result in the loss of property (i.e., all-White schools) and their dictation of the way desegregation would occur. They feared that litigation would have resulted in the desegregation of their schools under terms dictated by the courts. In the final analysis, their status was not threatened because the county schools received large financial incentives for participating in the plan, the financial burden was placed on the state’s taxpayers, and the arduous task of desegregating rested on the shoulders of African American students who were merely tolerated but rarely welcomed. The 1983 desegregation settlement in St. Louis, framed within CRT, inherently reified the privileging of Whiteness, which resulted in Black sacrifice and the protection of White self-interest.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND THEORY

The state of Missouri, the plaintiffs, the school board, and other interested parties negotiated for 3 years the future of the plan under Dr. William Danforth, the former chancellor of Washington University in St. Louis. In addition, the Missouri legislature developed a plan to offset the city's loss of court-ordered state funding and to continue its desegregation efforts with a long-term funding remedy—Senate Bill 781—which became law in August 1998. This law revised the state funding formula and required St. Louis voters to pass an additional local tax to support the St. Louis public schools. A three-member “overlay” board was an outgrowth of this law, and it determined that the tax increase should occur in the form of sales taxes, rather than property taxes, to have individuals who use the services of the city to also pay taxes. The voters in St. Louis approved on February 2, 1999, a two-thirds-of-a-cent sales tax. This tax increase raised the sales tax from 6.85% to 7.51% on goods and services sold in St. Louis after July 1, 1999.

Had this tax increase not passed, Senate Bill 781 would have been nullified and the case would have returned to the federal court and Judge Limbaugh for ruling. This could have resulted in the declaration of unitary status for the St. Louis school district and the discontinuing of the transfer plan and desegregation resources to the city schools. Consequently, this action could have placed a heavy financial and logistical burden on the St. Louis school district to absorb the returning African American students. It also would have resulted in the loss of funds that participating county schools received for each transferring African American student.

On March 12, 1999, the judges on the case signed the order officially ending the 1983 settlement, which resulted in the following: (a) the continuation of the transfer plan during the next 3 years for African American students who wish to transfer into the county schools; at the end of the third year, citizens from each participating suburban school district will vote on whether to continue or to end the plan in their respective school districts; (b) additional state funds to the St. Louis Public School District from a change in the state-funding formula and the tax increase that allow for the expansion of magnet school opportunities to White and Black students in the city; and (c) money for capital improvement in the city schools during the next 10 years. The sales tax is expected to increase local school revenue for St. Louis by approximately \$23 million. This amount would be matched by state funds in the amount of \$40 million, which would leave the district approximately \$7 million short of the amount that it would have normally received from the 1983 settlement.

How to make up for the difference of this financial shortfall will be a concern of the district from year to year. Another important issue is, Why were the suburban districts—who historically participated in creating the entrenched segregated housing and schooling between the suburban communities and the city—never approached about taxing citizens in their districts as a means of financing the new plan? There might have been the realization by the “framers” of the new plan that the citizens in the counties would not have considered imposing such a tax on themselves. In essence, African Americans in St. Louis—the original “victims” of legalized segregation—primarily have to foot the bill to remedy the inequities that they did not create.

Overall, these educators recognized that the implications of *Brown* extended beyond education and included the dismantling of legalized racism in all aspects of American society. They remind us, however, that desegregation, by racially balancing Black and White students, should be seen as only one way to implement *Brown*. For them, desegregation should have been more about African Americans in St. Louis having greater political and economic control of the education of Black students. Whereas the political control was a possibility, the economic control seemed less of a reality because of efforts to ensure that Whites’ overall economic interests were maintained.

These educators’ observations point to the need to ensure that Black students who decide to participate in the transfer aspect of the new plan are provided with the necessary resources to enable them to adjust academically, psychologically, socially, and culturally to predominantly White school environments. Transferring into a racially and culturally different school creates problems for many of the African American students from the city because many of these students are not welcomed (Wells & Crain, 1997). Although sensitizing White educators in the suburban schools is important, training and hiring African American educators to teach and work in these county schools would have a much more positive impact in minimizing the transitioning difficulties encountered by many of the African American students. In the interests of Black students, this component of the old plan should have been of a greater focus, and the necessity for this to be incorporated into the new plan cannot be overemphasized.

Furthermore, these African American educators remind us that schools serve a vital function in communities and have historically been so for African American families and communities. Low-income, predominantly Black communities especially need stable institutions (Wilson, 1996), and for many urban communities, schools can serve this function (Morris, 1999). This has to be taken into consideration when policy makers conceptualize such choice models that transfer African American students away from their communities. Although increasing choices for those parents who do not want

their children to attend the city's schools is important, if the city schools are not viewed as viable choices for African American students, it could have dire effects on the role that schools play in predominantly Black communities.

Finally, the implications of hearing these Black educators for educational theory suggest the need to foreground race as an indelible factor that affects all aspects of educational policy. It is not that CRT analyses are cynical or pessimistic—they are realistic. CRT analyses of educational policies force academics, researchers, and analysts to view desegregation policy within historical contexts by recognizing the wages and privileges of Whiteness and the limitations of policies predicated on minimizing the educational disparity between Whites and Blacks. More often than not, these policies have ultimately protected the overall interests of Whites.

CONCLUSION: HEARING BLACK EDUCATORS' VOICES

Judge Robert Carter (1980), who played a major role in school-desegregation strategy, states that if he had to reconsider *Brown* today, "instead of looking principally to the social scientists to demonstrate the adverse consequences of segregation, I would seek to recruit educators to formulate a concrete definition of equality in education, and I would base my argument on that definition" (p. 27). The conceptualization and implementation of educational policies—particularly those with serious implications for African American education—are incomplete when they ignore the perspectives of Black educators. The voices of these educators provide a more inclusive, but often neglected, voice on educational policy for African American children. When researchers and policy makers begin to fully chronicle and thoroughly understand the overall implications and ramifications of desegregation policy on Black people—which includes hearing the voices of Black educators—then the real promises of *Brown* may become more fully realized.

NOTES

1. The terms *African American* and *Black* are used interchangeably; both refer to U.S. citizens of African descent or institutions historically associated with their experiences.
2. Pseudonyms are used throughout for the names of the educators and their schools.
3. Derrick Bell reminds us that critical race theory (CRT) is not so much about intellectualizing and trying to find "critical race moments" in education but being cognizant of how Black people in America have always known what racism was—before there was any such thing as CRT. (This information was based on a conversation that I had with Derrick Bell at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association in April 2000.)

4. In Boston, Massachusetts, during the early 19th century, African American children were allowed to attend Boston public schools, but few parents enrolled their children because of prejudice on the part of White teachers. Separate schools were then established for the African American students. However, some of the African Americans protested the actions of the Boston public school system, which segregated Black children from White children. In 1849, a group of African American parents, in what became known as *Roberts v. the City of Boston*, fought for integrated education. The African American community was split on this issue.

5. In his polemical essay titled "Does the Negro Need Separate Schools?" Du Bois (1935) argued that the Negro child in America—because of the persistence and the pervasiveness of racism in America and public schools—could not be ensured of an effective education in integrated schools. Ironically, Du Bois was formerly a staunch integrationist and one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He broke from the organization in 1934 because of ideological differences. See also Alridge's (1999) article "Conceptualizing a Du Boisian Philosophy of Education: Towards a Model for African-American Education" in *Educational Theory*.

6. Almost all of these educators were born and raised in St. Louis and attended the segregated public school system. All except two received their teacher training or certification to teach from either Stowe—a historically all-Black teachers college—or Harris-Stowe Teachers College—a merger of Stowe and a historically all-White teachers college—Harris in 1955, 1 year after *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* became law (Wright, 1994). These educators' lives and professions were affected by *Brown* at the K-12 and higher education levels.

7. Approximately 10% of the African American students withdraw from the plan each year.

8. Fleming (1990) and Hilliard (1990) cautioned against using standardized tests solely to measure African American students' achievement.

9. South St. Louis was once a predominantly white community where the predominantly white schools were located. During the 1950s, the St. Louis Board of Education tried to relieve overcrowding in the schools by busing Black children to white schools on the south side. These students were in the school on different schedules and in different classrooms. The north side is where African Americans primarily lived and went to school.

10. See Garret A. Duncan's (1997) review of Wells and Crain's (1997) book, *Stepping Over the Color Line: African-American Students in White Suburban Schools*. Duncan notes that the authors' allegiance to the ideals of integration presents a very biased view of all-Black schools in St. Louis.

11. To encourage white parents to participate in desegregation efforts, many school systems in the 1970s and 1980s created magnet schools in response to the mandate of school desegregation. In 1976, incentives to motivate the voluntary transfer of students were approved by two federal courts in the cases *Arthur v. Nyquist* in Buffalo, New York, and *Amos v. Board of Directors of the City of Milwaukee*. In these decisions, the courts relied on magnet schools to desegregate Black schools and used majority to minority transfers to desegregate white schools. Today, magnet schools are being introduced in more urban school districts as a means of achieving racial balance in schools and to promote greater choices in the attempt to satisfy parents' interests and priorities (Smrekar & Goldring, 1999).

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