

RAYMOND WOLTERS

# WHY EDUCATION REFORM FAILED

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*Research & Analysis*

**August 28, 2015**

*In the years since* *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), there have been many well-intentioned but unsuccessful efforts to close America's racial and ethnic gaps in academic achievement. At the time of *Brown*, 75 percent to 85 percent of the nation's Black students (and 75 percent of Latinos) scored below the median for Whites on standardized academic tests. That has been the case ever since. Despite extensive government intervention and numerous educational reforms, the disparities remain. This persistent "achievement gap" has become one of the most comprehensively documented facts in American educational history.<sup>[1]</sup>

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[1] *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 US 485 (1954); Abigail Thernstrom and Stephan Thernstrom, *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003) 12 and *passim*.; Thomas Sowell, "Where Rhetoric Beats Reasoning," *Wall Street Journal*, May 13, 2004; Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips, eds., *The Black-White Test Score Gap* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1998).

“Closing the gap”—that is, ending racial disparities through new educational methods or public policies—has been a recurring political *leitmotif* for the past half-century. It has been a ubiquitous and deeply contentious meme, which has played a role in virtually every national election.

And yet so many reformers take up “closing the gap” as if for the first time. They ignore the complex history of education reformers, which I have recounted in my most recent book, *The Long Crusade* (2015), and the important lessons that can be gleaned from what can only be considered a history of failures.<sup>[2]</sup>

Education is undoubtedly critical for sustaining and advancing any advanced society. It is time for those who care about education to ask the difficult questions that past reformers overlooked. The most important of which is whether racial achievement gaps can be closed at all.

## 1.

School desegregation was the first in a series of interventions and reforms that failed to close the gaps. Despite initial resistance in the South, by the end of the 1960s, the great majority of Americans accepted the desegregation that *Brown* had mandated. In large part this acceptance occurred because both the Supreme Court and the U. S. Congress made it clear that desegregation required only that public schools should not discriminate racially. In several decisions between 1954 and 1968, the Supreme Court handed down rulings (and upheld lower-court decisions) that forbade the exclusion of children from public schools solely on the grounds of race. But the Supreme Court and the lower federal courts did not insist that compulsory *inclusion* must begin. They held, rather, that the proper remedy for compulsory separation was to end such separation.

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[2] Raymond Wolters, *The Long Crusade* (Arlington, VA: Washington Summit Publishers, 2015).

The courts did not demand that enrollments at individual schools should be balanced to achieve approximately the same proportions that existed in a larger region or state. Congress endorsed this approach in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which defined “desegregation” both positively and negatively.

“Desegregation” means the assignment of students to public schools and within such schools without regard to their race, color, religion, or national origin, but “desegregation” shall not mean the assignment of students to public schools in order to overcome racial imbalance.<sup>[3]</sup>

In so ruling, the Supreme Court and Congress accepted an argument that Thurgood Marshall and other attorneys presented for the NAACP. When questioned during the oral arguments for *Brown*, these lawyers were emphatic that they were “not asking for affirmative relief.”

The only thing that we ask for is that the state-imposed racial segregation be taken off, and to leave the county school board . . . to assign children on any reasonable basis they want to assign them on. . . .

What we want from this Court is the striking down of race. . . .

Do not deny any child the right to go to the school of his choice on the grounds of race or color within the normal limits of your districting system. . . .

Do not assign them on the basis of race. . . .

If you have some other basis . . . any other basis, we have no objection. But just do not put in race or color as a factor.<sup>[4]</sup>

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[3] *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 US 485 (1954); *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 349 US 294 (1955); *Cooper v. Aaron*, 358 US 1 (1958); *Brown v. Board of Education*, 139 F. Supp (1955); *Briggs v. Elliott*, 132 F. Supp (1955); *Evans v. Buchanan*, 207 F. Supp 820 (1963); Public Law 88-352 (1964); Raymond Wolters, *The Burden of Brown* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 134; Leon Friedman, ed., *Argument: The Oral Argument Before the Supreme Court in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 1952-1955* (New York: Chelsea House, 1949), 402.

[4] Leon Friedman, *Argument*, 47, 375, 402.

Civil-rights leaders said official separation of Black students grew out of a belief that Negroes as a race were incapable of matching the educational and civilizational standards of Whites. But Thurgood Marshall argued that many individual Blacks had met those standards; therefore, general racial segregation was too “arbitrary and invidious” to satisfy the requirement that states must provide “equal protection of the laws . . . in any public sphere.” Marshall said segregation branded “the Negro with the mark of inferiority and asserts that he is not fit to associate with white people.” Marshall wrote, “Distinctions by race are so evil, so arbitrary and invidious that a state bound to defend the equal protection of the laws must not invoke them in any public sphere.” Marshall conceded, however, that states could discriminate on the basis of individual qualities. When asked what should be done with individual students, Marshall answered: “Put the dumb colored children in with the dumb white children, and put the smart colored children with the smart white children.”<sup>[5]</sup>

Since Marshall and the NAACP won the case, most people assumed that the *Brown* Court had held that the Constitution prohibited the government from discriminating by race. This impression was reinforced when the Supreme Court, in *Bolling v. Sharpe* (decided the same day as *Brown*), held that racial classifications were too arbitrary to satisfy the requirements of the due-process clause. The impression was confirmed in 1955 when the implementation order known as *Brown II* declared that *Brown* stood for “the fundamental principle” that there should be no “racial discrimination in public education.” And the impression was reaffirmed in numerous other cases where the Supreme Court upheld lower-court rulings, such as one in South Carolina, where circuit judge John J. Parker interpreted *Brown* to

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[5] Transcript of Oral Argument in *Brown v. Board of Education*, 9 December 1952, 7; *Bolling v. Sharpe*, 347 US 497.

mean that, “The Constitution . . . does not require integration. It merely forbids discrimination.”<sup>[6]</sup>

Many later problems would have been avoided if the *Brown* Court had merely forbade racial discrimination. Legal scholars, however, have noted that the Supreme Court’s legal rationale in *Brown* was murky and inconsistent. On one hand, *Brown* condemned racial discrimination by the government. On the other, the Court looked with disfavor on the congregation of Blacks, even if this association was not compelled by government authorities. The *Brown* Court approvingly cited the social science of Swedish scholar Gunnar Myrdal, who maintained that Black society was so emotional, provincial, and crime-ridden as to be essentially pathological. The Court also endorsed a weak study and misleading testimony by an American psychologist, Kenneth Clark, who told the Justices that racial isolation damaged the confidence of Black youths and depressed their ambitions and self-esteem. The *Brown* Court said the separation of Black students generated “a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone.” *Brown* approvingly repeated the conclusion of a Kansas court: that Black schools tended “to [retard] the educational and mental development of Negro children and to deprive them of some of the benefits they could receive” in racially integrated schools. *Brown* embraced what is sometimes called “the harm and benefit thesis.” It held that racial congregation harmed Blacks and implied that racial mixing would help African-Americans do better academically.<sup>[7]</sup>

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[6] *Bolling v. Sharpe*, 347 US 497; *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 349 US 295 (1955); *Briggs v. Elliott*, 132 F. Supp. 776 (1955).

[7] *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 US 485 (1954), note 11; Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944). 928-29; for a discussion (with citations) of Kenneth B. Clark’s research and courtroom testimony, see Raymond Wolters, *Race and Education* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 23-33.

Pursuant to the original understanding of *Brown*, by the late 1960s, the great majority of American public school students were being assigned on a racially non-discriminatory basis. This was usually accomplished in one of two ways. Either students were assigned to schools close to their homes or they were allowed to attend whatever school they chose. By assigning students by neighborhood rather than race or by allowing students to choose their school, school districts satisfied the requirements of *Brown* and the Civil Rights Act. Students were no longer being assigned on a racial basis. Yet neither policy achieved a racial mix in school enrollments that approximated the demographic proportions in the larger region. Enrollments in neighborhood schools turned out to be either mostly White or mostly Black because most Whites and Blacks lived in neighborhoods that were inhabited predominantly by people of their own race. Enrollments in choice schools were also skewed because most students did not wish to attend a school in which their race would be a minority.

Thus Blacks were liberated from the stigma of official separation. But, as it turned out, mere desegregation did not narrow the racial gap in academic achievement. On most standardized tests, almost 85 percent of the Black students continued to score below the average White.

## 2.

Why did the academic achievement gap persist? In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the most common explanation held that disproportionately Black schools were inadequately funded. With this in mind, the 1964 Civil Rights Act provided one million dollars for a survey of educational inequalities. According to Alexander Mood, the director of the statistical center at the federal Office of Education, it was assumed “that the schools in the cores of cities and in the rural South are inferior in terms of class size, teacher training, enrichment and remedial programs,

and per pupil expenditures.” The research turned out to be so comprehensive and of such high quality that it superseded all previous work on school desegregation. Entitled *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (1966) and popularly known as “the Coleman report” for its principal author, James S. Coleman, then a professor of educational sociology at Johns Hopkins University, the study presented detailed information on 4,000 schools and test results from 570,000 students and 60,000 teachers. The report was of especially high quality because Coleman was the foremost mathematical sociologist of his age. His sophisticated statistical analysis of the quantitative information was evident on page after page.<sup>[8]</sup>

The Coleman report reinforced two aspects of conventional thinking. It showed that the familiar disparity in test scores was still in place. And it showed that, as of 1966, the races were still disproportionately educated apart from one another. Eighty percent of all White pupils in the first and twelfth grades attended schools that were between 90 to 100 percent White; while 65 percent of all African-American first graders attended schools that were at least 90 percent Black, and 48 percent of Black high school seniors attended schools that were at least half Black.

In another respect, however, the data contradicted the conventional wisdom. At the outset of the research, Coleman had predicted, “the study will show the difference in the quality of schools that the average Negro child and the average white child are exposed to.” Speaking to a reporter, Coleman had said:

You know yourself that the difference is going to be striking. And even though everybody knows there is a lot of difference between suburban and inner-city schools, once the statistics are there in black and white, they will have more impact.

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[8] *New York Times*, 2 September 1965, 21; James S. Coleman, *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1966).

Yet to Coleman's surprise, when the data were assembled, they indicated that by 1966 there was substantial equality in facilities and other measureable resources at majority-Black and majority-White schools. Predominantly Black and White schools had the same average number of teachers per pupil, similar pay scales, and teachers with almost the same amount of formal education and teaching experience. Put simply, by 1966, the nation had achieved the traditional notion of equality of educational opportunity.<sup>[9]</sup>

And yet, on standardized tests the academic achievement gaps had hardly budged. The average African-American student still scored below 85 percent of White students. Put differently, at age six, the average Black lagged behind the average White by one grade level, and by grade 12, the gap separating the racial averages had increased to four grade levels. Coleman understood that the report was "tread[ing] on sensitive ground." The differences could "lead to invidious comparisons between groups" and, even worse, might "lend [support] to racist arguments of genetic differences in intelligence." Nevertheless, Coleman decided that it would be a mistake not to mention the gap in academic achievement. "It is precisely the avoidance of such sensitive areas that can perpetuate the educational deficiencies."<sup>[10]</sup>

### 3.

To make his report more palatable, Coleman phrased a summary of the report to emphasize a correlation that recommended racially balanced integration as a reform that eventually might reduce the size of the academic achievement

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[9] Frederick Mosteller and Daniel P. Moynihan, *On Equality of Educational Opportunity* (New York: Random House, 1972), 7-8; Raymond Wolters, *Race and Education*, 178; Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips, *The Black-White Test Score Gap*, Chapter 1, accessed August 15, 2015, [nytimes.com/books/first/j/Jencks-gap](http://nytimes.com/books/first/j/Jencks-gap).

[10] Frederic Mosteller and Daniel P. Moynihan, *On Equality of Educational Opportunity*, 23; James S. Coleman, *Equality and Achievement in Education* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), 123.

gaps. As he pored over the statistics and test results, Coleman noted that Black children who attended majority-White schools scored higher than other Blacks. The difference was small, but Coleman also gave interviews and filed legal depositions in which he touted the benefits that Black children received when they were dispersed and educated in predominantly White classrooms. This eventually became the most widely reported finding of the Coleman report. “One of the report’s principal conclusions,” the *New York Times* stated, “was that integration was by far the most important school-related factor in improving the achievement of poor children.”<sup>[11]</sup>

Coleman’s integrationist sociology assumed that the quality of a school depended largely on its youth culture and that middle-class schools were better. Since “White” was presumed to be synonymous with “middle class” and “Black” the same as “lower class,” the purpose of integration was to create schools with enough White students to shape the prevailing attitudes and a substantial number of Black children to benefit from being exposed to peers who recognized the importance of schoolwork. Coleman explained that the social composition of a student body influenced academic achievement.

Sitting next to a child who is performing at a high level provides a challenge to better performance. The psychological environment may be less comfortable for a lower-class child . . . but he learns more.

According to Coleman, predominantly-Black schools were problematic because Black students did not offer one another as much beneficial peer stimulation as was available in mostly White schools. And this was important because, Coleman said, the socioeconomic background of fellow students was more important than the quality of teachers or the other resources that schools provided.<sup>[12]</sup>

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[11] *New York Times*, March 21, 1970, 15; March 28, 1995, B11,

[12] James S. Coleman, “Toward Open Schools,” *Public Interest*, 9 (Fall 1967), 23.

Eventually, the Supreme Court joined this chorus. In *Green v. New Kent County* (1968) and in subsequent opinions of the early 1970s, the High Court redefined “desegregation” to mean what Congress, in the 1964 Civil Rights Act, said it did not mean—“the assignment of students to public schools in order to overcome racial imbalance.” For the next 25 years, the Court held that *Brown*, when illuminated by modern social science, required the assignment of students by race to ensure that the mix of races at individual schools would be approximately the same as the proportions that existed in the overall school district (and sometimes in an even larger region). The constitutional mandate was changed from prohibiting racial discrimination that separated the races to requiring racial discrimination in order to achieve racial mixture.<sup>[13]</sup>

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It turned out, though, that Coleman’s sociological theorizing missed the mark. The racial differences in test scores persisted when Black and White students were mixed in proportionate numbers

#### 4.

The persistence of the academic achievement gap prompted Coleman to reconsider his research. When he had initially collected data in 1965, Coleman later noted, nearly all the Black children attending integrated schools in the South

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[13] *Green v. New Kent County*, 391 US 430 (1968).

had been volunteers who had enrolled under freedom-of-choice plans, while almost all integration in the North had occurred in neighborhood schools where Blacks and Whites lived in the same vicinity. The desegregated Black students of 1965 were not representative of Blacks as a group. They were unusual, in that they came disproportionately from middle-class families that considered education important. They had either volunteered to attend mostly White schools or had lived in mostly White neighborhoods. In 1978, Coleman admitted that it had been “wishful thinking” to believe that other Black students would make similar scores if they were integrated under mandatory court orders. Yet Coleman did not have much to recant, for the improvement that he had noted in 1966 had been quite small.<sup>[14]</sup>

In 1975, Coleman also came to recognize the significance of an important demographic trend. After analyzing data from 20 large school districts, Coleman concluded that court-ordered busing fostered “resegregation” by increasing the incidence of “White flight.” Coleman reported that the more Blacks enrolled in a school system, the more Whites left. Specifically, he found that after a tipping point had been reached, an increase of five percent in the average White child’s Black classmates would cause an additional 10 percent of White families to leave. Thus the nation faced an insoluble dilemma. There would be no racially balanced integration without court-ordered busing, but such busing had the overall effect of defeating integration. The official push for school integration was offset by the actions of White families who moved from areas where there was a large enrollment of Black students to areas where there was less racial mixing.<sup>[15]</sup>

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[14] Lawrence Feinberg, “Coleman Now Discounts Advantage of School Desegregation,” *Washington Post*, September 18, 1978, A1; *National Observer*, June 7, 1975, 1.

[15] James S. Coleman, “Recent Trends in School Integration: A Report to the American Educational Research Association,” Address at The American Education Research Association, April 2, 1975.

After documenting the extent of the flight, Coleman offered an explanation that infuriated erstwhile allies in the civil-rights movement. He said that in the 1960s he had mistakenly assumed that if middle-class students remained in the majority, they would continue to set the tone for an integrated school. “In that situation, both white and black children would learn.” As it happened, however, “the characteristics of the lower-class black classroom” often took over and constituted the values of the integrated school, even if middle-class students remained in the majority. Middle-class parents then transferred their children to private schools or moved to predominantly White suburbs. The problem, Coleman said, was “the degree of disorder and the degree to which schools . . . have failed to control lower-class black children.” It was “quite understandable,” Coleman said, for middle-class families “not to want to send their children to schools where 90 percent of the time is spent not on instruction but on discipline.”<sup>[16]</sup>

Coleman’s report on on White flight riled integrationists. “In 1966, we cited you as proof that [integration] worked,” NAACP attorney Charles Morgan told Coleman in 1975. “We don’t cite you as proof any more.” Perhaps because Coleman had formerly been their ally, perhaps because he had spoken candidly about the misbehavior of Black students, and perhaps because of fear that Coleman’s comments on White flight would spark additional criticism of racially balanced integration, the NAACP’s chief executive, Roy Wilkins, denounced Coleman’s traitorous “defection.” The civil rights establishment went to work on the media. Ultimately, Coleman’s earlier endorsement of activist integration became a meme in popular discourse, whereas his mature reassessment was ignored. In 1966, journalists lauded Coleman’s first report as “firm evidence” for busing and generally treated Coleman himself “as a giant in his field, a social scientist with a progressive agenda.” Then, after Coleman’s report on White flight,

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[16] *National Observer*, 7 June 1975, 1.

liberal thought leaders “turned hostile,” “questioned [Coleman’s] findings,” and “frequently quoted critics.”<sup>[17]</sup>

One of these critics was Alfred McClung Lee, the president of the American Sociological Association. Lee used his position to denounce Coleman at a press conference and then asked the Ethics Committee of the association to censure Coleman. Still later, Lee asked the general membership of the organization to condemn Coleman (which never occurred). Coleman eventually confronted his critics at a plenary session of the association, at which the walls were plastered with posters bearing his name, Nazi swastikas, and various epithets. For some time thereafter, Coleman suffered through what he called “a tortured period of intellectual isolation.” “We should not forget,” he later wrote, “how strong the consensus was at that time among social scientists that bussing was an unalloyed benefit, and a policy not to be questioned.”<sup>[18]</sup>

Despite White flight, most civil-rights activists persisted with demands for racially balanced Integration. In 1984, Jennifer Hochschild, then a professor at Princeton, called for “democracy” to give way to “liberalism.” Since many middle-class parents would not voluntarily send their children to racially balanced schools, Hochschild urged courts to insist that they do so. Quoting John Dewey, Hochschild maintained, “What the best and wisest parent wants for his child, that must the community want for all its children.” If most Americans would not choose to have racially balanced schools, “they must permit elites to make that choice for them.” James Liebman, a Columbia

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[17] *New York Times*, December 12, 1975, 31; Thomas F. Pettigrew and Robert L. Green, “School Desegregation in Large Cities: A Critique of Coleman’s White Flight Thesis,” *Harvard Educational Review*, 46 (February 1976), 1-53; Diane Ravitch, “The Coleman Reports and American Education,” in B. Sorenson Aage and Seymour Spilerman, eds., *Social Theory and Social Policy: Essays in Honor of James S. Coleman* (Westport: Praeger, 1993), 129-41.

[18] James S. Coleman, letters to the American Sociological Association, published in *ASA Footnotes*, November 1976, 4; January 1989, 4-5

professor who worked on several school-integration cases for the NAACP, explained that one goal was to withdraw control from parents and give children “a wider range of choices about the persons with whom they might associate and the values they might adopt as they approach adulthood.” According to Liebman, a principal purpose of busing was to deny parents the right to send their children to schools that would reinforce “the personal features and values those parents have chosen as their own.” Liebman urged the government to protect the “autonomy” of children from the “tyranny” of parents. The state should make sure that children were exposed to “a broader range of value options than their parents could hope to provide.” According to Liebman, “family life” was too often “marked by exclusiveness, suspicion and jealousy as to those without.” In 2006, 563 social scientists signed a statement that assured the Supreme Court that racially balanced integration improved the “critical thinking skills” and boosted the “achievement levels of African American students.” [19]

By then, however, the Court recognized that this was wishful thinking. With polite understatement, in 2007 Chief Justice John Roberts noted that social science had evolved, and many leading scholars had expressed doubt about “whether racial diversity in schools in fact has a marked impact on test scores . . . or achieves intangible socialization benefits.” In a landmark decision, *Parents Involved v. Seattle* (2007), the Court proceeded to end court-ordered busing with a ringing declaration that *Brown* meant what it said: the Constitution required public schools to assign pupils on “a racially nondiscriminatory basis.” “History will be heard,” Chief Justice Roberts wrote. “The way to stop discrimination on the

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[19] Jennifer Hochschild, *The New American Dilemma: Liberal Democracy and School Desegregation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 129, 124, 145, vii, 203; James S. Liebman, “Desegregating Politics: ‘All-Out’ School Desegregation Explained,” *Columbia Law Review* 90 (October 1990), 1639, 1650; Liebman, “Implementing Brown in the Nineties,” *Virginia Law Review* (April 1990) 365; Brief of 553 Social Scientists, *Parents Involved v. Seattle*, U.S. Supreme Court, 2006, 2755-56, 2767-68; Lewis Powell, dissenting in *Keyes v. School District No 1*, 413 US 189 (1973).

basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race.” The Roberts Court belatedly recognized points that Justice Lewis Powell had noted back in 1973; that many parents regarded busing for racial balance as an interference with “the concept of community” and with the “liberty to direct the upbringing and education of children under their control.”<sup>[20]</sup>

Meanwhile, James Coleman somehow managed to survive the criticism of his academic peers. His standing as a sociologist remained high, and eventually he became the president of the American Sociological Association. Accepting an award in 1988, Coleman acknowledged that “recognition by one’s fellow researchers is one of the highest honors that can be bestowed.” Yet he also recalled that it had been difficult to withstand the criticism of peers, and he lamented that others, including “some of the most original and brilliant sociologists,” had been “driven to the periphery or to adjacent disciplines because the implication of their work runs counter to the current intellectual fashion.” In the academic world, Coleman noted, “the threat posed by fellow faculty members is probably greater than that posed by the usual villains.” In academia, academic freedom had been constricted less by external pressures, from either the Right or Left, and more by fellow scholars who were predisposed against research that challenged the conventional wisdom of the liberal mainstream.<sup>[21]</sup>

## 5.

After the demise of court-ordered busing for racial balance, egalitarian reformers believed they had no choice but to experiment with other school reforms. Despite desegregation, equalized funding, and busing for

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[20] *Parents Involved v. Seattle*, 127 S.Ct. (2007) 2755-56; Lewis Powell, dissenting in *Keyes v. School District No. 1*, 413 US (1973).

[21] James S. Coleman, “Sins of Sensitivity: A Quiet Threat to Academic Freedom,” *National Review*, 43, March 18, 1991, 28-32.

racial balance, the racial and ethnic achievement gaps remained almost as large in the 21st century as they had been in 1950. And so reformers continued to grapple with the problem. Most grouped around one or the other of two familiar approaches: progressivism and traditionalism.

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***Despite desegregation, equalized funding, and busing for racial balance, the racial and ethnic achievement gaps remained almost as large in the 21st century as they had been in 1950.***

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For several decades, Jonathan Kozol has been the nation's best-selling education writer and one of America's most prominent progressives. Kozol's 1967 book, *Death at an Early Age*, enjoyed phenomenal success, with sales eventually amounting to more than two million copies. If one judges by the number of times a book is cited in judicial opinions, Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* (1991) was even more influential. *Shame of the Nation* (2005) completed a major trilogy of works that presented three progressive recommendations for improving the education of African-Americans.<sup>[22]</sup> One was a call for taxpayers to provide still more money for inner-city schools. As has been noted, racial equality in school funding had become a *fait accompli* by the time James Coleman conducted his research in 1965-66, but in the 1980s and 1990s, Kozol and other progressive reformers went to court and, in a series of what were called "equity" and "adequacy" lawsuits, persuaded some judges to require additional funding in

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[22] Jonathan Kozol, *Death at an Early Age: The Destruction of the Hearts and Minds of Negro Children in the Boston Public Schools* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968); *Savage Inequalities: Children in American's Schools* (New York: Crown, 1991); *Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America* (New York: Crown, 2005).

communities where the state constitution assured citizens that the state would provide “an adequate public education.” As Kozol explained, “Equity does not mean equal funds for unequal needs.

If we budgeted education in accord with the real needs of children . . . inner-city children . . . would be getting considerably more than the suburbs and possibly even more than white rural districts. . . .

If funds were allocated according to the real needs of children . . . New York City would get \$15,000 [per pupil] a year and Great Neck [a prosperous suburb in Long Island] could get by on \$7,000.

Kozol believed that school reform required an increase in “money transfer,” and he acknowledged, “When wealthy districts indicate that they see the hand of Robin Hood in this, they are clear sighted and correct.”

In some communities, equalization was accomplished through the democratic process, but in places where communities opposed the process, courts often stepped in and ordered that spending in disproportionately Black schools should exceed the average for a state. Even this “compensatory spending,” however, did not reduce racial and ethnic achievement gaps. In Cambridge Massachusetts, Hartford Connecticut, Camden New Jersey, and several other cities, there was little improvement despite the extra expenditures. In Kansas City, Missouri, where the expenditures for Black education were especially generous, three times as large as the expenditure per pupil in some mostly White school districts in the state, the average test scores of Black students actually declined.<sup>[23]</sup>

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[23] Abigail Thernstrom and Stephan Thernstrom, *No Excuses*, 165; Joshua M. Dunn, *Complex Justice: The Case of Missouri v. Jenkins* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 1, 6, 13, 126 and *passim*.; James E. Ryan “Schools, Race, and Money,” *Yale Law Journal* 109 (1999); Ryan, “Sheff, Segregation, and School Finance Litigation,” *New York Law Review* 74 (May 1999), 540, 538, 533.

The second arrow in Kozol's quiver aimed for busing for racial balance, but, as noted, the Supreme Court eventually ruled against this policy.

Kozol's third remedy, however, was widely implemented. It called for teachers to have more empathy for Black students, and for curriculum planners to design less prescriptive courses of study. Thanks in large part to Kozol's influence, for more than a generation, teachers were taught to emphasize the importance of caring for minority students and cultivating their self-esteem.<sup>[24]</sup>

The journalist Rita Kramer emphasized this point, after spending the academic year 1988-89 visiting schools of education throughout the United States, sitting in on classes, talking with faculty and students, and visiting the schools where education students did their practice teaching. Kramer found that Kozol's book (along with the works of other like-minded education writers) "permeated the ed school world." At Columbia Teachers College, the professors talked about "things like feeling, warmth, [and] empathy more than . . . about skills, training, discipline." At one education school after another, the emphasis was on promoting the self-confidence of students, on inculcating positive self-images, on encouraging respect for others from all cultural backgrounds. Rather than stress the importance of transmitting academic knowledge, the schools of education were training teachers to work with students "in egalitarian ways, respecting diversity and integrating everyone for the future of our country."<sup>[25]</sup>

Like most progressives, Kozol also called for a less prescriptive, more joyful curriculum. Kozol acknowledged that Black and Hispanic students should learn essential skills. But he strongly opposed the periodic testing of students

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[24] See Wolters, *The Long Crusade*, 15-71.

[25] Rita Kramer, *Ed School Follies: The Miseducation of America's Teachers* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 8. For more on this point, see John I. Goodland, *A Place Called School* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984).

in math and reading. He recognized the need for inner-city students to catch up with their higher-performing peers. But he complained that standardized testing led to “teaching for the test” and turned schools “into places not of learning but of robot-like memorization and military style discipline.” It led to teachers becoming “drill sergeants” and students “examination soldiers.” Kozol said he would not have opposed an emphasis on testing if this approach actually improved the students’ ability to read and compute. But, he said, this emphasis did “not work except for the lowest-scoring children in a class and, even then, the gains that they achieve sustain themselves for only a brief period of time. These are testing gains, not learning gains.” According to Kozol, the gains were an artifact of “nonstop drilling for exams.

If the gains were real, they would have persisted into high school, but only half the youths in many inner cities ever became high-school seniors and these students were, on average, still reading and computing, “at the level of the average white seventh-grader.

When people said that direct instruction and test preparation were working, Kozol told one reporter, they were “telling a terrible lie to the parents of poor children.”<sup>[26]</sup>

Kozol came in for criticism when he opposed standardized testing. Thus Whitney Tilson, a hedge-fund manager and a leader of a group called Democrats for Education Reform, asked,

Doesn’t Kozol realize that while [standardized testing] may have some warts and needs to be tweaked, it’s the best thing that’s ever happened to disadvantaged children? For the first time, school systems can no longer sweep these children under the rug and are FINALLY being measured, which is the first requirement of accountability. . . .

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[26] Jonathan Kozol, quoted by Dudley Barlow, “Resources for Educators,” *Education Digest* 72 (November 2007); Kozol, quoted by Richard Halicks, “School Resegregation,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (18 September 2005).

It's precisely BECAUSE kids who haven't had many advantages are so far behind that testing is NECESSARY. Without testing, how is anyone to know how far behind they are? [Without testing] how can a hue and cry be raised, how can we get extra help for these kids?<sup>[27]</sup>

After noting that Kozol's books were "still widely read in ed schools and by activist teachers," another critic, journalist Sol Stern, opined that, to the degree teachers subscribed to Kozol's progressive views, they would "limit the life chances of inner-city children."<sup>[28]</sup>

Despite criticism, from about 1960 to 2000, most school reform "gap closers" stuck to the playbook of progressive education. While acknowledging that inner-city students needed to learn essential skills, most progressives strongly opposed the testing that was supposed to help weak students catch up with their higher performing peers. Instead, progressives stressed the need for schools that exuded informality and warmth, camaraderie and playfulness. In addition, because testing and grouping students by ability had the effect of "resegregating" pupils, with Whites disproportionately being assigned to more advanced classes, progressives insisted that the full range of students should be placed in the same classroom. When the resulting mix included students who were reading or computing at markedly different levels, teachers discovered that they could no longer teach the class as a whole. Progressives then recommended that teachers adjust to heterogeneous classes by using new methods that were recommended as especially appropriate for integrated classrooms—methods such as "peer tutoring" and "cooperative learning." Progressives urged schools to turn away from "teacher-centered instruction" and to embrace "student-centered learning."

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[27] Whitney Tilson, "My Critique of Jonathan Kozol," *Whitney Tilson's School Reform Blog*, March 2, 2007, accessed August 15, 2015, <http://edreform.blogspot.com/2007/03/my-critique-of-jonathan-kozol.html>.

[28] Sol Stern, "Savage Exaggerations," *Education Next*, 6 (Summer 2006), 6.

Teachers were encouraged to eschew the role of master or mistress of ceremonies and instead become facilitators of “discovery” projects that allowed individual students to explore and to learn on their own. The ideal instructor was no longer a “sage on the stage” but a “guide on the side.”<sup>[29]</sup>

## 6.

Inevitably, there was a backlash when, as with the previous reforms, progressive approaches failed to close the racial and ethnic achievement gaps. The backlash initially manifested itself in demands for direct instruction and a standard curriculum.

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***Arthur Jensen, a University of California psychologist best known for his research on intelligence (IQ), was one of the most prominent scholars who emphasized the importance of direct instruction.***

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Arthur Jensen, a University of California psychologist best known for his research on intelligence (IQ), was one of the most prominent scholars who emphasized the importance of direct instruction. Writing in the *Harvard Educational Review* in 1969, Jensen reported that “wherever they have been tried . . . compensatory education programs” had failed to close the racial achievement gap. But Jensen also insisted, “All the basic scholastic skills can be learned by children with normal learning ability.” He further speculated that non-Asian minority children were lagging because their schools were using progressive approaches that stressed the importance of “understanding” and “conceptual learning.” Jensen said that

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[29] Abigail Thernstrom, “Lessons Not Learned,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 29, 2005; Wolters, *The Long Crusade*, 15-81.

a disproportionate number of Black students were not advancing because their teachers were using methods that were at odds with the “genetic and cultural heritage” of African-Americans. According to Jensen, children with low IQs and children who were disadvantaged in terms of cultural background or socioeconomic circumstances had “different . . . modes of learning.”

If diversity of mental abilities, as of most other human characteristics, is a basic fact of nature . . . it seems a reasonable conclusion that schools and society must provide a range and diversity of educational methods. . . . The ideal of equality of educational opportunity should not be interpreted as uniformity of . . . instructional techniques. . . . Diversity rather than uniformity of approaches . . . would seem to be the key to making education rewarding for children of different patterns of ability.<sup>[30]</sup>

Without acknowledging indebtedness to Jensen, several influential school reformers picked up on this theme. One was Robert Slavin, a Johns Hopkins psychologist who established a widely-adopted program called Success For All (SFA). In some ways, Slavin was a progressive. But when it came to the best method for teaching reading, Slavin rejected the conventional wisdom of progressive education. For decades, educators had debated whether it was better to present information and teach skills directly or to allow children to discover them on their own. Most progressives preferred non-directive, student-centered teaching methods that allowed children to learn at their own pace, with teachers acting as facilitators, as guides rather than as authoritative instructors. Progressives stressed the importance of exposing students to interesting stories, saying that if the students’ interests were engaged they would become enthusiastic about school and would automatically learn how to read. Progressives opposed memorization and drill, which they said would stifle students’ budding interests and cause them to emotionally reject school. Traditionalists, on the other hand,

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[30] Arthur R. Jensen, “How Much Can We Boost IQ and Scholastic Achievement?” *Harvard Educational Review*, 3 (June 1969), 116-117.

emphasized the importance of phonics and the need for students to sound out words by memorizing the sounds of letters and combinations of letters. Traditionalists, in addition, accused progressives of having a romantic view of learning, one that was imbued with love and hope but, sadly, left many children uncomprehending, without the ability to read.<sup>[31]</sup>

In 1986 Baltimore's superintendent of schools asked Slavin to design a program for disadvantaged elementary school students. Slavin then reviewed the literature on reading and discovered that a gulf separated the conventional wisdom of progressives from that of researchers. Progressivism was the fashion in most schools of education, but Slavin reported that the best research "was crystal clear that phonics was more effective." "Study after study found that children who struggled in reading had to be taught a phonetic, systematic strategy for unlocking the reading code." Some children admittedly learned to read without phonics, but Slavin concluded that no group of children had been harmed by phonics, whereas "a large group of children" was harmed by the lack of phonics.<sup>[32]</sup>

So it was also, Slavin concluded, with other subjects. If disadvantaged students were to learn, they had to be taught systematically. To this end, Slavin's SFA provided teachers with highly scripted lesson plans that prescribed what to do during almost every minute of a class period. One headline in the *New York Times* described SFA as "Teaching By the Book"; another in the *Wall Street Journal* declared, "Now Johnny Can Read if Teacher Just Keeps Doing What He's Told." Many progressives were appalled. "Highly scripted lessons don't just handcuff teachers," complained education writer Alfie Kohn. "They cheat students . . . by substituting a diet of isolated skills for the thoughtful exploration of ideas." "Creativity is being stifled," declared education professor Bob Nathanson, who

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[31] For more on Robert Slavin and Success for All, see Raymond Wolters, *The Long Crusade*, 213-239.

[32] Robert Slavin, interview with Hedrick Smith (PBS: Hedrick Smith Productions, September 2005).

opposed programs that focused too narrowly on the basics and treated teachers like robots. “A trained monkey could do [SFA],” said Janice Ault, the president of the North Sacramento Education Association.<sup>[33]</sup>

Many school administrators nevertheless defended SFA. “Some critics . . . will say, ‘Oh my God, you’re lobotomizing teachers,’” said Paul Vallas, who at different times headed the public school systems in Chicago, Philadelphia, and New Orleans. “No. What we’re saying is, ‘What every successful corporation is doing, what the military is doing, is giving teachers a model of quality instruction and curriculum.’” “Instead of everyone trying to figure out their own way in the classroom, which is the way schools used to work,” explained Judith Rizzo, the deputy chancellor for instruction in New York City, “new teachers in particular need a very clearly defined program.” Several federal judges agreed. When handing down decisions in the “equity” and “adequacy” lawsuits mentioned above, one judge after another ordered entire states—New Jersey, Texas, and others—to adopt the SFA program. And in 2010, when the Department of Education chose just four groups from among 1,600 applicants in the competition for “scale up” awards worth \$50 million each, Success for All was one of the four. SFA received these endorsements because many judges and government bureaucrats believed that Robert Slavin’s direct instruction program was doing better than rival approaches when it came to teaching elementary school students.<sup>[34]</sup>

When it came to the importance of having a standard curriculum, however, E. D. Hirsch received even more publicity than Robert Slavin. A professor of English at the University of Virginia and the author of a best-selling book, *Cultural*

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[33] *New York Times*, May 23, 2001, May 29, 2001; *Wall Street Journal*, July 19, 1999; Sarah Colt, “Scripted Lessons,” appendix to Robert Slavin, interview with Hedrick Smith.

[34] *New York Times*, November 26, 1999, May 23, 2001; Michele McNeil, “Applicants Win Grants,” *Education Week*, August 4, 2010).

*Literacy* (1987), Hirsch emphasized the importance of what he called “core knowledge.” He noted that most cultures focused on basic acculturation until youths reached an age of about thirteen. At that age Catholics were confirmed, Jews bar or bat mitzvahed, and tribal boys and girls underwent the rites of passage into the tribe.<sup>[35]</sup>

Similarly, according to Hirsch, familiarity with certain information was also taken for granted in America’s upper spheres, where those who lacked core knowledge did not seem to belong. That was the way things were, and Hirsch wanted to make sure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds had the opportunity to learn what was expected and needed to get ahead. Thus, as Hirsch saw it, the job of elementary and junior high schools was to transmit the basic information needed to thrive in a society, which in practice meant “the transmission to children of the specific information shared by the adults.” Upper-class White youths often picked up the requisite information automatically, because they lived in families that were disproportionately well-to-do and intact. But Black and Latino youths, and many working- and middle-class Whites as well, were less likely to acquire the core knowledge because their family lives were disproportionately disadvantaged, disorganized, or parochial. To address this situation, Hirsch established a Core Knowledge Foundation that produced a packaged plan that specified how teachers and students should spend about 50 percent of their time. By 2010 some 1,184 schools used all or part of what was called the Core Knowledge Curriculum. The curriculum focused on the elementary grades and emphasized the importance of giving students the basic knowledge that was needed as a foundation for more advanced learning.<sup>[36]</sup>

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[35] E. D. Hirsch, *Core Literacy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), 18, 30, xiii, xvi.

[36] For more on Hirsch, see Raymond Wolters, *The Long Crusade*, 241-279.

Progressives criticized Hirsch's approach, but Hirsch returned fire. According to Hirsch, it was a "tragic paradox" that "the *Brown* decision which desegregated our schools" was handed down in 1954, shortly before progressive educators "finally succeeded in abolishing the emphasis on traditional academic content in the early grades." As Hirsch saw it, during the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, children were being integrated into schools where "the traditional lore necessary to communication and full participation in our society were very inconsistently taught.

In the wake of the *Brown* decision, at the very moment of our highest hopes for social justice, the victory of progressivism over academic content had already foreclosed the chance that school integration would equalize achievement and enhance social justice.

Progressives dominated American public education, and they "precipitated a social misfortune."<sup>[37]</sup>

During the 1970s and 1980s, when busing for racial balance was in vogue, and when direct instruction and traditional curricula were regaining popularity, there was some progress in narrowing the racial achievement gap. But it is hard to know why. Some observers credited busing for the trend. But critics of that policy noted that the trend in academic achievement was similar for all Black students, regardless of whether they were attending schools that were mostly White or entirely Black. Since the test scores of Black students in racially concentrated inner-city schools improved as much as those of Blacks who were attending integrated schools, sociologist David Armor wrote, school integration was "unlikely to have contributed significantly to national black achievement gains." Critics also noted that when SFA was used, the gains were limited to students in the early grades of elementary school. Meanwhile, students in Core

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[37] E. D. Hirsch, "Why Core Knowledge Promotes Social Justice," *Common Knowledge*, 12 (1999); Hirsch, *The Making of Americans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 138; Hirsch, "Not So Grand a Strategy," *Education Next* 68 (Spring 2003).

Knowledge schools did well on standardized tests, but these students were not a representative sample, for they were disproportionately the children of parents who cared about education. In any case, during the 1990s the racial gap widened again and, as had been the case with the achievement gains, the retrogression occurred among both integrated and concentrated Black students. In 2000 the racial achievement gap was almost as wide as it had been in 1950.<sup>[38]</sup>

## 7.

Despite repeated failures, school reformers did not give up. During the 1990s and into the 21st century yet more reform movements came to the fore. One of the most celebrated was Teach for America (TFA), an organization that was established by Princeton graduate Wendy Kopp. TFA was organized around the idea that the racial and ethnic achievement gaps could be closed if the nation's public schools recruited more teachers who had high grades, high IQs, high SAT scores, and a fervent commitment to racial uplift.

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TFA maintained that the test scores of poor Black and Latino students could be improved substantially, but only if their teachers went beyond presenting

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[38] David J. Armor, *Forced Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) 96; Richard L. Venezky, "An Alternative Perspective on Success for All," *Advances in Educational Policy*, 4 (1995).

information clearly and also were especially bright people who invested students with the proper goals and attitudes.<sup>[39]</sup>

With substantial backing from corporate donors, TFA preached this message so effectively that by 2010, about 12 percent of all Ivy League graduates applied to serve a two-year stint with TFA. In terms of closing the achievement gaps, however, the overall results were disappointing. Millions of dollars were allocated for studies that compared the test scores of students who were taught by TFA recruits and the test scores of students taught by regular teachers. The results were ambiguous. Some studies reported that the TFA's students did a little better, and some studies reported the opposite. In either case, the differences were small. In a 2009 speech to the Commonwealth Club of California, Wendy Kopp acknowledged, "If you look at the data on the aggregate level, the achievement gap has not closed at all in the last twenty years."<sup>[40]</sup>

One TFA spin-off, however, enjoyed considerable success. Founded by TFA alumni Mike Feinberg and Dave Levin, the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) emphasized the importance of a traditional curriculum, a longer school day, and preparation for standardized tests. KIPP also developed an innovative system of rewards and punishments that simultaneously fostered a positive attitude toward school work and an understanding that bad behavior would not be tolerated. KIPP's students regularly scored above the level registered by other students with similar racial and socio-economic backgrounds, although this still left some disparity between the achievement of KIPP's students and the national averages for White and Asian students.

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[39] For more on Teach for America, see Wolters, *The Long Crusade*, 283-330.

[40] Wendy Kopp, *A Chance to Make History: What Works and What Doesn't in Providing an Excellent Education for All* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2012), 6; Kopp, quoted by Dana Goldstein, "Does Teach for America Work?" *TheDailyBeast*, January 25, 2011, accessed August 15, 2015, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/01/25/wendy-kopp-on-her-new-book-and-teach-for-americas-record.html>.

The KIPP academies, however, were not typical schools. Feinberg and Levin understood that a few disruptive students could destroy the education of all the other children in a class. Therefore, the KIPP academies were open only to students who observed KIPP's strict disciplinary policies. And there was more. To attend a KIPP academy, students had to accept a longer school day and year, and their parents had to agree to check their children's homework every night and to make sure that their children followed the KIPP dress code. By 2013, KIPP enrolled about 50,000 students in 141 schools, almost all of which were elementary or middle schools. It was not likely that KIPP would be brought to a much larger scale, but KIPP did offer a superior education for the students it enrolled. Some of the success, however, should be attributed to the unrepresentative nature of KIPP's students and parents.<sup>[41]</sup>

When TFA began, Wendy Kopp said underachieving minority students would do better if they had outstanding teachers. KIPP did the same. Then, during the first decade of the 21st century, the emphasis in school reform shifted. Instead of praising special teachers, reformers increasingly attributed the achievement gaps to schools that were bad because bad teachers' unions supposedly made it difficult for schools to fire bad teachers. In time, the "bad unions, bad teachers, bad schools" idea (what pundit Steve Sailer called the Three Bads Theory) became the conventional wisdom among an influential group of school reformers who believed that "choice" and "accountability" could close the gaps. In some quarters, these reformers were called "corporate reformers," because much of their work was subsidized by "billionaire boys" such as Bill Gates, Eli Broad, and Jack Welch.<sup>[42]</sup>

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[41] For more on KIPP, see Jay Mathews, *Work Hard, Be Nice* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2009) and Wolters, *The Long Crusade*, 334-364.

[42] Steve Sailer, "Guggenheim's Waiting for 'Superman' is Shoddy Filmmaking at Best," *Taki's Magazine*, September 27, 2010, accessed August 15, 2015, [http://takimag.com/article/guggenheims\\_waiting\\_for\\_superman\\_is\\_shoddy\\_filmmaking\\_at\\_best2/print](http://takimag.com/article/guggenheims_waiting_for_superman_is_shoddy_filmmaking_at_best2/print). For more on corporate reform, see Wolters, *The Long Crusade*, 355-511.

By “choice,” the corporate reformers meant increasing the number of publicly funded charter schools that would provide able and industrious students with an alternative to regular neighborhood public schools. By “accountability,” they meant using standardized tests to measure the achievement of students and also for rating and paying teachers according to how well their students did on standardized tests. As explained in one report from the Brookings Institution, teachers should be rewarded or punished according the “value” they added to their students. Instead of increasing the salaries of teachers as they gained seniority or earned advanced degrees—which was the policy in most school districts—corporate reformers and some academic reformers proposed a two-step program. First, they would create data systems that could track the teachers. Then, they would dismiss teachers whose students scored in the bottom 25 percent on standardized tests. They would keep only those teachers who could demonstrate success on the job by increasing the scores their students made on standardized tests. In this way, schools supposedly would have a staff of great teachers because all the bad teachers would be gone. This approach came to be known as the value-added model (VAM) for assessing teachers.<sup>[43]</sup>

In its Race to the Top Program, the administration of President Barack Obama used federal funding to promote the VAM method. But the teachers’ unions were opposed, as were many students and parents who complained about excessive testing and a loss of local control over education. Some skeptics even questioned the motives of the reformers. They said that well-to-do philanthropists had embraced VAM because, as Bill Gates once explained, VAM tacitly challenged “the myth that we have to solve poverty before we improve education. . . . It’s more the other way around: Improving education is the best way to solve poverty.” VAM’s critics interpreted this to mean that corporate reformers thought

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[43] Steve Sailer, “Guggenheim’s Waiting for ‘Superman’ is Shoddy Filmmaking at Best”; Robert Gordon, Thomas J. Kane, and Douglas O. Staiger, *Identifying Effective Teachers Using Performance on the Job* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2006).

there was no need for higher taxes to allow more spending for education. For VAM reformers, firing bad teachers was the key to closing the racial and ethnic achievement gaps. VAM reformers had no fixed opinions about the curriculum or teaching methods, but they recommended bonuses for teachers whose Black and Latino students performed well on standardized tests. And they insisted that many other teachers, those whose students continued to lag on the tests, should be fired.<sup>[44]</sup>

Some school superintendents did their best to implement the philosophy of the VAM model. One of these reformers, Whitney Tilson, candidly explained the rationale. According to Tilson, “every study shows that teacher quality matters far more than anything else when it comes to student learning and achievement.” “The key factor” responsible for racial and ethnic achievement gaps was “that most poor kids are forced to attend mediocre to catastrophically bad schools and are taught by way too many mediocre to catastrophically bad teachers.” “The problem is not too many bad kids, it’s too many bad schools.” The solution is to “fire bad teachers.”<sup>[45]</sup>

At first the evidence from the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) seemed to support an indictment of America’s schools. In this international comparison, the average scores of American students were in the middle range—behind the scores registered in Northeast Asia and Western Europe but ahead of the scores in most of the rest of the world. MSNBC reported that students in the United States were trailing “behind their peers in a pack of higher performing nations. . . . Out of 34 countries assessed, the U.S.

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[44] Bill Gates, quoted by Steven Brill, *Class Warfare* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011), 348; Gates, quoted in *Wilmington News Journal*, July 29, 2011.

[45] Whitney Tilson, “Improve education, fire bad teachers,” *Whitney Tilson’s School Reform Blog*, March 29, 2010, accessed August 15, 2015, <http://edreform.blogspot.com/2010/03/improve-education-fire-bad-teachers.html>.

ranked 14th in reading, 17th in science, 25th in math.” And school reformers then spread an alarm. Chester Finn characterized the release of the PISA scores in 2010 as another “Sputnik moment.” “Sixty-three years [ago] . . . Sputnik caused an earthquake in American education by giving us reason to believe that the Soviet Union had surpassed us.” And now PISA allegedly showed that other nations were “bent on surpassing us . . . in education.” President Obama concurred, saying, “Our generation’s Sputnik moment is back.”<sup>[46]</sup>

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But this point of view came under attack when statisticians “disaggregated” the test scores. It turned out that, when the PISA scores were broken down by race and ethnicity, and when American students were compared with students in the countries from which the Americans’ ancestors came, Asian-Americans outperformed the students in all Asian nations; White Americans did better than students from all 37 predominantly White nations (except Finland); U.S. Hispanics scored higher than the students of all eight Latin American countries that participated in the PISA tests; and Black Americans outperformed the only Black country that participated, Trinidad and Tobago, and probably would have outscored any sub-Saharan African country if any had participated in the PISA testing.<sup>[47]</sup>

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[46] Christine Armario, “Wake-up Call: U.S. Students Trail Global Leaders,” *MSNBC.com*, December 7, 2010; Chester Finn, “A Sputnik Moment for U.S. Education,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 8, 2010; Barack Obama, quoted by Sam Dillon, “Top Test Scores from Shanghai Stun Educators,” *New York Times*, December 7, 2010.

[47] For more on the PISA tests, see Wolters, *The Long Crusade*, 428-437.

The results of the PISA testing precipitated a schism in the ranks of the corporate reformers. Some continued to say that all would be well if bad teachers were weeded out and good teachers were rewarded with extra pay. But thanks to PISA, others sensed that American teachers and schools were not doing a bad job. This, however, did not lead reformers to give up on their cause; instead, many came to think that the problem with school reforms was that they came too late to make much difference. Persistent reformers emphasized a point that skeptics had long noted: that at the age of 5 or 6, when most students began kindergarten or first grade, the average Black student already scored below 85 percent of the Whites, and the proportion of the African-Americans scoring below the White median hardly budged over the course of the next 12 years. Taking this into account, some reformers ceased blaming teachers and instead shifted their emphasis to early childhood education and to reforming the quality of parenting in Black and Hispanic families. They said Black and Hispanic children were victims of dysfunctional family environments. They said ethnic and racial achievement gaps could be closed if reformers could teach non-Asian minority parents how to interact with their 2-, 3-, and 4-year-olds. This, indeed, has become the prevailing wisdom among reformers as of this writing (summer 2015). One observer, Robert Weissberg, likened this new emphasis on early childhood education to what he called “the gambler’s fallacy”; this is the phenomenon that some gamblers, after having repeatedly lost on wagers, mistakenly believe they are “due” for a success that will wipe out all previous losses. So it seems with desperate gap closers. Despite the failure of so many previous school reforms, they refuse to concede the futility of their enterprise. Instead, they say that racial and ethnic achievement gaps will be closed if Black and Latino children are liberated from their dysfunctional family environments.<sup>[48]</sup>

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[48] For more on this, see Wolters, *The Long Crusade*, 437-467; Paul Tough, *How Children Succeed* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2012); and Wolters, “The Return of the Inadequate Black Mother,” *American Renaissance*, November 21, 2014, accessed August 15, 2015, <http://www.amren.com/features/2014/11/the-return-of-the-inadequate-black-mother/>.

## 8.

Questions arise. Why do most reformers persist despite so many failures? Why do they continue to devise one nostrum after another? Why have they ignored the importance of IQ? Why do they persist in the face of Darwinian theory and biological and genetic evidence that points to the inevitability of achievement gaps? For many years after publication of *Origin of the Species* (1859), increasing numbers of educated Europeans and Americans believed that racial differences were the result of evolutionary adaptations; that mankind separated into several parts in the distant past, with one part inhabiting the ancestral homeland in sub-Saharan Africa and other groups crossing into Southwest Asia and then separating again and again until there were human populations living in reproductive isolation from one another in almost all regions of the world. This continued for hundreds of generations and, over time, there were numerous adaptations to differing climates and conditions. Opinions differed as to the full extent of these adaptations, but no one doubted that they went beyond changes in skin color. They include differences in musculature and brain size and different sequences in genes that influence behavior, intelligence, and personality. Earlier generations understood that nature was not stupid. They knew that different groups had developed different aptitudes that were suited to their respective environments.

Yet this traditional wisdom was forgotten when the civil-rights movement transformed America. By the time this writer attended college in the 1950s, most social scientists affirmed that “culture” was more influential than genes or race in determining the behavior of individuals or groups; that “opportunities” were more important than “biology.” In the 1950s and 1960s, after *Brown v. Board of Education* and after the Civil Rights Act, “culturists” became dominant in shaping public policy, while “biologists” were consigned to laboratories, where they were expected to work on discrete problems but not to probe into biological explanations of human differences. In 1956, one

of my favorite professors at the University of California, Kenneth M. Stamp, summed up the then-prevailing view in memorable language: “Negroes are after all only white men with black skins, nothing more, nothing less.” Professor Stamp and most other professors of his time subscribed to what is now called The Doctrine of Zero Group Differences (DZGD). This is the idea that all important aptitudes are distributed equally among all large groups of people, and the complementary idea that if a sizeable group is under- or over-represented in any important way, the disparity is not due to inherent traits but to discrimination or privilege, or perhaps to the accidents of history, climate, geography, or culture. Since the 1950s, the great majority of scholars in the relevant fields have either maintained silence or have openly rejected the idea that Darwinian evolution endowed different groups with different distributions of aptitude and ability. Instead, they have demanded an end to policies that have a disparate negative impact on non-White groups.

History is rife with false beliefs that are deeply held despite strong evidence to the contrary. Sometimes false beliefs are held even if they are at odds with common sense. My father, who fought in the First World War, and my paternal grandfather, who farmed virgin land in Kansas, were not disciples of Charles Darwin. But they believed that racial differences were obvious and consequential. They disapproved of bigots and told me to treat everyone respectfully. But they also knew there was a difference between equality of opportunity for individuals and equality of results for groups. They sensed something that has become ever more apparent with the passage of time: that the different races of mankind *inherently* differ statistically in the distribution of certain traits. My own generation was taught the opposite; that any statistical differences are the result of privilege, discrimination, or lack of opportunity. But what about my grandchildren and their progeny? What will they think? It’s hard to know. My hope is that they will become acquainted with modern research in the social and genetic sciences. If

they do, they will understand that social reform that attempts to usurp human nature will inevitably fail. They will understand why one reform after another has failed to close the racial and ethnic gaps in academic achievement. They will understand that the United States of my time was in the grip of what John Derbyshire has called “a collective delusion.” And when they understand all that, the opinions of my grandchildren and great grandchildren will resemble those of my father and grandfather more closely than those that have prevailed in the United States since the 1950s.

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