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Reconciling Student Outcomes and Community Self-Reliance in Modern School Reform Contexts

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Education: An Individual or Collective Enterprise?

Education for African Americans has historically been linked to the broad movement to improve their lot in life. Ceaselessly, from slavery and Jim Crow, toward full membership in American society, schooling was as much about academic learning as it was for ensuring the sustainability of the community in which the school was situated. Due to both *de jure* and *de facto* racial segregation of their communities and public schools, there have historically been high levels of self-determination in schooling for African Americans (Anderson, 1988). The boundaries of the racial community were often undistinguishable from the geographic communities in which African Americans lived. *Racial uplift* became the *raison d'être* in all sectors of black society, but education offered a pragmatic focus for community development, political empowerment, and economic enfranchisement. This has meant black teachers, the visible presence of the African American experience in the curriculum, and significant local decision-making power.

The latest wave of test-based reform is in direct conflict with this tradition of racial uplift and self-reliance that has substituted test score growth for community approval as the ultimate metric of educational success. Quite differently, modern test-based school reform has focused on the development of two linked areas: standards-based reform and choice (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Cuban & Usdan, 2002). From these economics-informed perspectives, students are viewed instrumentally as consumers and future workers (Strike, 2010). Schools are built to push individual success, productivity, and competitiveness. Schools improve with infusions of human capital, leading to the consequential removal of educators unable to meet

assigned performance targets. African American teachers, with their concentrated presence in schools that have been deemed failing, have been the collateral damage of test-based reform. From this perspective, schools look more like corporations in which bottom lines are met, individual advancement is *merited*, and success is brought to scale. The lines between racial, school, and geographic community are demarcated to bring clarity to roles and responsibilities, but the mission of test-based reform is universal: annual score increases. This type of categorization and/ or routinization reflects the social institution of the market. And while theories of efficiency and scientific management entered the education policy vocabulary long ago (Thorndike, 1904; Tyler, 1950), never has there been such political acceptance or structural alignment for the use of student testing as the sole metric for educational decision making at the school, district, state, and federal levels.

This current pervasiveness of market approaches is reflected in the reform language of state takeover, school turnaround, and reconstitution. As a consequence, since 2001, administrative control of many schools serving students of color has shifted from local educators and elected school boards to the states and the federal government, who set the accountability policies and determine student and school accountability rules based on test scores. The following chapter interrogates this facially benign policy of raising student achievement with respect to the potential impact on the legacy self-determination of African American schooling.

Divergent Perspectives

These changes have fueled a heated public debate about schooling for the poor in America. This debate includes neo-liberal school reformers who tend to favor school choice, charter schools, and a heavy emphasis on state testing for school evaluation (Beabout & Jakiel, 2011). Opposite this camp are the community control advocates that tend to favor increased public investment in schools, community-driven decision-making, and multiple measures of school evaluation. Thomas (2011) has offered a similar dichotomy of school reform camps, dubbing them the *no excuses* reformers and the *social context* reformers. And while these binary divisions are necessarily simplistic and fail to capture the nuances of the views of individuals and groups who care about improving schools, these divisions foreground an important question in our current reform debates: *What are the consequences of our current obsession with creating schools that can raise test scores?* What this debate currently lacks is a recognition of the competing values that drive each camp. The neo-liberals emphasize student academic achievement over community self-determination while the community control camp does not. Both views have inherent strengths and flaws.

This chapter provides a theoretical examination of the impact of these differing sets of values (student outcomes vs. community self-determination) and

suggests a conceptual road map for improvement based heavily on our work with public schooling in post-Katrina New Orleans, perhaps the American city where test-based accountability has been implemented in its most philosophically pure form (Beabout, 2010; Perry & Schwam-Baird, 2010).

The Rise of the Testing Regime in New Orleans

In post-Katrina New Orleans, the student outcomes reformers have reigned almost unopposed. While public education in New Orleans is a 160-year story filled with remarkable feats of self-determination and collective action (DeVore & Logsdon, 1991), a more recent history of the district reveals decades of poor academic performance, limited public investment, and systemic mismanagement (Roesgen, 2005). In a situation ripe for a revolution, the neo-liberal philosophy of prioritizing student achievement on state tests over the other functions of schooling (see Rothstein, Jacobsen, & Wilder, 2008) has been supported by a pro-market state government and bolstered by infusions of cash from market-oriented foundations and the federal government (Ritea, 2005; Simon, 2007). Since the storms of 2005, scores on state tests have risen (Perry & Schwam-Baird, 2010) while complaints about increasing racial segregation (Abramson, 2010), illegal firing of teachers (Robertson, 2012), and the exclusion of special needs students (Ritea, 2007) have generally been marginalized to small pockets of activists with little access to decision-making channels. Entranced by the widely held American belief that the product of good schools is good test scores, the media has showered much attention on the reforms in New Orleans. And while there have been many notable successes, the emerging gulf between our public schools and the predominantly African American community that they serve gives us pause.

It is undeniable that test-based accountability has limited the self-determination of the local African American population in running their own schools. The publicly elected school board has lost control of many schools and a state-appointed superintendent holds the most influential leadership role in the city. Meanwhile, rapid expansions of New Leaders for New Schools, Teach For America, and their affiliated charter management organizations have flooded the employment market with young teachers and school leaders from out of state. While many local educators still work in the schools, there has absolutely been a shift of power away from New Orleans' African American community and the once-mighty teachers union that for years influenced politics in the city. This is further evidenced in the recent election of New York native and Teach For America's New Orleans chapter executive director Kira Orange-Jones to the state education board with significant campaign support from state and national-level luminaries (including New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg) (Vanacore, 2011). This local development has led us to consider the question: *Are there times when limiting peo-*

ple's self-determination can be ethically justified? This analysis of the relationship between test-based accountability and urban communities begins with a look at the history of self-determination in African American thought and education. While educational self-determination is today being challenged in many low-income communities with many different racial compositions, we focus on the African American experience here because that is the context of such change in our city.

Historical Roots of Self-Determination

In the Americas, the period of Reconstruction saw a particular social and political activism conducted by and on behalf of the formerly enslaved people of African descent. The term *racial uplift* and its derivatives (*upliftment, community control*) are synonymous with the quest for civil and political rights by the descendants of the enslaved. Forged out of the crucible of slavery, racial uplift as a movement shaped black activism and the black education agenda. The backdrop of slavery accentuates why proponents of uplift do not separate freedoms such as education from political, economic, intellectual, and religious rights. As the Brookings Institution has reported:

> The moral, legal, and rhetorical pursuit of collective rights of access was but an essential strategy in a multifront war for a much larger prize: the uplift of a people, once mostly enslaved, afterward still widely despised. . . . Indeed, black leaders and organizations have always known that they must pursue the vast and varied interests of their stigmatized and marginalized constituents by any realistic mechanism available. Rights were more a means than an end. (Foreman, 1998)

Du Bois' oft-referenced citation underscored the overarching problem to be solved through uplift: "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line" (Du Bois, 1989, p. 10). The African American community had little choice but to respond *as a community* to deal with the legacy of racial discrimination, legal segregation, and slavery. Consequently, racial uplift has left an indelible imprint on black education as an ideology and field of study (King, 2005).

Notwithstanding the civil rights work throughout the world prior to Reconstruction, but certainly since, activists have pursued quality education and schools as an essential (but not singular) vehicle for racial and gender equality, full citizenship, and restorative justice. This work includes a specific focus on civil and educational rights, curriculum, instruction, and claims for physical school buildings. Even prior to the legal end of slavery, black educationists fought for state-sponsored universal education when white landowners felt the state had no right to impose education. Plantation owners and industrialists also did not want to disrupt the social arrangement developed after more than 200 years of slavery (Anderson, 1988). Consequently, African American public education is a byproduct of racial uplift.

Again, schools, diplomas, and test scores were not the end goals. Early proponents focused on loftier goals such as community/self-sufficiency. Self-reliance and community determinism are manifested in activists' pursuit for educational space, both physical and intellectual. Angel David Nieves's interdisciplinary work on "African Americans' struggle to claim a 'space' for themselves within the complex social, economic, and political fabric of U.S. dominant culture from the antebellum era through the present" is a good framework to view self-determinism in black education (Nieves & Alexander, 2008, p. 1). This work shows that black education was also about taking stock in the physical aspects of communities, neighborhoods, or cities. However, during Reconstruction and Jim Crow, blacks had to claim land, businesses, and schools without the start-up capital to do so. Partnership, government sponsorship, and philanthropy would provide the seeds toward universal education and self-empowerment (Anderson, 1988). Interestingly, black activists have always had to negotiate the principle of uplift while working with external foundations, religious organizations, and individuals who sponsored the uplift agenda. Thus, we can see black educational self-determination not as a simple description of who is involved in education of black children, but more accurately, who is making the decisions regarding the enterprise.

Similarly, Mary S. Hoffschwelle's (2008) examination of the Rosenwald school building program epitomizes idealized attempts of philanthropists and blacks working together to increase the capacity of racial communities. Booker T. Washington teamed with Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears, Roebuck and Company, to establish the initiative. "The most important element in that coalition was African American activism and self-help, mandatory components of the building program that Black southerners seized upon to make these schools their own" (Hoffschwelle, 2008, p. 278). The facility campaign met modern standards of building construction. All the sites had to be deeded to the local board of education or the state. Black school patrons contributed materially to the design and construction and believed in "the social and personal value of universal education and wanted white southerners to accept that black education was a public responsibility" (Hoffschwelle, 2008, p. 282).

In addition to buildings, self-determination could not be achieved without a superior education in terms of curriculum and instruction. W. E. B. Du Bois certainly did not seek education merely to achieve economic equality. As a supporter of the American Missionary Association's mission to build black schools in the liberal tradition, Du Bois wanted them to focus on the training of black teachers and higher education. As he articulately describes in his own words:

> The teachers in these institutions came not to keep the Negroes in their place, but to raise them out of the defilement of the places where slavery had wallowed them. The colleges they founded were social settlements; homes where the best

of the sons of the freedmen came in close and sympathetic touch with the best traditions of New England. The lived and ate together, studied and worked, hoped and harkened in the dawning light. In actual formal content their curriculum was doubtless old-fashioned, but in educational power it was supreme, for it was the contact of live souls. (Du Bois, 1989, p. 70)

The sentiment that black education was "not to keep the Negroes in their place" is the recognition that education without racial uplift falls short to the larger need of Americans disenfranchised by slavery. Harvard educated, Du Bois unashamedly promoted a classically liberal, northern education. However, he was unsatisfied with the acquisition of skills to *fit* into society or to serve a role. This was made clear by his rejection of industrial education, which sought to conveniently transition blacks from a slave and agricultural economy built on slavery to an agricultural one built on free men. "'What they [formerly enslaved] desire is assistance without control.' The values of self-help and self-determination underlay the ex-slaves' educational movement" (Anderson, 1988, p. 5).

The goal of racial uplift continued throughout the 20th century. Again, racial uplift was not compartmentalized neatly into education, economic development, health care, etc. The cross-pollination of these factors converged, especially in schools. For instance, organized labor has deep connections in education. In Milwaukee, local Urban League administrator William Kelley used schools to protect the rights of community members, for "the public schools not only were potential employers of middle-class black teachers but also served as key institutions that socialized black youth into their roles in the city's racialized labor market" (Dougherty, 2004, p. 13). Disenfranchised groups naturally partner across sectors to mobilize and share scarce resources and to form political alliances that empower the collective whole (Stone, 2002). However, sector crossing creates opportunities to prioritize values, which exposes internal and external competing interests.

The need for community determinism and community control reaches impasses when blacks are asked to place their professionalism, gender, or region over their racial identity. Teacher unionism during the 1968 NYC teacher strikes revealed tensions as black community mobilization presented a threat to professional inclusion of black educators. Twenty years prior, the United Federation of Teachers led a desegregation effort and voted not to charter segregated locals. During the high-stakes strike, self-help and community control sounded like aggressive Black Panther rhetoric to the union (Perlstein, 2004). In the moment of the 1968 strike, the union saw community control as a backwards step moving away from the ideal of integration. For many in the African American community, integration meant losing ground on school leadership, curriculum controls, and access to power.

Collective bargaining has been an essential tool for racial uplift particularly for blacks in service, manufacturing, and professional industries. However, the

battle to protect or erode collective bargaining has ensued since the passage of the National Labor Relations Act in 1935. Ever since, racial politics have been entangled in labor disputes. Attempts to decertify unions in Wisconsin and in New Orleans, Louisiana, provide examples that will be highlighted below. However, this intertwined network of political forces supporting racial uplift is almost unrecognizable in the recent rise of achievement-centered management and their brand of market philosophy being used to improve schools. The history described above provides useful context for understanding the present-day resistance to test-based reforms that is common, though by no means universal, in African American communities. The following discussion outlines and critiques the basic positions of two primary constituencies in the current reforms debate. We will call them the *community control camp* and the *student outcomes camp*. The former traces its roots quite directly to the racial uplift narrative, the Rosenwald Schools, and Du bois' brand of explicitly raising future generations to change society, rather the simply fit in. The latter finds its roots in scientific management and the neoliberal philosophy that the social ills of poverty, inequality, and racism can be addressed through market-oriented reforms based on maximizing test-score achievement for low-income students of color.

Historical Roots of the Student Outcomes Camp

Beginning with the massive growth in public school attendance following World War II, but perhaps best encapsulated in the 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report, the project of providing public education in the United States has become less about providing access and more about producing measurable results for public investment. Investments at the federal level initially ballooned with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 that has become the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (and is currently undergoing revision by Congress). While federal funding still makes up only about 10% of education funding nationwide, the leverage of this money has prompted states to establish content standards, create annual achievement tests, and devise reform plans that have tended to move decision-making away from African American communities and toward the states and their nonprofit partners.

The Modern Student Outcomes Camp

Since the entry of the federal government as a major player on the U.S. public education scene in 1958, the struggle for improved schooling has expanded on ideological and philosophical grounds. Particularly in urban settings, black and brown children are the focus of the student outcomes camp that emphasizes choice, market approaches, charter schools, vouchers, and portfolio management. Libertarians, neoconservatives, and neoliberals have found common ground in

this camp under the umbrella of the broader choice movement (DeBray-Pelot, Lubienski, & Scott, 2007).

"Choice" has been an undeniably unifying battle cry. "And although many see choice as a quintessential value in consumer-oriented American society, some conservatives and progressives champion choice as a means of empowerment for disadvantaged communities disenfranchised by that society—the 'new civil right'" (DeBray-Pelot et al., 2007, p. 205). But to say everyone is for choice has not quelled the contentious battles around charter schools, vouchers, state take-over, and other initiatives. In particular, market-driven, test-based strategies have led to labor disputes that make it difficult to differentiate if management seeks to eliminate collective bargaining or to improve educational outcomes. These actions clearly challenge the uplift agenda. Nevertheless, a discussion of key market principles in education under the umbrella of "choice" is warranted.

Testing and Choice Proponents

Standard-based curriculums, high-stakes testing, deregulation, decertification, charter schools, and vouchers have expanded mightily over the last 20 years under the hydra of autonomy, choice, and competition. "Such policies often blend public and private provision, with public components increasingly staffed by conditional employees rather than career civil servants or union workers, subject to contractual accountability for outcomes, heavily focused on numerical data for bottom-line accountability, and subject to sharp fiscal management discipline from above" (Bulkley, Henig, & Levin, 2010; Menefee-Libey, 2010, p. 57). These are the hallmarks of the student outcomes camp.

In response to *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, market theorists John Chubb and Terry Moe (1990) posited that the incremental reform movement of the day was incapable of reforming itself because of thick bureaucratic processes, stifling within-school regulation and immovable governing boards. They sought freedom from the internal and external bureaucracies to allow for innovation, leadership, and rapid change. They found difficulty untangling educational outcomes from the confused organizational and governmental context in which schools resided. This opened the political window for the modern accountability, deregulation, decertification, and conditional employee movements. Chubb and Moe did not specifically recommend these issues, but like-minded market-driven thinkers now had entre into the education reform world. Significant also is a response to Chubb and Moe by Wells (1991) in which she identifies, presciently, inequitable access to desirable schools, increased racial and socioeconomic segregation, and diminished democratic governance as negative consequences of their purely hypothetical proposal for relatively unrestrained school choice.

The passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001 signifies for many the start of the test-based accountability era. Republicans' proclivities for government accountability and performance ushered high-stakes testing, state takeover, and expanded opportunities for charter schools. Educational researchers had extensive evidence on the size and nature of the achievement gap between different ethnic groups. However, the federal government charged states to close it. A federal reach into education is usually discouraged by the Republicans (Marshall, 2011). However, it did embrace an affable business orientation to reform. Particularly, gap-closing involved psychometric data collection and decision-making, students' required acquisition of critical subject areas, deregulation, autonomy, school turnaround, as well as dramatic changes in workforce and talent. What is not emphasized in market approaches are community development, collective bargaining, racial uplift, and strong public oversight (elected governance).

Over the last 20 years, CEOs of some of the most successful businesses involved themselves in public education debates. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Broad Foundation, Fisher Foundation, and Walton Family Foundation have collectively contributed hundreds of millions of dollars to organizations that embraced market principles or who were at least aligned with philosophies that made their businesses successful. Their foundations have contributed millions to education reform (Reckhow, 2010).

For instance the Walton Family Foundation's "core strategy is to infuse competitive pressure into America's K–12 education system by increasing the quantity and quality of school choices available to parents, especially in low-income communities. When all families are empowered to choose from among several quality school options, all schools will be fully motivated to provide the best possible education. Better school performance leads, in turn, to higher student achievement, lower dropout rates and greater numbers of students entering and completing college" (Walton Family Foundation, 2011). In 2010, they invested $157 million in education reform including the *Investment Strategies* of public charter school choice, private school choice, district reforms, particularly open enrollment and district school choice, and cross-sector parental choice, where parents are empowered to choose across school sectors.

Similarly, the Broad Foundation's focus on market results is reflected in their "Approach to Investing: Venture Philanthropy. . . . We take an untraditional approach to giving. We don't simply write checks to charities. Instead we practice 'venture philanthropy.' And we expect a return on our investment. . . . We hold ourselves and our grantees accountable for results—because results are what will improve the education of every American student" (Broad Foundation, 2011). The return on investment is measured using test scores and other forms of discrete, easily collected information. Community wellness is not measured as a re-

Table 8.1. Community Control Camp

Axioms of the Community Control Camp
• Urban education is about social uplift for poor communities of color. • Social uplift is primarily the work of minority communities, with supporting roles for other members. • Social uplift can be effectively addressed only through coordinating education, health care, public safety, housing, etc. • Urban educational problems require both school and non-school solutions. • Making strong communities is the goal of education and the source of metrics for success. • Teachers, parents, and community groups must work together to "bring up" our children (seeking optimal outcomes for all learners).
Strengths of the Community Control Camp
• Community resources are drawn into the work of schools. • Broad definition of success, more holistic, inclusive. • Educational success tied to community success. • Community self-determination seeks to support local culture and prepare students for the global economy ("I know who I am and what I can do").
Weaknesses of the Community Control Camp
• Self-determination means "local school boards" to many policymakers and reformers, and this is often connoted to mean "status quo." Alternatives need to be provided (Warren, 2005). • Simply defining and sustaining *self-determination* and *community* in diverse urban contexts is challenging. • Self-determination where there is a lack of local capacity leads to failure.

sult. As stated earlier, market approaches are not fond of bureaucratic structures that increase inefficiencies. This aligns with conservative values.

In an ironic twist, the conservative Heritage Foundation eschews state intervention, for "the Constitution does not provide for a federal role in education, and public schools have traditionally been under the jurisdiction of local authorities. Washington's intervention seems to have brought out the worst in education governance. It has led to ever-increasing spending and bureaucratic bloat while undermining schools' direct accountability to parents and taxpayers" (Marshall, 2011, p. 1). This statement should not be taken as support for self-determination, however, but rather as a vote for the individual's right to choose in the marketplace educational vouchers.

While the overall investment of these groups is relatively small compared to public education spending, the impact of millennial choice advocates has been felt. Terms and phrases familiar to corporate America such as *human capital*, *ven-*

Table 8.2. Student Outcomes Camp

Axioms of the Student Outcomes Camp
    • Urban education is about closing the racial achievement gap.
    • Social inequality can be effectively addressed through closing the achievement gap.
    • Urban educational problems can be solved at the school site.
    • Achievement of state standards and college graduation are the metrics of success.
    • Teachers and schools must get all students to meet state standards at all costs.

Strengths of the Student Outcomes Camp
    • Teachers and schools that do not generate academic achievement gains will not operate very long.
    • School choice is advocated—students are not stuck in failing schools.
    • Accountability mechanisms focus on student achievement.

Weaknesses of the Student Outcomes Camp
    • Schools are often forced to prioritize math and English over other important educational goals.
    • Local community tends to be seen through "deficit lenses" and this strains community-parent relationships.
    • Teachers become service-providers, not adult mentors, which may contribute to less-satisfying work for teachers and increased turnover.
    • Reform does not take up the broader inequalities of society: *"no curricular project can fundamentally transform knowledge and its distribution if it is not part of a process of transforming social relations as well"* (Perlstein, 2002, p. 249).

ture capital, *start-up*, *scale-up*, *turnaround*, *incubation*, *management organization*, and *data driven decision-making* emerged quickly in the education landscape. School leaders have also adopted nomenclatures such as *CEO*, *COO*, and *CFO* in lieu of *superintendent*, *principal*, and *treasurer*. As titles and phraseology has changed, so too has school culture. Common to the drivers of the new school market reform is the "laser-like" focus on closing the achievement gap. In and among themselves, the aforementioned ends of market driven approaches are not necessarily an affront with black individuals. Who doesn't want students to perform better? Rather, it's the black community's demand for a racial uplift focus that is in conflict.

A Comparison of the Two Camps

Both the community control camp and the student outcomes camp can be described by a set of axioms that, while no means exhaustive, firmly show their philosophical position and make clear how they reach their conclusions relating to the control and purposes of schools. In practice, both views have certain

strengths and weaknesses. These are outlined in Tables 8.1 and 8.2, but discussion is forgone given space limitations here.

Black Educators vs. Education Reformers

In the current reform debates, the rhetorical convening power of choice hides nuanced, clear divisions between both camps who are ostensibly working on behalf of the disenfranchised. It is important to clarify the areas of contrast that exist in a somewhat blurry convergence of advocates supporting the amorphous concept of choice.

The inherent objectives of the black educationists' goal of self-reliance as a by-product of place-making through schools comes in direct conflict with choice advocates' fight for deregulation, decentralization, and decertification. Universal, public education has been inextricably linked to labor, housing, and busing movements. In addition, the outcomes camp (with their emphasis on closing racial achievement gaps) seeks to rid school of links to racial uplift agenda (organized labor, universal schooling, strong electoral leadership).

Historically, black recipients of the various educational movements wanted the freedom to create their own pedagogies, rules, and schools. We should remember the caution that W. E. B. Du Bois noted about the Freedmen's Bureau. He believed that the bureau certainly set forth a system of free labor, free public schools, and black businesses. However, "it failed . . . to guard its work wholly from paternalistic methods that discouraged self-reliance" (Du Bois, 1901). It is this insistence on self-reliance, even when the spoils of paternalism are deeply desired, that creates the enduring rift between the two camps described here. It allows, and in fact necessitates, black educators from the community control camp to respond negatively to even the best of the victories of the student outcomes camp. In New Orleans, one can sit in a room where positive test score growth is displayed by student outcomes reformers and witness those in the community control camp focus exclusively on poking holes in the numbers by referencing the number of expulsions, the limited special education services provided, the challenges of city-wide school enrollment, and decentralized busing challenges. Improvement, even improvement that is desired by both camps, will not be accepted by community control advocates when the work is *owned* by student outcomes advocates. There is a lack of trust and a lack of collaborative, across-the-aisle work that has become the hallmark of much of recent U.S. politics. Both groups will have to make concessions in their proposals and in their style of interaction if this is to change.

Loss of Community Control: The New Orleans Context

As the outcomes camp ascends to power, conflicts around organized labor continue to be a source of racial conflict. The aftermath of Katrina started a new chapter

in the saga of those who embrace racial uplift amid competing values and agendas of movements that explicitly share the same goal. Specifically, black educators and others who are proponents of racial uplift struggle to find connections with the student outcomes camp whose rapid (and contested) ascendancy to power in New Orleans damaged the potential for collaborative work between the two groups.

Labor conflicts in New Orleans reached an apex in the month following Hurricane Katrina. Without residents and their tax revenues flowing into the district, an already cash-strapped New Orleans School Board cancelled paychecks and insurances for its employees. The employees, approximately 70% of whom were black, including teachers and custodial and cafeteria workers, bus drivers and support staff, received one paycheck on September 1, 2005. Without concrete information on many of the employees' whereabouts, hundreds of workers did not receive written notification of the cancellation of pay. Many employees received word about the decision from news media outlets, union groups, and word of mouth. The financial and collegial blows of the pay cancellations added insult to injury to an already displaced group of working- and middle-class employees. The teachers who did return and attend subsequent open meetings of the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) directed their anger toward its members instead of on the reform. However, not receiving pay was a critical decision that preceded another political move, which set the table for new educational delivery system.

During an emergency session of the Louisiana legislature after the storm, the passage of Act 35 expanded the state's authority to take over schools by redefining what was considered failing. The state-run Recovery School District (RSD) assumed control of the failing schools. In addition, the RSD served as a school authorizer, giving it ability to create new charter schools. Shortly thereafter, the federal government issued Louisiana approximately $45 million over the next two years for the development of charter schools. As school authorizers, the Louisiana State Department of Education through its charter school office and the RSD could award approved educational service providers with start-up grants and services. Act 35 initiated the power shift from the New Orleans School Board to a new swath of nonprofit school providers. It also created new market conditions for service providers that are external to the schoolhouse. The state's charter office also increased its profile and influence on the how schooling would be delivered. Dissent along the lines of self-determination and community control naturally followed.

Two of four black members of the OPSB opposed the changes. School board president Torin Sanders and superintendent Ora Watson were on the losing side of a 4–2 vote to create a charter district in Algiers. The board president and superintendent sought to retain 4 of the 13 schools in Algiers that would be eventually placed under the auspices of the RSD. Sensing a loss of local control, a group of mostly black business leaders, activists, and religious leaders successfully filed an

injunction to stop a plan to transfer control of the schools to the charter managing organization. The injunction eventually expired. In addition, Alvarez and Marsal, the accounting firm that managed and supervised the board's finances, informed members that they did not have the fiscal resources to open the schools. The opposition to the portfolio model was staged as the fight for local control. The charter district would eventually become the Algiers Charter School Association (Bogotch, Miron, & Biesta, 2009).

The Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education's (BESE) takeover of 112 of 127 New Orleans schools and the subsequent placement of those schools in the RSD led to the OPSB officially terminating the contracts of all of its employees. Employees went from not receiving pay to not having a job with the NOPS district. A bankrupt school board without control of 88% of its schools simply could not continue to employ its teachers, custodial and cafeteria workers, bus drivers, as well as other support staff. The new nonprofit providers possessed the autonomy to hire and fire their employees, with no obligations to provide preferential treatment to previous school system employees.

Consequently, United Teachers of New Orleans (UTNO), the local teachers union, fought vigorously against the reforms that led to the termination of teachers. UTNO started a statewide campaign titled "Refuse to Lose." President Brenda Mitchell stated, "We've been painted as obstructionists, which is not the case . . . I've been told that the union is trying to run the schools. All we are saying is that we should work together on this" (Tisserand, 2007). On June 30, 2006, the UTNO contract with NOPS expired, and the school board did not vote to renew the contract. With a significant reduction in membership due to the transfer of schools to the RSD and without a collective bargaining agreement, the union saw its influence significantly reduced.

From the perspective of the community control camp, the loss of collective bargaining was viewed as a deadly blow to black empowerment, racial uplift, and/or community control. The outcomes camp chooses explicitly to seek improvements in public schools, but without recognition of the broader goal of racial uplift. The student outcomes camp's goal of gap closing unapologetically eschews the racial uplift agenda items such as organized labor and economic development. In essence, the outcomes camp places emphasis on improving the academic performance of poor children of color while removing any agenda for reducing other areas of inequality that face both children and adults. Strategically, this constricted set of concerns is politically savvy as it has garnered support from frustrated educators as well as the base of the Republican Party, which has steadfastly opposed government-led attempts to address the myriad inequalities that exist in American society, relying instead on the private sector to do this work, when it is profitable. This narrowed strategy also allows the student outcomes camp to work with a smaller set of goals, making it somewhat easier to demonstrate success to

funders and voters. For the traditional African American civil rights organizations, narrowing the focus of their work to student outcomes only is a contradiction. They fight for expanded rights and great equality for all members of their respective groups. One African American group, however, has managed to successfully launch a platform that narrows the struggle for equality to educational outcomes. This is a move that has created much animosity but also an interesting study of political maneuvering within the tensions between the students outcomes and self-determination camps.

A Contentious Crossroads: The Black Alliance for Educational Options

The Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) offers a unique but inevitable progression in the student outcomes vs. self-determination debate. Whereas many African American civil rights organizations, educational organizations, and community groups have sought to claim social, educational, and political space in the public schools, BAEO espouses broader self-deterministic principles that transcend public schools but are limited to education. BAEO seeks "to increase access to high-quality educational options for Black children by actively supporting parental choice policies and programs that empower low-income and working class families" (Black Alliance for Educational Options, 2012). BAEO's promotion of high-quality school options has led them to advocate for nonpublic options as well as charter schools. Their advocacy for racial communities separate and apart from traditional educational communities historically promoted by black mainstream groups places BAEO at a contentious crossroads.

The Louisiana chapter of BAEO has been on the frontline of reform on behalf of the state. The national president of BAEO, Kenneth Campbell, was the former charter school director for the Louisiana Department of Education. Louisiana BAEO was the public face of Republican Governor Bobby Jindal's education legislation that led to the State Department of Education's Student Scholarship for Excellence program, which is the newly created voucher program for the state (Barrow, 2012). Vouchers may be the most obvious derivative of the market approach to schooling and the most challenging reform initiative to the black educator tradition. However, BAEO's cheerleading for black school leadership as well as economic and educational freedom creates a libertarian perspective in the black political continuum. If the Louisiana style of school reform is to succeed nationally, groups like BAEO that can peel off traditionally Democratic-voting African Americans will play a key role. What is uncertain is whether their unique political positioning will cost them support in African American communities where their objectives include expanding private school vouchers and using student testing to diminish local control of public schools. On one hand, BAEO's emphasis on

moving black students into the private system (which could ostensibly be black-controlled) might be the ultimate move toward community control. On the other, a weakened public system in districts where the vast majority of families are people of color increases the likelihood of state takeover and loss of community control in the public system. How their work is perceived is unknown as they are relatively recent entrants into the mainstream educational reform dialogue. For more road-tested thoughts on how marginalized racial groups might manage the education of their own young people, we next briefly look at educational thought from the Native American perspective.

Transsystemic Schools: Lessons from Indigenous Education

It should, at this point, be clear that testing advocates have used the current wave of educational reform to limit local control of certain schools on the argument that traditional district governance has failed to adequately educate students. Self-determination has been a historically assumed reason for education. There is a long-standing cultural ethic of self-determinism in black communities rooted in efforts to free the enslaved and in the quest for equality after the official end of slavery. Modern reforms, however, buttressed by widespread acceptance of the idea that the job of schools is to produce high-testing students, have begun to erode this self-determination. And the communities most directly affected are poor communities of color, for whom the right to self-determination has been a multigenerational, and ongoing, struggle. How, then, are we to proceed when there is a trade-off between educational performance and local community control?

In the African American tradition, community empowerment has been indistinguishable from individual empowerment. The gains and pitfalls in education reflect the struggle for control of public and private assets. A critical (though generally unasked) question of this debate is: *How are the social costs on community self-determination accounted for in the current wave of market-based reform?* In a liberal democracy, when do individual rights (or the responsibilities of the state) trump communities' rights to self-determine? What is the purpose of reform if communities are not able to self-determine? *Are the state's actions to address the lack of educational achievement for poor children of color merely a convenient way to maintain an unequal social order by limiting communities' struggle to self-determine?* Given historical patterns of enslavement and acute racialized oppression in our country, these questions cannot be taken lightly. In what follows, we extrapolate some lessons learned from the educational programs designed for Native Americans over the last 150 years.

After the 1880s, American cultural genocide of indigenous people was attempted primarily by the use of government-run boarding schools that sought to "de-Indianize" Native American children, thus breaking the cultural links that

might facilitate future resistance to Anglo domination on the continent. Between 1880 and 1900, the government increased its spending on government schools 40 times over, and had created a network of 147 reservation day schools and 106 boarding schools (Adams, 2008). Local control in the education (and supervision) of children gave way to state control with the explicit intent of cultural genocide. In the documentary film *We Shall Remain,* former boarding school student Walter Little Moon (Oglala Lokota) notes:

> This is the education that was promised us, that was *guaranteed us,* through the treaties. But it wasn't. It was torture. Brainwashing. They called us many different names: savage, dumb. We got beat for *lookin'* like an Indian, s*mellin'* like an Indian, even *speakin'* Indian. Everything I did . . . (wipes away tears). (Grimberg, 2009)

These federal indigenous education policies claimed legitimacy by offering to assimilate *savage* children into mainstream American society through basic education, re-culturation, and the teaching of English and Christian spiritual beliefs. In the long run this program thankfully failed, but the costs were horrible on students, families, and native communities that lost bonds of kinship that are impossible to repair.

On the surface, current test-based educational reform does not explicitly seek to eliminate African American culture in an effort to bring the students into the mainstream. But in practice, is the current emphasis on removing educational decision-making from poor communities of color via testing and choice reforms any different? Has educational testing (rather than rifles) been used as a tool to sustain (or even grow) the socioeconomic gulfs that exist between communities in the United States? Buras (2010) identifies the loss of teaching jobs as a severe economic blow to the black middle class in New Orleans. A June 2012 state court decision found that the firing of nearly 7,500 Orleans Parish School Board employees in the wake of the storm was implemented illegally, paving the way for damages to be paid to many of the fired teachers (Robertson, 2012).

What lessons can be learned for the education of low-income communities of color in the United States? Borrowing from the literature on indigenous knowledge and education (Battiste, 2008; Madjidi & Retoule, 2008), and the U.N. Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), the animating spirit guiding the reform of our systems of public education is a balance of power between local communities and national (undoubtedly Eurocentric) priorities. If the United Nations was compelled to pronounce that indigenous people have the right to establish and administer education for its children, why is it that poor communities of color in the United States are seeing their rights diminished? The true answer to this question lies at the intersection of our American belief in tests as the ultimate measure of educational performance (Tye, 2000) and our

physically and symbolically violent insistence on assimilation as the ultimate act of building a nation. To overcome these harmful tendencies, we need to create new understandings of knowledge and education that are "'transsystemic' . . . and reach beyond two distinct systems of knowledge [indigenous and Eurocentric] to create fair and just educational systems and experience" (Battiste, 2008, p. 90). As test-based accountability policies use a Eurocentric view of the world to strip educational self-determination from non-dominant communities, a *transsystemic* view of accountability would combine state and locally defined educational outcomes, track progress toward ensuring that students can both succeed in the mainstream economy and sustain the cultural linkages of their community (Delpit, 1995) view educational and other social goods in relationship to each other, and ensure that the local community has authority in educational decisions.

In practical terms, this means ensuring that local citizens are encouraged to work in education; this means that when schools are opened or closed, the local community is a part of the decision; this means that school leaders must be chosen by parents and community members so that they can effectively integrate the education of children with other community needs (Khalifa, 2012), and that student testing is only one piece of a larger collection of data used to make formal decisions about school performance, which might include community involvement, site visitation, alumni performance, and student social and emotional growth (Rothstein, Jacobsen, & Wilder, 2008; Schwartz, Hamilton, Stecher, & Steele, 2011).

Test-based reform policy has led to a loss of community control of public schooling in many poor communities of color in the United States. The historic legacy of strong community control for African American communities has reached a crossroads. There is bipartisan political support for the idea that poor test performance justifies the loss of local control via reconstitution, state takeover, and the expansion of quasi-private charter schools and, less strongly supported, private school vouchers. This portends more cities where such loss of self-determination will occur. Even if test scores rise under such a system, the idea that a community is deemed unable to educate its own children should shock the conscience. Lessons from the history of Native American education (as well as indigenous education worldwide) teach us that the unilateral imposition of Eurocentric schooling on marginalized communities, regardless of outcomes, is an act of cultural genocide. While the varying components of a successful educational program for poor communities of color in the United States are persuasively described elsewhere (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994), the essential lesson of the discussion is that communities have an inviolable right to manage the public institutions that directly affect them. When testing policies are used to wrest control of public schools from local communities and place that authority in the hands of educational technocrats or distant policymakers, a disservice has been done. Poli-

cymakers faced with this understandably difficult decision are urged to reject the simplistic urge to do whatever it takes to achieve annual test-score gains, but to consider the impacts to our democracy when our poorest and more marginalized citizens have access to less democracy than their wealthier and whiter neighbors. The reform pendulum (Cuban, 1990) feels to be reaching an apex quite far from the transsystemic view offered by Battiste (2008). Those interested in putting such ideas into practice are wise to organize now, so that they are prepared when the window opens.

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