

The 21st Century Color Line:
**Assessing the Economic and
Social Impact of Urbanization and
School Discipline**

Marcia Watson, Derrick Robinson, Tiffany Hollis, & Sheikia Talley-Matthews
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte

In 1899, W.E.B. DuBois researched the social conditions of African Americans in *The Philadelphia Negro* (DuBois, 1899). This in-depth sociological study pioneered urban sociology and education simultaneously. Later in 1903, he found that the damages of racism and unequal opportunities irreversibly stunted the plight of African Americans in the 20th century. He coined this term “the color line,” which indicates the damages of racism and discrimination to African Americans post-emancipation (DuBois, 1903). However, even in 21st century contexts, the *color line* is still an eminent problem that disrupts social, economic, and educational opportunities for African Americans. Within education, race is a contributing factor to student mistreatment, school inequity, and community underdevelopment. Although DuBois asserted his beliefs over a century ago, the *color line* still exists in the 21st century.

This paper will analyze the 21st century color line, and specifically examine

its implications for urban North Carolina schools. In order to examine the implications of this issue, it is important to examine the historical, social, and economic conditions, which undergird societal inequality and unequal school access. The purpose of this study is to deconstruct the economic and social impact of urbanization on African American students. This study asserts that factory-style education, zero tolerance policies, school desegregation, and neoliberal education policies over the last century have greatly influenced African American students in the areas of: student isolation, underachievement, and school “push out.” Using Charlotte-Mecklenburg and North Carolina secondary census data, this study comparatively examines national and state level population trends to gain a better understanding of the economic impacts of urbanization. The remainder of this paper will include: (a) historical overview documenting the impact of school desegregation on African American



Preparation and retention programs aimed at underrepresented students are often criticized for their limited ability to influence large-scale change.

students, (b) literature review of school and classroom pedagogical practices that impact African American students with a focus on school discipline, (c) theoretical framework, (d) data analysis, and (e) discussion of research. In all, this study ultimately aims to provide a historical and contemporary analysis of educational practices that impact African American students, and provide recommendations that will help eradicate today's *color line*.

Historical Background

20th Century Education, Industrialization, and Unequal Opportunities

The period of industrialization shifted the role of education in the United States. During the 19th and 20th centuries, common schools taught citizenry, life skills, and job training (Rury, 2013). Many of these schools resembled the surrounding factories found in urban cities. Instead of one-room schoolhouses for years prior, 20th century schools began servicing hundreds of students. The introduction of the common school model began to prepare students for the workplace, and education witnessed a shift in the area of curriculum and instruction (deMarrais, & LeCompte, 1998). Horace Mann, known as the father of the common schools, believed that the nation's stability was tied to universal education of its citizens (Rury, 2013). However, educational opportunities were not universal. Twentieth century common schools in the Southern states started years after Northern states. Furthermore, many states in the South unevenly distributed funding to Black schools (Anderson, 1988). Often African Americans in the South paid double taxation in order to fund schools,

however building inequalities and material resources were consistently despairing (Anderson, 1988).

The contributions of Northern philanthropies, such as the Rosenwald Foundation, helped to finance the building of 4,977 Black common schools in the rural South by 1932 (Anderson, 1988; Douglas, 1995). Many of these Northern philanthropy donations were acts of false benevolence, but many freed Blacks received a quality education within their own communities. These Black schools enabled African American citizens to obtain literacy skills needed for citizenship tests, voting registration, and political office (Anderson, 1988). In addition, these schools helped the plight of African Americans towards their own formalized system of education. In most cases, Black teachers taught Black students, and the "village" concept of education included all community members in the fight for educational advancement. Many believe these intergenerational community efforts were one of the greatest losses experienced through upcoming desegregation efforts of the 1950's.

North Carolina: School Integration and Culturally Mismatched Classrooms

As demonstrated, the South's racial climate in the 19th and 20th centuries yielded unfair conditions for African Americans. Specifically in North Carolina, school inequality cemented the political climate indefinitely. In 1875 North Carolina became one of the first states to require segregated schools. The 1896 Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson* stated that separate but equal facilities were constitutional. This court ruling made it hard for Blacks to receive funding and resources for their schools. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) began litigation against unfair practices that



prevented and limited Blacks' educational opportunities (Douglas, 1995). In the state of North Carolina, there were only 14 Black lawyers in 1890, because the state failed to provide Black students a school to study law. The 1938 *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada* decision stated that states must provide a facility for a Black student to study law or admit students into an all-White program (Douglas, 1995). It was not until the opening of Shaw University and North Carolina Central University that Blacks in North Carolina had a law school (Douglas, 1995). Litigation for educational opportunities was the way in which Black people were able to enforce their rights under the Fourteenth Amendment.

Undoubtedly, the case that changed the educational system in the United States was the 1954 Supreme Court case *Brown v. the Board of Education* of Topeka, Kansas, which ruled that separate schools were unconstitutional. This law overturned the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, and was considered as a progressive step towards racial equality. Yet, the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was slowly received in the South. Public school integration in the Southern United States was not widely enforced in many Southern states. In fact, some states closed their public schools instead of integrating Black and White students (Douglas, 1995).

School desegregation was not the utopian ideal that many had hoped. In fact, many Southern states – like North Carolina – stalled the desegregation process (Douglas, 1995). In North Carolina, school integration did not happen immediately. Although North Carolina eventually desegregated their public schools, the decision was made due to influences of the federal government. Charlotte, Greensboro, and Winston-Salem were among the first cities in the South to desegregate their

schools. In 1957, twelve students were granted transfers to White schools (Douglas, 1995). In Charlotte, Dorothy Counts was among the first four Black students to attend an integrated school. She was admitted to Harding High School; however, during Counts' first few days of school, protestors met and harassed her until she eventually withdrew from the school and relocated out of the state (Douglas, 1995). This once again reinforces the dangers of school desegregation in the South, especially during an unsettled time in racial history.

Impact of School Desegregation Today

The integration process of the 1960's caused many unforeseen, long-lasting problems. In North Carolina, specifically, many school districts fired Black teachers when schools desegregated (Douglas, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994). For White teachers, many were forced to teach Black students whom they knew nothing about. Black students, who once thrived academically in their all Black schools, faced challenges in their new school environments. This caused a "mismatch" in the educational experience for Black students (Kunjufu, 2000; Lenski, Crawford, Crumpler & Stallworth, 2005). Culturally mismatched classrooms are environments of cultural strain between teachers and diverse student populations. The effects of desegregation efforts are still evident today, as 84% of the American teaching force is White (U.S Department of Education, 2012).

Teachers who are unfamiliar with different cultures often have biases and limited knowledge about groups outside of their culture or socio-economic status (SES), which impacts the quality of education provided to their students (King, 1993;



curricular content, and classroom behaviors reflect certain cultural norms and ethos, many of which fail to include diverse student populations. Often, students who share teachers' middle class values are favored over their counterparts (Kunjufu, 2000). Thus, the compounding effects of cultural and socioeconomic mismatch have had severe impacts on students in public schools. One of the most noticeable areas of mismatch is in the area of school discipline.

Literature Review

When considering the compounding effects of school desegregation, it is no surprise that a *color line* still exists in the 21st century. Not surprising, schools are institutional examples of inequality and unfair treatment. Not only does cultural mismatch impact classroom instruction and teacher perceptions, it also directly impacts discipline. In 1975, the Children's Defense Fund first examined racial disproportionately associated with school suspensions in the nation. Today the discipline gap, or tendency for African American students to be sanctioned more frequently and severely than their peers, is present in almost every school system throughout the United States (Losen & Gillespie, 2012). These racial and socioeconomic inequalities have been extensively documented in existing research, specifically in the areas of discipline disproportionality, the school-to-prison pipeline, academic achievement, and school resource inequities in urban schools (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010; Kozol, 2005; Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2010). However, a more extensive examination of the economic and social impacts of urbanization is needed to better understand school discipline.

This study aims to provide contextualization for the following research question: *How is cultural mismatch evident in 21st century urban educational contexts and within school discipline?* To further explore this question, it is important to understand discipline mismatch, cultural synchronization, and student-teacher interaction.

Discipline Mismatch

Disciplinary sanctions are imposed in effort to maintain safety, by removing students who are disruptive to the learning environment. Yet, research demonstrates that most Black students receive suspensions or expulsions for non-threatening behavior (Skiba, 2009). Racial bias in the practice of school discipline is part of a broader discourse concerning the undeniable presence of institutional racism or structural inequity in education (Nieto, 2000). Townsend (2000) reported that African American males are suspended at a rate three times their White counterparts. Discipline policy violations often also differed between racial groups. Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson (2002) found that White students tended to be suspended for "serious" violations (e.g., weapons and drugs), while African American students were more likely to be suspended for nebulous infractions such as "disrespect" or "appearing threatening" (Lewis et al., 2010; Skiba et al., 2012). As a result, many minority students perceive bias in the disciplinary practices of their teachers and administrators (Sheets, 2002). In a study citing the perceptions of students in an urban high school in the Pacific Northwest, individuals of all socioeconomic statuses (SES) detected bias in disciplinary practices aimed at students of low socioeconomic status, specifically (Skiba et. al, 2002).



Much of the national data agrees that there is a disparity in the discipline practices in many schools, especially towards Black males. Many Black male students have been tracked into special education and disciplined at disproportion number, as a result of teacher biases and cultural mismatch (Kunjufu, 2000; Townsend, 2000). Currently, Black males are overrepresented in special education programs for emotional disturbance (ED), emotional/ behavior disorder (EBD), learning disabilities (LD) and mental retardation (MR) compared to their counterparts (Schott Foundation, 2012). Special education referrals and testing usually derive from subjective interpretations of student behavior, which is another component of cultural *mismatch* (Skiba et al., 2008). Low-income students in urban schools are more likely to be referred to special education due to unequal educational opportunities and lower expectations from teachers (Irvine, 1990). As a result of discipline disproportionality and alarming suspension rates, many schools fail to meet the needs of African American students.

Cultural Synchronization

As a remedy for cultural mismatch, scholars have proposed *cultural synchronization* as a needed area of further research. Irvine (1990) defined cultural synchronization as the alignment and parallel between school and home environment of students. Irvine (1990) and others have presented compelling arguments regarding detrimental effects that result from a lack of cultural synchronization between teachers and students. Examples include the development of deficit views among teachers, the deterioration of interpersonal respect between teachers and students, increased attention to controlling student behavior, and poor use of

instructional time (Irvine, 1990). However, few scholars have studied that the presence of cultural synchronization and the effects on classroom discipline.

Irvine (1990) emphasizes that if a teacher is familiar with students' cultural backgrounds, this enables teachers to draw on shared knowledge that honors students' heritage and preexisting knowledge. Irvine and Fraser (1998) termed African American teachers as *warm demanders*. They argued that many Black teachers often employ a firm, authoritative orientation that serves as the foundation of their interactions with students. Warm demanders often use stern voice tones, word choices, and demeanors that clearly model to the students what is expected from them in terms of how to behave (Irvine & Fraser, 1998). Some people may think that warm demanders have a harsh method of discipline, while members of the Black community interpret this as showing concern and care (Delpit, 2006; Gordon, 1998). An implication of the shift to culturally responsive discipline may be that teachers learn to adopt disciplinary strategies that address in-appropriate behavior in meaningful ways and often avoid office referrals by addressing the minor infractions in class. Gilmore (1985) and others have demonstrated how a lack of cultural synchronization between teachers and students contributes to

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among boys. As Irvine (1990) mentions, “the language, style of walking, glances, and dress of Black children, particularly males, has engendered fear, apprehension, and overreaction among many teachers and school administrators” (p. 27). Gordon’s (1998) study of inner-city African American educators suggests that teachers often use voice tones, facial expressions, and word choices that convey a strong and intense style.

Student-Teacher Interaction and Discipline

Wilson and Corbett (2001) and Delpit (2006) note that today’s classroom environments should be places in which expectations are clearly stated and inappropriate behaviors are dealt with immediately. Attempting to meet the needs of students requires that teachers and service providers develop an awareness of and explicitly respond to students’ ethnic, cultural, social, emotional, and cognitive characteristics (Brown, 2003). Delpit (2006) indicates that many children expect many more direct verbal commands than perhaps teachers may expect to give or provide. If students interpret commands as questions, teachers and administrators may perceive them as uncooperative and insubordinate, without understanding their failure to comprehend what is expected and why they choose not to comply (Delpit, 2006). Gaining students’ cooperation in today’s classrooms involves establishing a classroom atmosphere in which teachers are aware of, and address, students’ cultural, linguistic, social, and emotional, and cognitive needs (Brown, 2004). The physical features, emotional tone, and quality of interactions among students and between students and teachers have a tremendous impact on classroom learning. Classroom climates that are

hostile, uninviting, and negative are not conducive to the learning environment for any students, and students with behavioral concerns tend to perform better in inviting, caring, and supportive classroom climates (Howard, 2006). As Howard discovered, students prefer “teachers who displayed caring bonds and attitudes towards them, and teachers who establish community-and family-type classroom environments” (p. 131).

Student misbehavior varies across different classrooms. It is important for teachers to be reflective and assess how their actions influence student behavior (Delpit, 2006). Student misbehavior can be attributed to effective classroom management and the ability of the teacher to create a rapport with the students in an effort to create a welcoming environment that is conducive to learning. Within the right environment, students can begin to feel engaged and productive. As engagement increases, misbehavior tends to decrease (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Educators who effectively master classroom management can reduce the need for exclusionary discipline sanctions and can keep students in the learning environment (Tuck, 2012).

Theoretical Framework

Central to the social and economic color line created by urbanization and school discipline is the cultural misunderstanding between students and teachers. Resistance theory, which captures the indignation expressed among students, will serve as the center of analysis. As urban isolation and discipline systems are developed through the structural legitimation of dominant norms, values, and roles, resistance theories help to explain a social and



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Resistance to the norms of dominant society is captured in the theoretical understanding of the *cool pose*. Richard Majors (1986) describes cool pose as “a unique response to social, political, and economic conditions” in which Black males, in particular, display a disposition of control, toughness, and detachment (p. 6). The cool pose, as a collective response to social order, is perceived as a threat to stability. Within school systems, the words, postures, clothing, or expressive demeanor that ascribes the cool pose invokes strategies of exclusionary discipline over instructional practices on the part of teachers and administrators (Majors & Billson, 1993; Pane & Rocco, 2014). Those individuals who become frustrated from the division of labor are captured in Robert Merton’s *strain theory*. Merton frames strain theory as the frustration that develops from the “inaccessibility of effective institutional means for attaining economic or any other type of highly valued success” (Merton, 1938, p. 678). Where economic deprivation is highest, Merton posits that the individual is forced through one of five possible adaptations: (a) conformity; (b) innovation; (c) ritualism; (d) retreatism; and (e) rebellion (Merton, 1938). Retreatism, the “rejection of the goals and means” of education, and rebellion represents the “emancipation from reigning standards” of the system and responds to strain within school structures (Merton, 1938, p. 677-678). Together, the structural practices that often respond to *cool pose* and *strain* are suspensions, which explain the

disproportional representation of Black youth in school discipline.

Data

In order to see manifestations of cultural mismatch, the following map displayed in Figure 1 presents zip code zoning data for Charlotte-Mecklenburg County. Charlotte-Mecklenburg County was selected because of its large size and urban population. An analysis of zip codes by education and race indicates segregated and isolated areas, as displayed below (Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, 2012). For sake of point, the following information is used as a reference for this section:

- State-level: North Carolina state-level data demonstrates that the student population is 26% Black and 52% White (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2014). The North Carolina teacher composition is 14% Black and 82% White.
- Local-level: In Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, North Carolina’s largest urban school district, the student population is 42% Black and 32% White. The teacher composition in Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools is 24% Black and 70% White.

Because schools zones and zip codes are synonymous with school placements, figure 1 provides a visible representation of the color line in Charlotte-Mecklenburg County and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. Despite the high populations of Black students in urban districts like Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, there is still the probability that students will still enter a classroom with a culturally mismatched teacher.



Figure 1. Education and Race by Zip Code

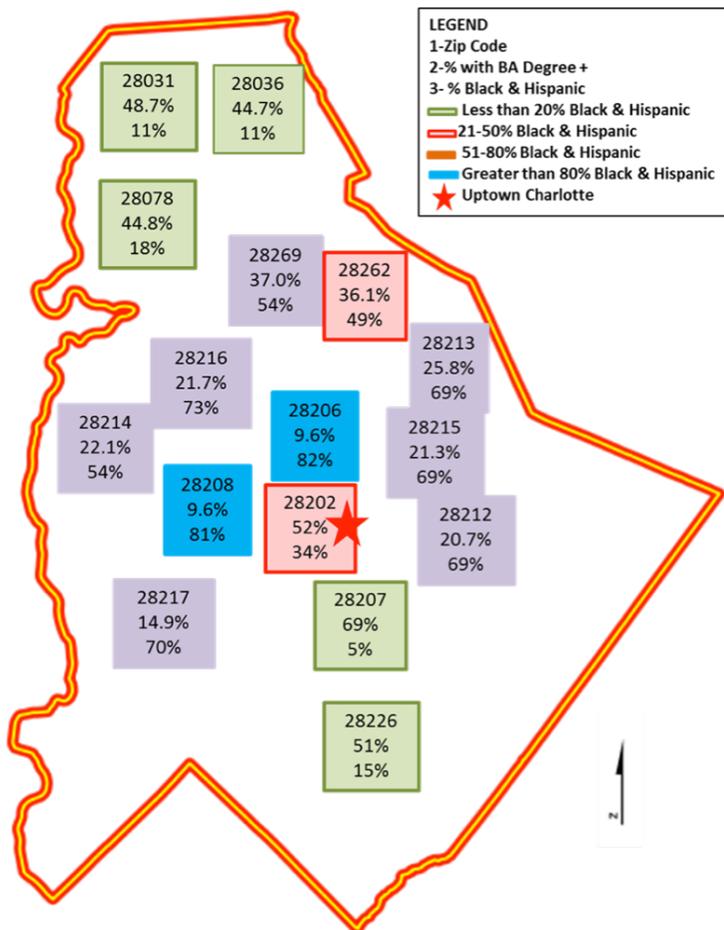


Figure 1. Map of Mecklenburg County, NC with select zip codes. Adapted from Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, (2012). *Detailed demographics by zip code*. Retrieved from: <http://charlottechamber.com/demo-ecoprofile/demographics-by-zip-code/>

population of 11.5% (Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools, 2014). Both of these schools operate within the same public school district. Here, schools with varying student demographics exist in isolation of each other, which suggests that school desegregation is still prominent within 21st century contexts.

When considering the literature, the map above is discouraging and indicative of school resources and educational quality. In the state of North Carolina, 58% of all short-term suspensions during the 2012-2013 school years were Black students, compared to 26.3% for White students (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2014). The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2014) also notes that in Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, Black students accounted for 77.4% of all short-term suspensions, compared to 8% for White students during the 2012-2013 school year. As Figure 1 displays, Charlotte-Mecklenburg County is still physically segregated. As a result, many students in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools are also isolated based on race or socioeconomic status. Many districts, such as Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, reproduce the *color line* in urban settings.

Discussion

Recent economic policies have crystalized the educational color line. A specified focus on the economic impacts of urbanization and schooling is an appropriate discussion for the research listed above. Using the theoretical frameworks of *resistance theory*, along with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg data provided in Figure 1, the following discussion aims to synthesize how the 21st century color line influences today's urban schools.

As displayed in Figure 1, the city of Charlotte is segregated by race and zip code. Specific areas, such as zip codes 28206 and 28036, demonstrate a staggering difference between racial demographics. Considering the urban educational contexts and the likelihood of cultural mismatch, schools within these districts schools operate in extreme isolation by race and education. Druid Hills Academy's population (zip code 28206) is 86.8% Black and 0% White, and has a free and reduced lunch population of 96.1%. Davidson Elementary (zip code 28036) has a 5.6% Black and 83.9% White population, with a free and reduced lunch

Ultimately schools are becoming factories for social reproduction. Recent changes, such as the privatization of educational resources, now positions businesses and for-profit entities as stakeholders in children's educational futures. These modes of privatization, known as neoliberal economic policies, reinforce social order, competition, and class. Every aspect of education, including curriculum textbooks, high-stakes testing, discipline policies, and the formation of charter schools, directly result from privatized, neoliberal economic policies (Rury, 2013). Neoliberalism, or the focus on privatization and decentralization, is highly lucrative for large businesses. These businesses often outsource products and services in order to privately manage what was once public domain. Lipman (2004) asserts that neoliberal economic policies "shift responsibility for inequalities produced by the state onto parents, students, schools, communities, teachers, and teacher education programs" (p. 171). Neoliberal education policies promote private ownership, and corporate sponsorship of schools, as well as curriculum standards that align with the economy and teacher compensation suppression (Wiggin, 2009). High-stakes testing, for example, is a result of neoliberal policies that outsource student test scores to private testing companies. As a result, schools are being subjected to increased levels of accountability and high-stakes standardized testing (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Because of the lucrative benefits of high student performance, many schools opt to remove low performing students – through suspensions and expulsions – in order to salvage school test scores. Low performance is directly connected to teacher quality. As mentioned, teacher quality cannot be guaranteed without first addressing cultural *mismatch* and the looming *color line*.

The introduction of high-stakes testing and accountability policies such as *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), *Race to the Top* (RTTT), *Common Core State Standards* and *Mayoral Control* are connected to the economic market (Tuck, 2012). These economic educational policies are harmful to groups from low socioeconomic areas, which have fewer opportunities of academic success in public schools (Anyon, 1995; Lipman, 2004; Tuck, 2012). This form of legitimized domination is dependent of various zip codes to stratify opportunities based on social class. Looking at Figure 1, those students living in zip codes with the highest percentages of African American and Latino/a citizens also have the lowest percentage of college degrees (Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, 2012). Thus, remediation and supplemental learning



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opportunities in these neighborhoods are not equal. Across the various zip codes in Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, there are pockets of students who have unequal access to adults with college degrees (Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, 2012). When examining the neoliberal high-stakes accountability testing, it is unfair to assume all students have equal access to resources to aid their performance on standardized testing.

Furthermore, when students in certain segregated zip codes are suspended from school, their surrounding environment is often conducive to crime and poverty. However, repeated suspensions and exclusionary practices that occur in urban schools add to the negative feelings these students attribute to school and bolster their suspicions of



systemic mainstream rejection (Townsend, 2000). Strain theory, or the dissatisfaction with the division of labor, manifests through student suspensions and expulsions. Additionally, these exclusionary practices further alienate students, both physically and psychologically, from the school environment and decrease learning opportunities (Sheets, 2002; Townsend, 2000). When students are removed from the learning environment, through suspensions or expulsions, instructional time is missed. In addition, the likelihood of suspended students to academically fail, drop out, or become incarcerated compounds with each suspension (Brooks, Schiraldi, & Ziegenberg, 1999; Kunjufu, 2000; National Association of School Psychologists, 2008). Once suspended, students are more likely to be suspended again and this “high rate of repeat suspensions that may indicate that suspension is ineffective in changing behavior for challenging students” (National Association of School Psychologists, 2008, p. 2). Being out of school also puts students at greater risk of becoming involved with the justice system.

As a safeguard for *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) accountability standards, many states provide alternative education settings for students. Many of these schools are General Equivalency Diploma (GED) programs that provide non-traditional educational opportunities for suspended and expelled students (Tuck, 2012). However as Tuck (2012) mentions, even the GED is now privatized to a large testing company, which is another aspect of neoliberalism. Although the GED is a viable option for many students, many students drop out without obtaining a high school completion certificate. This is known as the dropout crisis. This crisis is tied to economic factors that help to shape a community, and reinforce the zip code divisions as displayed in Figure 1. Students who do not

finish high school are four times more likely than college graduates to be unemployed (Olson, 2006). They are far likely to end up in prison or on welfare, and they die on average, at a younger age. For students living in the 28206 and 28208 zip codes listed in Figure 1, the need for effective education is paramount. Olson (2006) asserts that high school dropouts impact society in lost tax revenue, health care, corrections, and government assistance (i.e., food stamps, subsidized housing, and public assistance). Anything that increases the high school dropout rate is a deterrent to economic development (Olson, 2006).

In all, Wilson (1987) argues that the societal changes found in the social transformation of the inner city can best be explained through concepts he calls *concentration effect* and *buffer effects*. Wilson (1987) explains that, while the former “refers to the constraints and opportunities associated with living in a neighborhood in which the population is overwhelmingly socially disadvantaged,” the latter “refers to the presence of a sufficient number of working and middle-class professional families to absorb the shock or cushion the effect of uneven economic growth and periodic recessions on inner-city neighborhoods” (p. 144). It is important to note that structural systems in place are designed to legitimize domination of certain demographic groups. When analyzing Figure 1, racially segregated areas displayed in the zip code mapping, proves how systemic racialization is. The topic of disproportionate discipline reduces educational opportunities and consequently, economic development, in communities such as Charlotte-Mecklenburg. With zip codes already surpassing 80% Black and Latino/a (as demonstrated in Figure 1), the need to ensure that schools implement fair discipline policies is paramount.



Recommendations and Implications for Future Research

The color line still exists in the 21st century. With cultural mismatch in many classrooms, inadequate teacher preparation, and the overrepresentation of African Americans in school discipline, many students find themselves in segregated schools, many of which are just as isolated as those prior to the 1954 Board of Education decision. In order to proactively address these areas of school urbanization, the following list provides practitioner recommendations and implications for further research:

Encourage cultural synchronization at multiple levels. The discipline gap appears to be the result of a lack of cultural synchronization in the classroom. Eliminating the discipline gap requires a multi-pronged solution that needs to be applied on both a structural level and a personal level. Educators can address the disparities in discipline, while facilitating change in their classrooms and at the school level. Teachers can employ culturally responsive classroom management and discipline efforts, develop cultural synchronization, and develop a relationship with their individual students, which are discussed more in depth in the next section, as well as the next few pages of the paper.

Equalize local funding and eradicate school property tax laws. Public school funding is still a major contributing factor to public education in urban areas (Tuck, 2012). In the United States public schools receive money at local, state, and federal levels; however, the largest portion of their funding is from local property taxes. In more affluent neighborhoods, home prices are higher than in poorer neighborhoods, thus the surrounding neighborhood schools are able

to allocate more money per child (Kozol, 1991). Darling-Hammond (2010) and Lareau (2011) argue that economics inequalities cause opportunity gaps between students of parents who are financially well off and those of low socioeconomic status. In addition to school fiscal inequality, students from middle and upper class backgrounds often have access to early education resources and remediation materials, while many urban students in poorer neighborhoods have limited access (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Kozol, 1991). The importance of readdressing school property tax laws is imperative for equalizing school access and educational opportunities for both sides of the color line.

Provide effective teacher preparation programs that teach African American student needs. Teacher education programs can effectively impact teacher perceptions and teacher performance (Brown, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994). The most misunderstood demographic group are African American students. Bireda (2002) acknowledges “beliefs, assumptions, and practices that result in racial disparities in discipline ultimately deny children the right and access to a quality education” (p. 6). Bireda (2002) attributes the increases in disciplinary infractions against African American students to the “lack of knowledge, understanding, and sensitivity to the culture of African American students” as well as, “assumptions and negative expectations for the academic performance and social behavior of African American students” (p. 9).

Reconsider suspensions and expulsions for urban students. In the United States, schools most frequently punish the students who have the greatest academic, social, economic, and emotional needs (Johnson, Boyden, & Pittz, 2001; Noguera, 2008; Townsend, 2000). Schools punitively rely heavily on



strategy (Arcia, 2006), and this practice often has a disproportionate impact on students of color. However, as mentioned in the introduction, many African American students live in low socioeconomic homes. When suspending students, it is important to consider the social effects of suspension on students from low-income urban areas. The use of school exclusion as a discipline practice may contribute to many social problems found in low-income areas, such as dropouts, unemployment, and incarceration.

Remove “achievement gap” from educational discourse. The existence of the *achievement gap* between African American students and White students and its possible causes and remedies has gained considerable attention in both the public mind and in academia (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). However, inquiries into disparities in achievement often neglect to consider patterns in disciplinary referrals, which remove African American students from learning environments. Thus, insufficient discussions have taken place with regard to discipline and the difference in achievement between students (Skiba et al., 2002). While many factors have been explored as contributors to the discipline gap, teacher beliefs and practices, biases, and cultural misunderstandings as it relates to discipline has received little attention. Without the consideration of both factors, the popularized “achievement gap” in today’s educational discourse is false.

Redefine “cool pose” for urban youth. A key prescription for addressing the color line can be found in the power of researchers and community leaders to deconstruct the destructive discourse that views “cool pose” as polarizing and threatening to social institutions such as education. Questioning and rethinking the cool pose permits community leaders,

parents, students, educators, and future teachers, the opportunity to employ agency in their own narrative. The decentering of the structural narrative of urban, poor Blacks will enable change agents within the community, schools, and other social institutions to see the value in investing the resources needed to erase policies that deepen the color line.

Conclusion

The plight of African Americans in the quest for educational freedom has endured racial segregation, desegregation, and new manifest forms of segregation. The 21st century color line is just as despairing as the one previously mentioned by W.E.B. DuBois over a century ago. Many of today’s urban neighborhoods are homogeneously populated and underserved. Demographics in many urban areas include high poverty, low median ages, high unemployment, and low salaries. With these impeding factors influencing urban neighborhoods, education is vitally important today. However, today’s urban schools are often just as segregated as they were prior to the 1954 *Brown* decision. Even within schools, cultural mismatch is an influencing phenomenon that plagues the learning environment in many urban classrooms. Regardless of race, teachers have the sole responsibility of maintaining effective student and teacher relationships in order to improve student-learning conditions and minimize excessive school discipline. By focusing on proactive measures, education can provide the necessary tools to eradicate the damages of the 21st century color line.



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