**Rethinking Integration: African American Education in the Post-Brown Era**

Antwan D. Brown

Omega Graduate School

COM 803: Hermeneutics and Communication

Dr. Ken Schmidt

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**ASSIGNMENT**

Write a 5-page paper on a specific event or phenomenon (e.g., a historical event, cultural practice, a legal decision), and interpret it from a hermeneutic perspective. This would involve understanding the event within its context and recognizing the role of your prejudices in shaping your interpretation.

The student should direct developmental readings from Assignment #2 on the hermeneutic issue for this assignment.

2. Paper Outline

a. Begin with an introductory paragraph that has a succinct thesis statement.

b. Address the topic of the paper with critical thought.

c. End with a conclusion that reaffirms your thesis.

d. Use a minimum of eleven scholarly research sources (two books and the

remaining scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles).

**Rethinking Integration: African American Education in the Post-Brown Era**

Integrating schools in the United States, a landmark victory of the Civil Rights Movement was intended to dismantle the racially segregated educational system upheld by the infamous "separate but equal" doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). While *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) marked a turning point by declaring segregated schools inherently unequal, the subsequent implementation of integration policies has had complex and multifaceted effects on African American education. Though integration aimed to equalize educational opportunities, it led to numerous adverse outcomes for African American students, including the erosion of a supportive community environment, displacement of African American teachers, and perpetuation of racial disparities within the integrated settings. This paper will explore how the integration process, while a significant stride toward educational equity, has also undermined the quality of education for African American students in several critical ways.

Scholarly resources highlight various dimensions of these negative impacts. One such impact was the loss of African American educational leadership and community cohesion that resulted from the closing of black schools and the displacement of black teachers, who were often the pillars of the African American community (Peters, 2019). The institution of the integration process frequently placed African American students in predominantly white schools where they faced racial isolation, low expectations from teachers, and a curriculum that marginalized their historical and cultural experiences (Smith, 2020). Furthermore, (He, 2023) provides an analysis of how resegregation has occurred in many public schools, with African American students frequently attending underfunded schools that lack the resources necessary for academic success. These sources collectively suggest that the implementation of school integration, despite its noble intentions, has had negative consequences on the educational experiences and outcomes of African American students.

**Erosion of a Supportive Community Environment**

The aftermath of school desegregation, while marking a significant legal victory against institutional racism, also had unintended consequences for the African American community, notably the erosion of a supportive community environment that had once been a cornerstone of black educational and social life. Before desegregation, African American schools often served as vital community centers, not just educational institutions. Teachers were highly respected community members who often lived in the neighborhoods where they taught, creating a close-knit, supportive environment for students beyond the classroom. These schools were spaces where black culture and history were taught and celebrated, helping to instill a sense of pride and identity in students. However, as Peters (2019) discusses, desegregation led to the closure of many such schools and the dispersal of students to previously all-white schools, where they frequently encountered hostility and discrimination. This transition not only strained the personal connections between teachers and students but also diluted the cultural and community solidarity that had been nurtured within the segregated school system. Moreover, the integration process often meant that African American teachers and administrators, who played critical roles in their communities, lost their jobs or faced demotions. As a result, the close community bonds and the supportive, affirming environments that had flourished within segregated African American schools were significantly undermined, leaving a void that has been challenging to fill in the decades since desegregation.

**The Displacement of African American Educators**

As stated above, the pivotal shift towards integration also bore harsh consequences, especially for African American educators. In the years following desegregation, thousands of black educators across the South and beyond found themselves displaced, their jobs lost, or their roles significantly diminished. This wave of professional displacement was not merely a matter of bureaucratic reshuffling but a profound alteration of the educational landscape that had long-term repercussions for the African American community. Prior to desegregation, African American teachers played crucial roles in the lives of their students and families. Teachers were educators, community leaders, and advocates for racial equality. This latter role played a huge part in their displacement. White officials were often fired for advocating for more excellent resources for black schools and for being “disruptors” of the status quo. One such educator, Al Cheatham, a Harvard-educated principal in Savannah, GA, was fired by the Chatham County School Board in 1961 because he was considered progressive and was “active in a Savannah group called the Crusade for Voters which encourages Negroes to register to vote and supported candidates it felt help Negroes the most” (Willis, 2021).

In addition to the causes mentioned above of displacement, there were other mechanisms behind the displacement and job loss of African American educators. These mechanisms were multifaceted and rooted in both overt discrimination and subtle biases. As schools integrated, hiring practices often favored white teachers under the pretext of qualifications or cultural fit, leading to a significant reduction in the number of black educators within the public school system. Furthermore, the closure of historically black schools, a common strategy employed for achieving desegregation, resulted in the loss of leadership and teaching positions once held by black professionals, further exacerbating their displacement. The impact of these changes was far-reaching, affecting not only the educators but also the generations of students who lost out on the opportunity to learn from teachers who shared their cultural heritage and understood the unique challenges they faced. This era marked a significant setback in the fight for educational equity, illustrating the complex interplay between progress and loss within the narrative of civil rights in America.

**The Perpetuation of Racial Disparities within the Integrated Settings**

The desegregation of schools, intended as a cornerstone for equality and integration, paradoxically also laid bare the resilience of racial disparities within these newly integrated settings. Despite the hopeful dismantling of legally enforced segregation, the transition into integrated schools did not automatically translate into equal treatment or opportunities for African American students. Inside classroom walls, where the promise of *Brown v Board of Education* was to be realized, many African American students encountered a landscape still marred by racial biases and unequal access to resources. The educational environments, while no longer segregated by law, often remained deeply unequal, with African American students disproportionately placed in lower-track courses, facing lower expectations from teachers, and subjected to harsher disciplinary actions compared to white peers. This perpetuation of racial disparities underscored a harsh reality: the removal of legal barriers did not equate to the dismantling of the systemic prejudices and institutional biases that continued to shape the educational experiences of African American students.

Moreover, integrating schools did little to bridge the socioeconomic divide that underpinned much of the racial disparities in education. Historically deprived of equitable investment and resources, African American communities saw this pattern extend into the integrated educational system. Charles Clotfelter writes, “One of the most potent tools for maintaining residential segregation, a California innovation of the 1890s that was approved by the Supreme Court in 1926 and used widely following World War II, was the restrictive covenant, the insertion into deeds the promise not to sell a property to Blacks or members of other specified groups. Although ultimately declared unenforceable in 1948, its effects were solidified in the segregated patterns of residential development in the large cities of the North… Such residential patterns naturally led to substantially segregated schools” (Clotfelter, 2004). Schools that served predominantly African American student populations often received less funding, fewer resources, and were staffed by less experienced teachers, perpetuating a cycle of educational disadvantage.

**Conclusion**

The journey toward educational integration was embarked upon with the noble aim of dismantling the barriers of segregation to foster equal educational opportunities for all. However, this path has been marked by unintended consequences that have, in many respects, undercut its foundational goals. The erosion of supportive community environments, once central to the educational and social development of African American students, the displacement of African American educators who served not only as educators but as community pillars, and the persistent racial disparities within the integrated settings reveal a complex legacy. These outcomes highlight the profound challenges in translating the principle of equality into practice. While integration broke down the physical walls of segregation, it also laid bare the deeper systemic issues that continue to impede true educational equity. In reaffirming our commitment to the cause, we are reminded that the work of building a genuinely equitable educational system is ongoing, requiring continual reflection, advocacy, and action to correct these adverse outcomes and fulfill the promise of integration for future generations.

**Works Cited**

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