The Lingering Effects of Segregation in Elementary Education: What do we do about it?

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EDE 756
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December 18, 2006

Acknowledgements: I want to thank Dr. Jeanne Peloso, my wife Monique Ngozi Nri, and Louis Reyes Rivera for their time, patience, considered comments and critique of this document. I hope that this will be of use to educators and students alike.

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In the urban public schools throughout the country we find the “separate but unequal” hallmark of segregation (actually, an American-style apartheid system) still very much in effect. We are now living some 53 years after the Supreme Court decision of 1954, Brown vs. Board of Education Topeka, Kansas, declared that with “all deliberate speed” segregated schools in America must come to an end. The Supreme Court issued its unanimous ruling in Brown v. the Board of Education on May 17, 1954, when separate and decidedly unequal was the status quo of the land in the South and in the North. In the South, things were most particularly unequal as people of color were forced to sit in the back of the bus, drink at different fountains, and sit in separate train cars, etc. They were barred from most places of business owned by whites and could not try on clothes in department stores. Poll taxes, tests with arcane questions, and outright intimidation prevented them from voting. Of course, people of color living in northern communities endured similar, if less harsh treatments (Robinson, 2004).

After years of argument and deliberation, the Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice Earl Warren, issued its unanimous ruling. In the decision, Warren wrote, “Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children. The impact is greater when it has the sanction of the law, for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the Negro group. A sense of inferiority affects

the motivation of a child to learn" (Robinson, 2004, p.2). The assumption that separation denotes or implies inferiority is one that must be challenged.

Of course, there would be no such interpretation of inferiority had it not been written into the very foundation of this country—the Constitution. In that document, enslaved Africans were looked upon as being 3/5 of a human being. In other words, separate does not have to be unequal unless it is designed to be so.

The Supreme Court decision of 1954 helped give shape to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s; however, change came very slowly because the Court also ruled that desegregation should proceed "with all deliberate speed," which was interpreted by many to mean that change should come as slowly as possible (Robinson, 2004).

In many instances, however, today's conditions, according to research, parallel those of pre-1954. There may have been some relief in the apartheid/American conditions of segregated public facilities and businesses, especially in the South, but the all-important area of education has seen a reversal of reform. The central inquiry of this thesis is to answer the questions as to why this reversal has occurred, and what has kept this system in place so long. As well, it is important to question what remedies can be used to deal with this system since it has been very resistant to change. The factors that are believed to have contributed to the maintenance of the status quo, such as government policy, community involvement, and individual perception, will be explored from different vantage points.

Before looking at the conditions of the country on the whole, a look at the current demographics of New York City public schools reveals some interesting statistics. "…Of the approximately 1.1 million students in New York City about 13 percent are Asian, 15 percent white, 32 percent black and 40 percent Hispanic" (Robinson, 2004, p.2). Those demographics

led Professor Pedro Noguera of New York University to state that, "there are no kids to integrate with" (Robinson, 2004, p.3). However, the devil is in the details.

In New York State "some 60 percent of all black students,… including those in New York City, attend schools that are at least 90 percent black, according to a recent study by the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University; more Latinos in New York State than in any other state go to schools that are 90 percent or more Latino" (Robinson, 2004, p. 3).

While New York might be an extreme condition, the fact is that this trend is not one that is relegated to New York alone, but is actually a national reality. Lee (2004) has done research that reveals, "Black and Latino students (across the country) are in schools with substantially fewer Whites than was the case in the late 1980s. These schools are also highly segregated by poverty" (p. 2).

Evidence indicates that, in addition to the existence of an academic gap, there is also a resource gap. In a recent article in the *Nation* magazine, Jonathan Kozol again stated what he has been saying for years: "predominantly black and Hispanic, New York City spends $10,500 per pupil, about half the $21,000 that the rich and largely white Long Island suburb of Manhasset spends. The Chicago public schools spend about $8,482 annually per pupil while nearby Highland Park spends $17,291. The Chicago public schools have an 87% Black and Latino population, while Highland Park has a 90% White population. Per pupil expenditures in Philadelphia are $9,299 per pupil for the city's 79% Black and Latino population, while across City Line Avenue in Lower Merion, the per pupil expenditure is $17,261 for a 91% White population "(2004, P.8).

At the same time, many senior teachers avoid poor, minority schools in the city in favor of richer schools that can offer higher salaries. This is deemed understandable when one looks at

the fact that teachers are not rewarded for teaching at impoverished schools; in fact, the inverse is true. My experiences as a teacher in the South Bronx and in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn has often left me wanting for supplies to the extent that I have had to purchase what I needed as opposed to waiting for them to become available.

Whenever the amount of money spent on a child is spoken about, one has to reflect on what information is fed to the public regarding that expenditure. It generally goes like this: "money for schools comes from local tax revenues and therefore the more affluent--usually white communities--have more money to spend than the black and Hispanic communities that tend to be less affluent" (Berliner, 2005, p.16). The result of this and other factors amount to the fact that, "American schools are failing some of our students… primarily the urban and rural poor and in particular the poor who are (the so-called) minorities" (Berliner, 2005, p.16). This, however, is not news. In reality, it is government (Federal, State and Local) accountability that is lacking and should be the news.

According to John Logan, who conducted a study for the Lewis Mumford Center at the State University of New York at Albany, "This segregation (in New York) has a different cause than that in the south in the 1950s. In New York, segregation in the schools reflects segregation in the housing markets. While New Yorkers think this is a progressive city, it is one of the most segregated cities in the country in terms of blacks and whites"(Robinson, 2004, p. 3).

One might ask, what is wrong with that? If students live in the same neighborhood, shouldn't they go to the same neighborhood schools? If schools are still segregated, should it matter? Card and Rothstein (2006) point out some facts that tend to reiterate the argument of the 1954 Supreme Court. Their research identified four mechanisms through which racial or

ethnic segregation might affect the educational achievement of black students. First, what might be called direct exposure effects arises in peer group models where minorities have lowered expectations or aspirations than non-minorities (all else held constant). For example, models of race-based cultural norms (e.g., Ogub and Forham, 1986; Ogbu, 2003) assert that black children have lower norms of achievement than otherwise similar whites, and that exposure to peers with lowered aspirations reduces achievement. What is missing is the question: Why? Why would children of color have lower norms of achievement "than otherwise similar whites"? Have children of color been taught to expect less than their white counterparts?

In her 2006 Presidential Address to the National Educational Research Association, G. Ladson-Billings stated: "During the long period of legal apartheid, African Americans attended schools where they received cast-off textbooks and materials from White schools. In the South, the need for farm labor meant that the typical year for rural Black students was about 4 months long. Indeed, Black students in the South did not experience universal secondary schooling until 1968 (Anderson, 2002). Why, then, would we not expect there to be an achievement gap?" (2006, p.3).

A recent repetition of the doll test first conducted in the 1940s would seem to indicate that Black children have been taught to see themselves as inferior as early as ages 4 or 5. In the film, "A Girl Like Me" (2005), Kiri Davis, a 17 year-old student,

> "…re-created Kenneth Clark's 1940s doll test that was used to fight school segregation in the landmark Brown vs. Board of Education case. In Clark's studies, he and his wife, Mamie Clark, found that the majority of black children they tested chose white dolls over black dolls and ascribed negative attributes to black dolls. Five decades later, Davis, a senior at Manhattan's Urban Academy High School, assumed things had improved -- especially in black cultural Meccas like Harlem. But her film, punctuated with black teen girls discussing their relationships with their skin, their hair

> and their community, illustrates how the converse is true" (Einhorn, 2006 p. 1).

Prior to the 1954 Supreme Court decision was the Plessy v. Ferguson case of 1896, which ruled that racially segregated institutions were constitutional if they were created equal. This belief, coupled with the ruling, gave school systems the latitude to segregate schools by race (Cloud, 2002). In a 1965 commencement address at Howard University, President Lyndon Johnson articulated the general philosophy of affirmative action: “You do not take a person, who for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say ‘you are free to compete with all the others' and still believe that you are being completely fair” (Peters, 1999, p.1).

Even though slavery in the United States of America ended officially 144 years ago with the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, its effects are still felt by many people of color. While it was Abraham Lincoln who issued that edict, many other presidents before and after him would hardly have been considered liberal on the issue. “The major leaders of the nation endorsed ideas about inferiority of Black, Latino and Native peoples. Thomas Jefferson (1816), who advocated for the education of the American citizen, simultaneously decried the notion that Blacks were capable of education. George Washington, while deeply conflicted about slavery, maintained a substantial number of slaves on his Mount Vernon Plantation and gave no thought to educating enslaved children” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p.4).

It’s a given that few of us are physically enslaved today, the prison industrial complex notwithstanding. Yet, the trauma witnessed and borne by those ancestors who did live the full effects of that experience, with no healing offered after enduring such a unique and bizarre experience, has to have had an effect on the psyches of generations of people. After witnessing

the World Trade Center disaster of September 11, 2001, we now know that one does not have to have a personal experience of trauma for it to have an effect on one's psyche, and research has shown that severe trauma can effect on multiple generations (Leary, 2005). Of course, with the ending of physical enslavement in 1863, the violence did not stop. There were murders, rapes and lynchings committed by fear mongerers, citizens' councils and KKK alike that continue even until today. Yet the mechanisms for coping with the fear engendered from these experiences, handed down from generation to generation of continued onslaught in hostile environments after slavery, might well explain why there is a lowered norm of achievement for people of color in the United States of America.

"Since segregation by definition raised the relative exposure of black students to black peers, pure exposure effects creates a link from segregation to the black-white achievement gap. A second set of direct exposure effects arises from the correlation between minority status and other characteristics that may negatively effect achievement. Black children, for example, are more likely to have a single parent than white children" (Card and Rothstein, 2006, p.4). Once again, segregation in America was by design. Enslavement in America was by design. The destruction of the family of the enslaved African was designed to destroy the most important supportive structure known to human beings: the family.

The single parent family is actually one of the legacies of enslavement wherein families were deliberately separated at the whim of slave owners who exercised decision-making powers over the lives of enslaved Africans. Given the social system in which we currently live, the single parent family has had more of a negative impact as a result of the breakdown of the extended family tradition. Africans created the extended family tradition during and after slavery as a natural protection against the destruction of a solid family structure. It has only

been within the last couple of decades that the protective force of the extended family has been eliminated from the African-American and Latino communities. One of the major factors that aided this destruction was the infusion of crack cocaine into those communities during the 1980s and 1990s. The presence of crack cocaine in communities of color for close to two decades has had a devastating effect on many of the relationships long taken for granted in those communities. The results have not only been the breakdown of the family but homelessness, the likes of which no one before has seen in a so-called civilized society, as well as a large number of arrests for petty crimes with long prison sentences, the proliferation of children raising children, prostitution, gang fights, the return of the use of the "n" word, the proliferation of a Hip Hop/Rap culture that glorifies "gangsterism" and other negative behavior, and, of course, peer groups replacing the extended family as the support base (T'Shaka, 2005).

> "In the years after World War II, and especially after the civil rights reforms of the 1960s, black Americans' standardized-test scores improved steadily and significantly, compared with those of whites. But at some point in the late 1980s, after decades of progress, the narrowing of the gap stalled, and between 1988 and 1994 black reading scores actually fell by a sizable amount on the national assessment. What had appeared to be an inexorable advance toward equality had run out of steam, and African-American schoolchildren seemed to be stuck well behind their white peers" (Tough, 2006, p.2).

The twelve years of the Republican Party shaping national policy, first under Ronald Reagan, then under the elder George Bush (1980-1992), had an agenda to move the hands of time backwards. They were so successful that, during the two terms of Bill Clinton's administration, we as a nation of people needed those eight years just to be within any proximity to a state of balance. However, the second George Bush came in with the same

Republican agenda in 2000, and a large part of the country has been relegated back to the 1980s and 1990s, if not the 1950s again. The effects have not only been the destruction of the extended family, but also the destruction of communities of color, as we once knew them.

It is traditionally known that school is based on the three pillars of family, community and school. In many communities of color, it is the school that one has to increasingly look to for any degree of relief and, most importantly, sanctuary, given the fact that family and community have been so radically transformed. What is the role of government in all this? Should schools be seeking more help from governmental initiatives like No Child Left Behind?

> "In 2002, when No Child Left Behind went into effect, 13 percent of the nation's black eighth-grade students were "proficient" in reading, the assessment's standard measure of grade-level competence. By 2005 (the latest data), that number had dropped to 12 percent. (Reading proficiency among white eighth-grade students dropped to 39 percent, from 41 percent.) The gap between economic classes isn't disappearing, either: in 2002, 17 percent of poor eighth-grade students (measured by eligibility for free or reduced-price school lunches) were proficient in reading; in 2005, that number fell to 15 percent" (Tough, 2006, p.1).

In the article, *Racial Segregation and Educational Outcome in Metropolitan Boston*, Lee (2004) gives reason to understand that government *culpability* might be at the heart of the matter. "After decades of relatively stable desegregation, three Supreme Court decisions between 1991 and 1995 limited school desegregation and authorized a return to segregated neighborhood schools, decisions which were interpreted by a number of Southern courts as prohibiting even voluntary race-conscious plans to maintain desegregated schools where local authorities believed integration to be a crucial local goal" (p. 5).

The article goes on to state that not only the judicial arm of the government, but, as well, the executive branch was not without some efforts used towards reversing the tide or even

making sure that nothing really was going to happen in regards to desegregation. Most notably during the Nixon Administration, the executive branch stopped enforcing desegregation (until ordered to resume by a federal court). There have been no significant policy initiatives to foster desegregation, while resegregation for black students reflects the direction of social policy and is the result of government inaction and court rulings.

All of this should not be news unless one has not paid attention to the information that has been presented to us over the years. What could be a source of news is how a school, given the reality we are now experiencing, decides to make itself a sanctuary. How would a school go about this? What issues would have to be addressed?

Creating value is, I believe, very necessary in a social structure whose very foundation (our constitution) devalues the human being. It is virtually impossible to devalue one group as our constitution does with African Americans (3/5 of a person), without that having an effect on all people. The legacy of slavery (which has spawned racism), along with the legacy of sexism (in addition to xenophobic and homophonic tendencies), leaves us in a social structure that is fear-based and is generally speaking to a win/lose culture. What I mean is that winning at someone else's expense has been normalized into our structure. The win/lose paradigm is so prevalent we rarely think that we have the power to affect change in ourselves or in the world at large. As well, the need for change is rarely seen. One means of approaching a remedy for this condition is to create "sanctuaries" or "pockets of resistance" that counter fear with love. In other words, a win/win paradigm, whereby, instead of winning by putting someone else down, we work together to insure that everyone is a winner. The school can be made to be one such sanctuary, and certainly the classroom within a school where a certain kind of

understanding is prevalent becomes another. There has to be both an understanding of the need for and the belief that a school can become a "sanctuary."

There is a national non-profit organization called Operation Respect, founded by Peter Yarrow of the folk group Peter, Paul and Mary, which offers workshops and assembly programs designed to provide educators with tools necessary to affect a change towards making a school into a sanctuary. Operation Respect has developed the "Don't Laugh At Me" program which attempts to confront the problem of bullying in public schools through a conflict resolution curriculum that involves getting educators and students to think about saying things that are "put ups" as opposed to the common tendency of "put downs." People who take the workshop, as I did, are encouraged to find positive things to say about one another or say nothing at all. The school I teach at has attempted to implement this program with some moderate success. Students respond well to having good things said about them. This is, however, just a small step in what is a monumental job of changing a prevalent mindset that is constantly reinforced by negative imagery.

In Texas, a two-and-a-half year residency at a public school with a predominantly African American and Latino population became the source of a dissertation by Kelly Goran Fulton, Ph.D, with some very interesting ideas towards creating a sanctuary. The data collected at Clark School (fictitiously named) included interviews with 61 teachers, administrators and school staff, observation of classroom and school events, and an analysis of existing school records. Given the above stated conditions of both the family and community in the area of this school, the proactive effort of the principal (at the Clark school) to deliberately incorporate African American male teachers created a unique opportunity to explore responses to those conditions. In addition to lack of male role models, other challenges perceived by the school

staff included high residential mobility and low-income conditions. In sum, teachers' and administrators' responses to the needs of the students were shaped and complicated by district and state policies, social class differences between teachers and families, and ideas about gender roles (Fulton, 2004).

The gender role is one that requires some investigation because it speaks to the single parent family and how schools, given the lingering effects of enslavement and segregation, can help to impact on this cycle of pain. The single parent family is most often a female dominated one. For the male of color, this easily sets up two problems. One, on a community level: how can a man make a difference? The other problem includes looking at the African American or Latino male as a teacher. If male or female children are not accustomed to fathers in their homes, how will they deal with the authority of a male in the classroom? It is a fact that not many males decide to teach elementary school. Fewer men teach in elementary schools, in part, the argument goes, because elementary school (at least at this point in history) is a woman-dominated institution, and the participation of men, therefore, makes them 'suspect.' Yet, at the same time, African American and Latino men are highly desired as role models for young boys. At Clark, African American men were intentionally recruited to serve as teachers and role models (Fulton, 2004). It was interesting that there was not a similar proactive effort made towards Latino males, given the demographics of the school.

The principal recruited men specifically because of their cultural background (as African Americans) and because of their maleness, so that attention could be focused on the male students who, as a group, in recent years had fallen behind in academic achievement. Having male teachers was seen as a way of addressing a community need. This factor produces a double benefit in that the male can been seen as a surrogate parent and as a community

professional. This is important because of the onslaught of negative images portrayed in the newspapers, television and in the community where African American and Latino men are seen as drug dealers, pimps, in jail or absent for any number of reasons.

Dr Joy Leary's book, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, is a brilliant approach to looking at the psychological damages of enslavement and the need for therapy. Leary suggests that African Americans (and other people of color) can ill afford to wait for the dominant culture to realize the qualitative benefits of undoing racism. The real recovery from the ongoing trauma of slavery and racism has to start from within, she says, beginning with a true acknowledgment of the resilience of African-American culture.

One of the problems faced by urban schools and by America in general is one of class. There are places where race and class intersect, but certainly the materialistic culture that we live in often devalues the individual for things. The solution for that has to be a school where caring is one of the most important values. Teachers in today's urban reality might oftentimes replace parents as the primary caregivers.

> "In the professional homes, parents directed an average of 487 "utterances" — anything from a one-word command to a full soliloquy — to their children each hour. In welfare homes, the children heard 178 utterances per hour. Hart and Risley showed that language exposure in early childhood correlated strongly with I.Q. and academic success later on in a child's life. Hearing fewer words, and a lot of prohibitions and discouragements, had a negative effect on I.Q.; hearing lots of words, and more affirmations and complex sentences, had a positive effect on I.Q. The professional parents were giving their children an advantage with every word they spoke, and the advantage just kept building up" (Tough, 2006, p 3).

Fulton, (2004) posits, "Teachers' perceptions of parents not only shape how the teachers relate to their students but also hint at the attitudes about which parents can be authentic

educational partners. Authentic partnership then would include 'culturally relevant' teaching as well as sensitivity to ideas about class and how that shapes teachers' perceptions and actions" (p.131). Being proactive and recruiting teachers who may not have been through a particular educational process but who can relate to students in a culturally relevant way may very well be a way of addressing some of these issues with a bold and broad stroke.

A significant difference between the 1950s-1960s and today's reality is the lack of a movement like the Civil Right Movement that encouraged pride in one's heritage. Given the general tendency of the African American and Latino middle class to deny their roots as they aspire to become "Americans," culturally relevant teaching takes on new meaning, especially in this age we're living in. Given this understanding, in the area of music I have done research on a paper that defines the music coming from African people in America as Jazz: A Music of the Spirit. Along with that definition comes several artists who can be identified as progenitors of the art form, if one needs to put a face on the name. The artists, both male and female, are Duke Ellington, Mary Lou Williams, Sun Ra, Nina Simone, Betty Carter and John Coltrane. Theses artists were chosen because of the transformational quality of their music which can readily be accessed.

Cole (1993) quotes Professor Fela Sowande of Nigeria as follows: "By far the most important single factor in African music is the full recognition and practical endorsement and use of the metaphysical powers of Sound"(p. 25). That is to say, it wasn't a coincidence that as a means of addressing a major imbalance created by the enslavement of millions of people, those same people were provided with a music that could be spiritually transforming, giving them a means through which to understand how their music and lives could be important to their sense of collective dignity and respect while creating a gift to themselves and the world. I would also

take that a step further and suggest that all of the art forms (writing, dance visual arts, etc.) created by Africans in the Americas were and are an effort to rise above the condition of enslavement and apartheid. It is because the culture is primarily relevant and vital to African people (even while it might be interesting to other people), that educators have to seek it out and pass it on.

When G. Ladson-Billings, (1997) decided to write *Dreamkeeper*s (a book that helps to define cultural relevancy by profiling the successful teachers of African American children), as opposed to using "objective measures to identify teacher proficiency," she went to the educational consumers---parents to solicit from them their insights into good teaching (p.27). This is indicative of the approach she felt she had to take to define what cultural relevancy was because, she says,

> "Given the long history of the poor academic performance of African American students one might ask why almost no literature exists to address their specific educational needs. One reason is a stubborn refusal in American education to recognize African Americans as a distinct cultural group. While it is recognized that African Americans make up a distinct *racial* group, the acknowledgement that this racial group has a distinct culture is still not recognized. It is presumed that African American children are exactly like white children but just need a little extra help. Rarely investigated are the possibilities of distinct cultural characteristics (requiring some specific attention) or the detrimental impact of systematic racism. Thus the reasons for their academic failure continue to be seen as wholly environmental and social. Poverty and lack of opportunity often are presented as the only plausible reasons for poor performance. And the kinds of intervention and remedies proposed attempt to compensate for these defiencies" (p.9).

Another look at the important role that parents play, not necessarily in the area of cultural relevancy, but certainly in the area of nurturing the education of children, comes from Jeanne Brooks-Gunn a researcher at Columbia Teacher's College:

> "Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, a professor at Teachers College, has overseen hundreds of interviews of parents and collected thousands of hours of

> videotape of parents and children, and she and her research team have graded each one on a variety of scales. Their conclusion: Children from more well-off homes tend to experience parental attitudes that are more sensitive, more encouraging, less intrusive and less detached — all of which, they found, serves to increase I.Q. and school-readiness. They analyzed the data to see if there was something else going on in middle-class homes that could account for the advantage but found that while wealth does matter, child-rearing style matters more" (Tough, 2006, p.3)

Cultural relevancy is a positive take on the often-used term "culturally deprived" of the 1960s and 1970s, used to define impoverished students of color. The term was one (in keeping with the general marginalization of people of color), which implied a lack of culture, suggesting that the only culture of importance was the dominant one. Cultural relevancy, however, calls for cultural intervention or an infusion of understanding that tunes into the cultural heritage of the student body. At this point, it is important to define culture as a system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors and artifacts that the members of any given social group use to cope with their world and with one another, and that is transmitted from one generation to the next through learning. To fully understand the culture of African American people and people of color who are influenced by that culture, one has to understand the culture of African people which has long been relegated to that of the barbaric and the insignificant; however, to the contrary, T'Shaka (2005) states:

> The commonly held assumptions that Africans from different ethnic or tribal groups were separated from each other during slavery is not supported by the data that shows that slave masters from certain states preferred Africans from specific geographic regions of Africa. Subsequently, it will be clear that specific African ethnic groups had a special impact on particular regions of the South. The African priesthood, and African cultural practices brought to the United States by Africans from different ethnic or tribal groups would merge together to form African American culture (p.236).

T'Shaka's work gives understanding as to how it was possible for African people to survive the ordeal of enslavement for centuries as he places great emphasis on the spiritual practices which were the central belief systems of many of the enslaved Africans. This common cultural unity, T'Shaka posits, outweighed differences and enabled the implementation of very specific cultural practices that would later be identified as African American. He points out that African democracy was rooted in improvisation, communalism, the extended family community, apprenticeship systems, the mighty Word, the hieroglyphic mentality, African music and African dance [a twin mindset]. Improvisation became the major cultural weapon Africans used to adapt to the cruel and harsh treatment of life in the United States, the Caribbean and South America.

> "African culture persisted in the United States partially because of common cultural unities existing between African ethnic groups thrown together through the middle passage. Common cultural unities included a spirit-based culture centered on a deep belief in God. This spirit-oriented culture operated out of a hieroglyphic mentality and placed a high value on the living word. The majority of Africans enslaved in the United States and in the Americas came out of oral societies, where knowledge was passed on through word of mouth, and skills were acquired through apprenticeship systems. Those coming out of written cultures also placed the same high value on the spoken word, with truthful speech and actions being given the highest value. Africans who endured the middle passage had an optimistic view of life grounded in a twin view of the world and the cosmos. Life always had a cutting edge that offered the possibility of change with God being on the side of the just and against the unjust. Various African ethnic groups shared a respect for elders" (T'Shaka, 2005, p.237-8).

Through her research, G. Ladson-Billings has identified several characteristics that help to define what culturally relevant teaching looks like. Of course, by definition, culturally relevant teaching would mean that one is aware of the historical factors that have helped and will help to shape the identity of students of color. For instance, in the school I teach at there are many students of color from African-Caribbean backgrounds like Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and

Tobago, Saint Vincent and Saint Lucia, just to name a few places of origin. These students are mixed with students of African American, Latino and Asian backgrounds. As a teacher using cultural relevancy, it would be important to make connections between these various places while having the students make connections with each other. Fortunately, music is a great means of being able to do that because some artists, like Bob Marley, have songs that are revered throughout all of these communities of color. Recently, I've enjoyed teaching music and interpretation to several classes by using Bob Marley's *Redemption Song*. The classes were engaging in what is known in music as "a dictation exercise." Students listened to the music and wrote down the poetical lyrics while sharing a communal spelling when they were not able to spell out words on their own accord. The whole exercise was made into a friendly competitive project as students vied to be the first to hear the lyrics or the first to spell out the words correctly. It is not only Bob Marley's African-Caribbean background that is relevant, but as well the lyrics, which connect to an understanding of the African Diasporic impact of slavery and what we need to do to rid ourselves of its lingering effects. After writing the lyrics out, we discussed their meaning:

Old pirates, yes they rob I,
Sold I to the merchant ships.
Minutes after they took I
From the bottomless pits
But my head was made strong
By the hand of the Allmighty
We forward in this generation, triumphantly

Won't you hear to sing,
These songs of freedom
Cause all I ever had
Redemption songs, redemption songs.

Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery
None but ourselves can free our minds
Have no fear for atomic energy

‘Cause none of them can stop the time
How long shall they kill our prophets
While we stand aside and look
Some say it’s just a part of it,
We got to fulfill the book.

Won’t you hear to sing
These songs of freedom
Is all I ever had
Redemption songs, redemption songs.

Redemption Song was written towards the end of Marley’s life and Smith (2005) understood the lyrics to the song as “a fitting conclusion to the last recording that he (Marley) produced and oversaw. It is a striking expression of his commitment to his music as form of transformative education.” Smith, goes on to say: “*Redemption Song* would confirm Marley’s commitment to the task of teaching and leading his people out of a world marked by oppression and hopelessness and into a world of survival” (p.18).

Last year, I introduced students to another artist India.Arie (her preferred spelling), who is African American and with whose work I also had great success. In her song *Talk to Her*, she expressed words that tapped into the need for respect, which is an issue that certainly had and still has currency in our schools and communities. The lyrics to the chorus are:

When you talk to her
Talk to her like you want somebody
To talk to your mama,
Don’t be smart with her,
Have a heart to heart with her
Just like you would with your daughter,
‘Cause everything you do or say,
You got to live with everyday.
She’s somebody’s baby, she’s somebody’s sister, she’s somebody’s mama.

Respect and dignity are flip sides of the same coin. As a youngster growing up in Harlem and New York's Lower East Side, I got to see musicians, artists, poets and dancers who were from a generation before me and who were therefore connected to a way of being that espoused dignity and pride in one's heritage. They represented an earned self-togetherness. Musical artists like Duke Ellington, Mary Lou Williams, John Coltrane, Nina Simone, Sun Ra and Betty Carter, also represented something that I would later understand as Jazz: A Music of the Spirit. The key element of Jazz that links the six of them is that they were masters of the art of improvisation. As a Music of the Spirit, what we call Jazz includes improvisation, a term and a phenomenon that implies "the act of making better," as improving one's social and therefore spiritual condition. The historical condition of African people in America is one that certainly has been in continual need of greater improvement. This art form is one that transcends the isms and schisms of this country and infuses the hearer with an appreciation of the cultural relevancy of African people in America. I have therefore used the music and life of the above-mentioned artists as a culturally relevant teaching tool.

Ladson-Billings (1997) says a culturally relevant teacher would have to see him/herself as an artist teaching an art as opposed to a technician teaching a technical task. A basic ingredient here is that of improvisation which means knowing your craft so well that at any given moment you can move into another direction required to reach students, like the Jazz soloist breaking free from the melody to make another statement to consider.

Teachers with culturally relevant practices would see themselves as part of a community and would see themselves as giving back to the community they've come from. If they are not from the community they would make an effort to understand the community they are teaching in so they can better communicate with and connect to the students. As well, the teachers

would encourage students to also give back to their community. A teacher with culturally relevant practices would have to believe that all the students can succeed rather than believe that failure is inevitable. Of course, if that is the belief system, then one will have to find ways to help students succeed. Finally, a culturally relevant teacher sees teaching as “pulling knowledge” out--like mining as opposed to “putting knowledge” into-- like banking.

As a final note about the successful teachers in her study, who represented culturally relevant practices, Ladson-Billings states: “They saw what drugs and state and federal neglect did to the community. They stayed in Pinewood because they wanted to, not because they had to. Each was offered the opportunity to teach in a more affluent, less stressful school environment. But for all of them, teaching in Pinewood remains a calling—a chance to be active participants in the construction of a dream” (p.167).

In conclusion, I would like to say that what is probably needed first is an understanding that there is a nationwide crisis in education based on the lingering effects of segregation and on the changes in community and family that have occurred in the last two decades paralleling the lack of changes in schools and the reversal of governmental policy during the same period. If we assume, as my research has led me to believe, that this condition is going to endure, then creative minds who can envision solutions to these problems are required. Certainly the idea of school as sanctuary and the involvement of Operation Respect in the school and the surrounding community would be a major step.

Along with that I would recommend workshops for educators, students, and community people focused around the study of Dr. Joy Leary’s *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*. Dr. Leary is a powerful speaker on the subject and would probably be available for speaking engagements. If that were not possible the purchase of her book and DVD would be a good

acquisition. I think the proactive approach demonstrated by the Texas school of enlisting more males in elementary education whose cultural background reflects that of the student population would also be a strong asset. Another important book that I highly recommend is Gloria Ladson-Billings, The *Dreamkeepers*. By interviewing successful teachers of African American children, she offers an invaluable service to the condition.

Thus my research indicates that the de facto situation of segregation in the public school system is the result of both external and internal socioeconomic, as well as legal barriers. On a micro level, there is a need for additional research on the legacies of slavery and, in particular, the psychological effects of a post-traumatic slave syndrome along with strategies for recreating fundamental values of dignity and respect amongst people of color. However, these strategies can only succeed within the context of major economic and educational structural reforms.

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