

# History of Using Whiteness to Create Ethno-Racial Segregation

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## From School Segregation to Integration: How Whiteness Limited Our Impact

“Now slavery as an institution has been overthrown, but slavery as an idea still lives in the American republic.” (F. E. W. Harper, January 1867, Philadelphia National Hall)

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, a Black poet and author, spoke these words at the Social, Civil, and Statistical Association of the Colored People in Philadelphia.<sup>1</sup> Harper hints that slavery continued to have roots because the Whiteness ideology that justified slavery continued to exist in the country—abolishing slavery did not remove Whiteness as the cultural center. The Emancipation Proclamation abolished slavery but did not provide a proclamation abandoning Whiteness. As educators, we need to maintain this important realization; the educational system, just like many other systems in U.S. society, was universalized based on the experiences—and need to reinforce the social and economic interests—of White-identifying individuals.

In this chapter, I outline the history of using Whiteness to create the educational system favoring Whites through the segregation of Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and African Americans. Specifically, I discuss how Whiteness ideology expanded from framing light skin color as the signifier

<sup>1</sup>Gardner, E. (2017, Summer). Frances Ellen Watkins Harper’s “National Salvation”: A rediscovered lecture on Reconstruction. *Common Place: The Journal of Early American Life*, 17(4). <http://commonplace.online/article/vol-17-no-4-gardner/>

of superiority to including other cultural features (English language, mannerisms, family connections, individualism, American patriotism, meritocracy, etc.), language, and citizenship status.<sup>2</sup> I intend to provide the context for how Whiteness was utilized to create our educational system, in order to understand how its contemporary operation directly resulted from this initial architecture; our society attempted, adjusted, adapted, learned, and morphed its ideas of education to serve the ideology of Whiteness.

An important concept to understand involves the use of laws and policies to cement the validity of Whiteness. In other words, laws (legal frameworks for rights) and policies (regulatory actions that support implementation of laws) regarding services such as schooling, voting, housing, and employment were written based on “universal” experiences of White-identifying individuals to reinforce that universality of White identity. An outgrowth of these laws and policies included the strengthening of affinity and associational biases toward non-Whites, non-Christians, non-heterosexuals, and others. During Reconstruction (1865–1877) and post-Reconstruction, Whiteness tools—affinity and associational bias—operated in full action. For instance, since African Americans received full citizenship on July 9, 1868, via the Fourteenth Amendment, Whites utilized other means to sustain segregation, such as curtailing the rights of Black Americans in order to manage their movements. In fact, legislators inserted a provision in the Thirteenth Amendment that servitude or slavery can be invoked for individuals who commit crimes:

Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.<sup>3</sup>

This provision led to the development of convict leasing. In essence, individuals convicted of crimes would be leased to farms, companies, or other firms to serve as labor. These companies would pay a fee to local governments for using this labor owned by the state—an emerging strategy for incarcerating Black people. The crimes of which courts found Black people guilty included walking on someone’s grass, looking incorrectly at a White person, or assembling day or night while not having gainful employment papers, which meant being employed by a White person (Conwill &

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<sup>2</sup>Though not the central focus of this book, sexuality, gender, and gender identification were also expanded into the camp of Whiteness ideology.

<sup>3</sup>U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. (2022, May 10). *13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Abolition of slavery (1865)*. <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/13th-amendment>

Gardullo, 2021). Such policy actions and many others like these perpetuated an associational bias toward Black Americans as deviant.

Additional elements of the social slavery that Harper references involve the development of “Black codes.” Used by municipalities as policy tools to minimize the assembly and protest of Black people, these codes included being deemed vagrant for not paying child support, as well as not being allowed to quit a job before the expiration of their contract, rent or own property, or own any type of weapon including a knife (Conwill & Gardullo, 2021). These habits of segregation were justified by beliefs of inferiority toward Black, Indigenous, and Mexican populations and continued throughout the rest of the 19th and 20th centuries. In outlining this history I intend to reveal how Whiteness ideology has been sewn into the fabric of the American psyche, and make clear that the educational system was organized to serve its students based on this ideology. The remainder of this chapter provides an overview of Whiteness ideology as utilized in the educational trajectory of Indigenous, Mexican, and Black populations.

### **Indigenous Schooling: Removing the “Savagery” to Dispossess Them of Their Lands**

The enslavement of Indigenous populations in the United States operated differently yet from a similar tenet—maintain separation, educate them in order to make them civilized, and diminish their Indigenous culture. As early as the 1700s, the U.S. government developed plans for “civilizing” Native Americans. The rationale for this assimilationist approach was twofold: (1) enable White colonizers to possess the lands owned by Native Americans through “dispossession,” and (2) tame the “savage” culture, viewed as threatening to White colonizers, of Native Americans. In an 1803 confidential message, President Thomas Jefferson provided such a rationalization for segregating and civilizing Native Americans:

To encourage them to abandon hunting, to apply to the raising stock, to agriculture, and domestic manufacture, and thereby prove to themselves that less land and labor will maintain them in this better than in their former mode of living. The extensive forests necessary in the hunting life will then become useless, and they will see advantage in exchanging them for the means of improving their farms and of increasing their domestic comforts.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Newland, B. (2022, May). *Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative: Investigative report*. U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs. [https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/inline-files/bsi\\_investigative\\_report\\_may\\_2022\\_508.pdf](https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/inline-files/bsi_investigative_report_may_2022_508.pdf), p. 21.

Through his presidential pulpit, Jefferson further anointed the strategy of segregating Native Americans in off-reservation boarding schools. In his 1801 congressional address, President Jefferson articulated the need to civilize Indigenous people:

Among our Indian neighbors also, a spirit of peace and friendship generally prevails and I am happy to inform you that the continued efforts to introduce among them the implements and the practice of husbandry, and of the household arts, have not been without success; that they are becoming more and more sensible of the superiority of this dependence for clothing and subsistence over the precarious resources of hunting and fishing.<sup>5</sup>

Over the next nearly 100 years, the U.S. government continued this strategy of Native American land dispossession through assimilation, debt accumulation, and boarding schools for their children. In 1886, a U.S. Indian agent described in his notes the lengths to which they went to kidnap Native American children for these boarding schools:

I found the attendance at the boarding school about half of what it should be, and at once set about increasing it to the full capacity of the accommodation. This I found extremely difficult. When called upon for children, the chiefs, almost without exception, declared there were none suitable for school in their camps. Everything in the way of persuasion and argument having failed, it became necessary to visit the camps unexpectedly with a detachment of Indian police, and seize such children as were proper and take them away to school, willing or unwilling. Some hurried their children off to the mountains or hid them away in camp, and the Indian police had to chase and capture them like so many wild rabbits.<sup>6</sup>

The prevalence of these boarding schools is astounding and served as part of the process to dispossess Native Americans of their land and to assimilate their children because of the associational bias of “savagery” with Native Americans. In other words, assimilating Indigenous children to “American” cultural habits provides a platform for the children to assimilate their identity to serve “American” priorities, which include the occupation of lands owned by others. In a 2021 report,

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

commissioned by the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, the U.S. government acknowledged that between 1819 and 1969, “the Federal Indian boarding school system consisted of 408 Federal schools across 37 states or then-territories, including 21 schools in Alaska and 7 schools in Hawaii.”<sup>7</sup> The states with the most schools included Oklahoma (76), Arizona (47), New Mexico (43), South Dakota (30), Minnesota (21), Alaska (21), Montana (16), Washington (15), California (12), and North Dakota (12). These schools involved removing any remnants of Indigenous culture—language, hair, clothing, and family connections. Images shared in the 2021 commissioned report and related images catalogued by the Library of Congress show Apache children before and after arriving at one of the boarding schools (see Figure 1.1).

**FIGURE 1.1** Apache Children Before and After Entering Off-Reservation Boarding School



*Source:* *Ciricahua Apaches at the Carlisle Indian School, as they looked upon arrival at the School, 1885 or 1886* [Photograph]. Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2006679977/>; and *Ciricahua Apaches at the Carlisle Indian School, after 4 months of training at the School* [Photograph]. Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2006679978/>

We learn from this process of school segregation with Indigenous children that Whiteness ideology was used to define the cultural features of Native Americans as inferior. We simultaneously learn that White identification involved cultural features such as uniformity in dress, English language dominance, and superiority to Native Americans. Finally, we begin to understand the building of Native boarding school curriculum to center White identity-based experiences as the trough in which science, social studies, reading and English language arts, mathematics, and arts content is developed.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

### Shopping Cart Exploration Pause



1. Take a moment and imagine how Indigenous parents experienced their children being sent away to these schools. Now also imagine the individuals who enacted such processes. How do you imagine they rationalized their actions? Did they view themselves as doing the “right thing” because they maintained an associational bias about Indigenous populations?
2. What parts of Indigenous history are familiar to you? When did you learn them?
3. How do we introduce this history in elementary, middle, and high school?
4. Review your novels, read-aloud books, bulletin boards, and other resources. Where do you see the representations of Indigenous populations?

### Mexicans in Schools: Education for English Only

After the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, the United States took lands from Mexico that now comprise Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Colorado, and California. According to Article VIII of this treaty, Mexicans living in the lands ceded by the Mexican government would be granted U.S. citizenship and retain the ownership of their properties.<sup>8</sup> This element of the treaty proved to be an interesting quandary because during that time only Whites could own land and be citizens; thus, Mexicans were officially denoted as White but socially ascribed as Mexican (Donato & Hanson, 2012). Between 1848 and 1930, the U.S. Census Bureau identified Mexicans as White, and Mexican was included as an option in the 1930 Census but then removed until 1970. Figure 1.2 shows the 1850 Census form; column 6 shows only three “colors” or races—White, Black, and Mulatto (mixed White and Black).

<sup>8</sup>U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. (2022, September 20). *Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848)*. <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/treaty-of-guadalupe-hidalgo>

**FIGURE 1.2 1850 Census Form**

STATE		1850 Federal Census										MICROFILM SERIES		
COUNTY OR PARISH		TOWNSHIP/TOWN/ OR CITY					DATE OF ENUMERATION					PAGE		
Line Number	Dwelling houses numbered in the order of visitation.	Family numbered in the order of visitation.	The name of every person whose usual place of abode on the 1st day of June, 1850, was in this family.	DESCRIPTION			Profession, occupation, or trade of each person over 15 years of age.	Value of real estate owned.	Place of Birth. Naming the State, Territory, or Country.	Married within the year.	At school within the last year.	Persons over 20 years of age who cannot read and write.	Deaf and dumb, blind, insane, idiotic, pauper, or convict.	
				Age.	Sex.	Color: White, Black, or Mulatto.								
1.				3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
2.														
3.														
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5.														
6.														
7.														
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National Archives and Records Administration

www.archives.gov

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Source: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. (2022, August 23). 1850 Census records. <https://www.archives.gov/research/census/1850>



Figure 1.3 demonstrates the section requesting information regarding Mexican identification. After 1970, the Census placed Mexicans and other Latinx-identified groups in an Ethnicity category.

**FIGURE 1.3** 1970 Census Questionnaire

Name of person on line <b>1</b> of page 2		
Last name	First name	Initial
<p><b>13a. Where was this person born?</b> <i>If born in hospital, give State or country where mother lived. If born outside U.S., see instruction sheet; distinguish Northern Ireland from Ireland (Eire).</i></p> <p><input type="radio"/> This State</p> <p>OR</p> <p><i>(Name of State or foreign country; or Puerto Rico, Guam, etc.)</i></p>		
<p><b>b. Is this person's origin or descent—</b> <i>(Fill one circle)</i></p> <p><input type="radio"/> Mexican                      <input type="radio"/> Central or South American</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Puerto Rican                  <input type="radio"/> Other Spanish</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Cuban                              <input type="radio"/> No, none of these</p>		

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2022, December 5). 1970 Census questionnaire. [https://www.census.gov/history/www/through\\_the\\_decades/questionnaires/1970\\_1.html](https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/questionnaires/1970_1.html)

It is important to note that Whiteness ideology at times served as the basis for creating laws that were also difficult for policies focusing on segregation to support. In the case of Mexicans following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), the United States made Mexicans citizens, but citizenry was only socially allowed for White-identifying individuals. Thus, Whiteness ideology instead helped to justify the development of another identity marker for segregation—language. Various states developed laws and policies to make that distinction. In other words, the English language became a calling card of nationalism, at that time framed by White-identified individuals; suffice it to say using language to segregate became another strategy to promote Whiteness ideology.

In 1855, the California state legislature amended their new state constitution to include a provision in which all proceedings and services in the state would be in English only. This meant the educational process for those who identified as Mexican American was premised on language segregation. David García (2018) documents various case studies throughout California in which Mexican Americans were segregated using language via housing and schooling. One particular case study occurs in Oxnard, California. In the early 1900s, the school superintendent, mayor, and other city officials organized the city services, including the school system, to align their segregation of Mexicans. One of those White architects,



as D. García highlights, is Richard Haydock, who served as principal and superintendent of Oxnard schools. He spoke most explicitly about a need for the Oxnard community to segregate Mexicans in order to maintain the community as “clean”:

The ignorant are allowed to live and breed under conditions that become a threat and a menace to the welfare of the community. . . . Many cases of filth and disease and contagion are found by us in the school work. We suggest to these Mexican people that they care for themselves but they do nothing. The personal health of the Mexican children in the grammar school affects every child in the school. (D. García, 2018, p. 12)

D. García (2018) notes that the organization of both laws and policy involved the following: In mid-February 1917, the plans for paving Oxnard only included the White neighborhoods; during an outbreak of the flu, the local hospital did not permit Mexicans to be admitted, and instead city police opened a makeshift hospital at a detention center; and the city planned for creating segregated children’s playgrounds. Countless such case studies illustrate the ways in which laws and policies were utilized to operationalize the critical elements of Whiteness ideology—sustaining a singular White-affinity community in its purest forms and highlighting the inferiority of BIPOC communities.

In 1910, after achieving statehood, New Mexico also minted new English-only policies to limit the incorporation of Mexican populations; “that provision shall be made for the establishment and for public maintenance of a system of public schools, which shall be open to all the children of said State and free from sectarian control, and that said schools shall always be conducted in English.”<sup>9</sup> Overall, the framing of language as reasoning for segregation was used to illustrate a level of “nativism” expected of an American identity. In other words, being American meant speaking English, considered the hallmark language of White identification. The storied segregation of Mexicans illustrates for us how Whiteness ideology became imbued with English language as a cultural feature to maintain for the purity of the race.

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<sup>9</sup>New Mexico Constitution, *Article XXI: Compact with the United States § 4 Public schools*. <https://law.justia.com/constitution/new-mexico/article-xxi/section-4/>

### Shopping Cart Exploration Pause



1. Take a moment and imagine how speaking another language was conveyed to parents as a problem. Now also imagine the individuals who enacted such processes. How do you imagine they rationalized their actions? Did they view themselves as doing the “right thing” because they maintained an associational bias about Mexican American populations?
2. What parts of Mexican American history are familiar to you? When did you learn them?
3. How do we introduce this history in elementary, middle, and high school?
4. Review your novels, read-aloud books, bulletin boards, and other resources. Where do you see the representations of Mexican American populations?

### Virginia: State-Sponsored Skin-Color-Based Exclusion of Black Students

The case of segregation among African Americans centered on using race or skin color as a proxy to determine educational services. That such segregation occurred prior to *Brown v. Board of Education* but continued after the ruling is an important point to understand about Whiteness ideology; although educational laws and policies were organized for the purpose of skin color segregation prior to 1954, afterward we learned the ideology was able to adapt itself post *Brown*. The prevailing memory or story we carry as citizens is that once the ruling was passed a level of resistance emerged to end segregated schools; however, we don't necessarily recognize that it centered on sustaining the valuation of White children's school experiences. This resistance was very much bound to White families drawing from a shopping cart filled with associational and affinity bias experiences that reinforced this valuation. Any move to shift or upend their shopping carts, such as school desegregation and integration, was an assault on their way of life; a way of life promoted in parenting guides (DuRocher, 2011). A well-circulated adage nicely encapsulates why White families pushed back on desegregation as

an educational equity: “When you’re accustomed to privilege, equity feels like oppression.” School desegregation and integration were perceived as oppressing their privileged experience—an experience of Whiteness is the ability to continuously define itself as the norm for everyone (M. Bell, 2021) and as a tool to monopolize resources (E. K. Wilson, 2021). The image<sup>10</sup> in Figure 1.4 reflects White protesters, reporters, and plainclothes police in Nashville, Tennessee, in September 1957, reflective of similar tactics in Virginia.

**FIGURE 1.4** White Protesters, Reporters, and Plainclothes Police Outside Glenn Elementary in Nashville, Tennessee, September 1957



Source: © Nashville Public Library, Special Collections.

This community rallied the majority of the White community to protest the integration of schools including appearing on days when Black parents were registering their first graders (see Figure 1.5).

<sup>10</sup>Egerton, J. (2009, May 4). Walking into history: The beginning of school desegregation in Nashville. *Southern Spaces*. <https://southernspaces.org/2009/walking-history-beginning-school-desegregation-nashville/>

**FIGURE 1.5** Fred Stroud Leads Protest Against Desegregation, Nashville, Tennessee, 1957



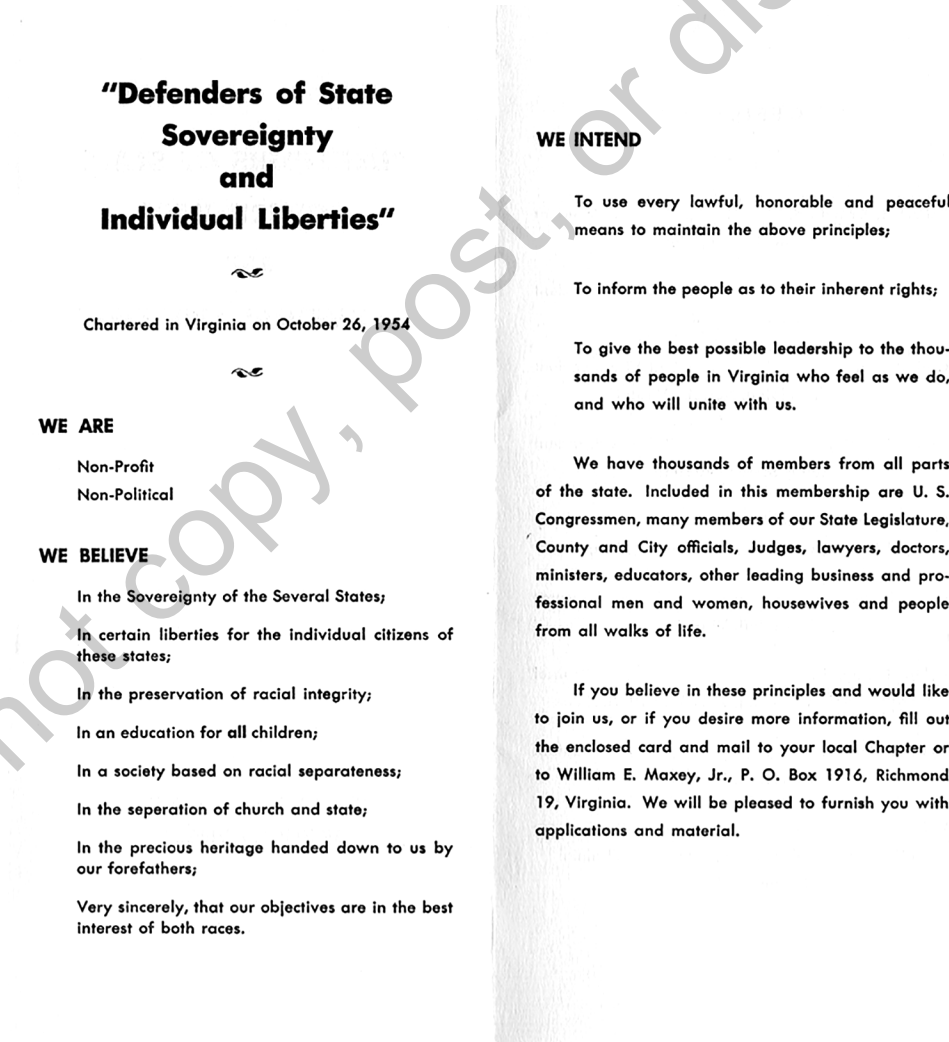
Source: © Nashville Public Library, Special Collections.

Demonstrating these images provides us an imagery of how communities throughout the country rallied around sustaining White schools; despite knowing about the unequal facilities, they were not rallying to improve schools for Black, Mexican, or Indigenous students. Kristina DuRocher (2011) documents in *Raising Racists: The Socialization of White Children in the Jim Crow South* that White communities organized churches, neighborhood associations, and their parenting to reinforce the importance and valuation of White children:

White southern parents' instruction in regulating relations between the races was grounded in a highly idealized and nostalgic vision of a paternalistic white society. The ideological objective of this instruction, however unrealistic, was that the New South should replicate the romanticized social order of slavery. The lessons that shaped young children's identity were primarily racial, not surprising in a racially segregated society with idealized expectations of white masculinity and femininity tied to morality and contrasted with African American degradation. (p. 14)

Thus, imagining society post *Brown* needs to emphasize an understanding that dismantling segregated schools was also about dismantling segregated parenting, neighborhood associations, golf courses, playgrounds, and other institutions. As an example, Virginia residents, like many from both southern and northern states, found ways to resist the *Brown* decision. On October 26, 1954, the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties was formed to oppose the *Brown* decision. The non-profit organization maintained specific values as part of their charter (see Figure 1.6). They believed in “the preservation of racial integrity, an education for all children, and a society based on racial separateness.”

**FIGURE 1.6** Charter of Defenders of State Sovereignty



*Source:* Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties, Courtesy of Special Collections and University Archives, Old Dominion University Libraries



This citizen-based organization, similar to the type that emerged in the 2010s and 2020s (e.g., Oath Keepers, Proud Boys, Tea Party, Moms for Liberty), purported to preserve their worldview, which included a valuation of Whiteness cloaked in language such as “individual liberties,” “American values,” and “freedom principles.” Such organizations received further support from governmental actors as well, similar to the current actions seen in the banning of discussions regarding race, diversity, gender expression, and sexuality (e.g., Tennessee, Florida, Texas, Oklahoma). For instance, in 1958, the Norfolk Public Schools sought an injunction to prevent the integration of 17 Black children into their White middle and high schools. The district hoped to halt efforts to integrate and, if not successful, threatened to close all of their schools. The letter in Figure 1.7 provides the actions taken by the school district personnel.

**FIGURE 1.7 Statement From Norfolk Public Schools, 1958**

STATEMENT OF THE SCHOOL BOARD OF THE CITY OF NORFOLK  
SEPTEMBER 19, 1958

The School Board has appealed from the rulings of the District Court under which seventeen colored children will have to be assigned to previously all white schools. Today the District Court declined to grant a suspension in the effectiveness of its ruling until the appeal can be heard on its merits. The Board will request Judge Sobeloff, Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, to grant such a stay, but no appointment with Judge Sobeloff can be had before September 22, 1958. For this reason, the Board has delayed the opening of all junior and senior high schools in the City until September 29, 1958.

It is the understanding of the School Board that the following results will follow Judge Sobeloff's ruling:

- (1) If the requested stay is granted, the junior and senior high schools will open on September 29 on a segregated basis as in former years.
- (2) If the stay is denied by Judge Sobeloff, the School Board will have to assign the seventeen children in conformance with the District Court's rulings and Maury High School, Norview High School, Granby High School, Blair Junior High School, Northside Junior High School, and Norview Junior High School will be automatically closed.
- (3) If these schools are closed, the buildings will be physically closed and there will be no necessity for any child, teacher, or administrative personnel to report to the school on the day that the rest of the high schools and junior high schools are opened.

Meanwhile all elementary schools will be opened on September 22, 1958, including any classes from the first through the sixth grade which are conducted in Willard and Norview Junior High School buildings.

*Source: Statement of the School Board of the City of Norfolk, Courtesy of Special Collections and University Archives, Old Dominion University Libraries*

Without public schools, White families needed a school setting to send their children to, and private schools, including independent and parochial schools (especially Catholic schools), were poised to absorb

these families. The Arrowood Academy, like many private schools, made commitments to deny the presence of Black students in their schools. Figure 1.8 is a signed affidavit from the school principal in 1967, guaranteeing that their school remain segregated.

**FIGURE 1.8 Signed Affidavit of Budget and School Segregation**

A F F I D A V I T

STATE OF Virginia,  
(name)

NORFOLK OF Frances A. Smith, to-wit:  
(City or County) (name)

This day personally appeared before me, Herbert L. Penlin  
(name of Notary Public)

a Notary Public in and for the City/County aforesaid, in the State aforesaid, Frances A. Smith, who, being by me first duly  
(name of affiant)  
sworn, on his/her oath says:

1. That he/she is the OWNER - Directress of  
(title)

Arrowood Academy and is duly authorized to make  
(name of school)  
this affidavit.

2. That the attached copy of the operating budget of Arrowood Academy, itemized by sources of revenue,  
(name of school)  
is a true copy of the operating budget of said school, and that all of the information set forth on the sheets attached hereto is true and correct for the 1965-1966 school year to the best of his/her knowledge, information and belief:

3. That said school:

(a) accepts pupils regardless of their race or color.

refuses to accept pupils on account of their race or color.

(Delete (a) or (b), whichever is not the case.)

Frances A. Smith  
(Signature of affiant)

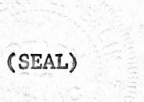
(Continued)



(Continued)

Subscribed and sworn to before me, this 23<sup>rd</sup> day of November, 1965. In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal the day, month and year aforesaid.

My commission expires 3-12-68.

(SEAL)  [Signature]  
Notary Public

Source: Affidavit, Frances A. Smith, Courtesy of Special Collections and University Archives, Old Dominion University Libraries

Such examples of private schools refusing to enroll Black children also occurred simultaneously in public schools. In 1958, Virginia governor J. Lindsay Almond closed schools in Warren County, Charlottesville, and Norfolk in order to prevent Black students from attending those White schools. Prince Edward County also closed their public schools from 1959 until 1964. White students attended private schools for which they received tuition grants to attend ([www.odu.edu/library/special-collections/dove/timeline](http://www.odu.edu/library/special-collections/dove/timeline)). Virginia eventually began to implement methods of desegregation. Some of these methods resulted in policies that approached this issue with an equality frame rather than an equity frame. For example, in Norfolk schools they sought to create teacher staffing that mirrored the student enrollment (see Figure 1.9). However, such actions were counterintuitive in certain schools, particularly predominantly Black schools.

**FIGURE 1.9 Statement From Booker T. Washington High School**

File  
4/10/70

The Official Position of the Faculty of  
Booker T. Washington High School on the Faculty  
Desegregation Portion of the Norfolk School Board Plan

We, the members of the faculty of Booker T. Washington High School, in full recognition of the School Board's responsibility to wipe out all vestiges of a dual school system in the City of Norfolk, wish to register, at this time, our opposition to that portion of the Norfolk school Board Plan which requires a 70% white to 22% black teacher ratio at Booker T. Washington High School by September, 1971.

The basis of our discontent is to be found in the uniqueness of our situation. Of the five high schools in Norfolk, Booker T. Washington is the only one with fewer than ten students of the opposite race. In other words, we have a black student body. Yet, an administrative decision has determined that we should have a majority white faculty.

It is our collective opinion that a majority white faculty at Booker T. Washington is an unsound educational experiment which is destined to disrupt the instructional program and that such a fraud should not be perpetrated upon the black students or white teachers who would be assigned to this school.

Even though faculty desegregation has proceeded normally at Booker T. Washington High School, we have reason to believe that the climate within the school and in the black community does not lend itself to the installation of a majority white faculty at this time.

We are guided in our opinion by a series of events and decisions which have left a great deal to be desired in the minds of the black community, and this is mirrored in the thinking and actions of our students.

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*Source:* The Official Position of the Faculty of Booker T. Washington High School on the Faculty Desegregation Portion of the Norfolk School Board Plan, Courtesy of Special Collections and University Archives, Old Dominion University Libraries

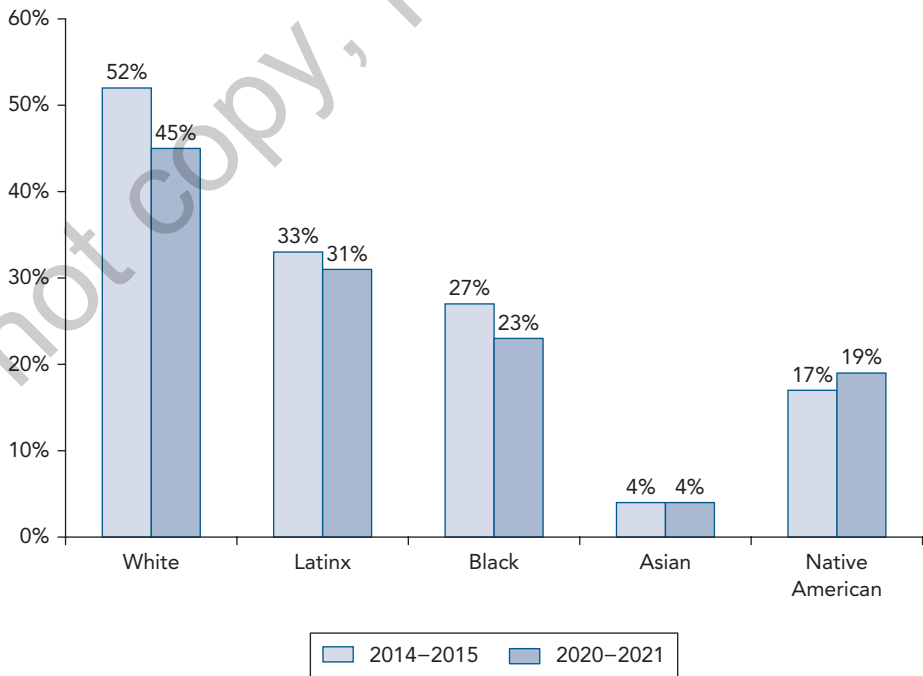
I note the historical terrain of Whiteness valuation and people of color devaluation to highlight the ways in which public and private actors managed to make agreements despite legal and regulatory requirements such as *Brown v. Board of Education*. In other words, Whiteness as an ideology was able to sustain its operation. The removal of Indigenous children and placement in “civilizing” schools, the segregation of Mexican students based on their language, and the deliberate tactics of Virginia communities to maintain segregation showcase how Whiteness and its cultural tools were utilized to reconstruct *Plessy v. Ferguson*. In fact, such agreements did not dissipate but rather spread into other educational practices to reconstruct a 20th century *Plessy v. Ferguson*. More specifically, practices such as special education and gifted/Advanced Placement (AP)/Honors enrollment and classification, as well as discipline patterns, became additional segregated spaces in which schools used Whiteness ideology to reinforce associational biases regarding cognitive and cultural superiority or inferiority.

### School Segregation 70 Years Later: Laws and Policies Continue to Sustain Whiteness

Over the last 70 years, the pattern of student school enrollment has dramatically shifted from majority White to majority students of color, namely Latinx, Black, Asian, multiracial, and Native American. As noted by a 2022 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, during the 1950s White students comprised over 90% of public school enrollment. During the 2020–2021 school year, White students comprised 46% of enrollment while the remaining 54% represented other racial and ethnic groups—28% Latinx, 15% Black, 6% Asian, 4% multiracial, and 1% Native American (U.S. GAO, 2022). Such a shift in demographics in schools creates opportunities for an expansion of cross-cultural experiences.

First, despite the overall racial and ethnic diversification of schools, White students, in particular, continue to enroll in schools with predominantly White students (U.S. GAO, 2022). Figure 1.10 demonstrates the percentage of students by race/ethnicity attending schools with 75% or more of students of the same race/ethnicity. Between the 2014–2015 and 2020–2021

**FIGURE 1.10** Percentage of Students by Race/Ethnicity Attending School Where 75% or More of Students Are of Their Own Race/Ethnicity



Source: U.S. GAO (2022).

school years, the level of school segregation decreased for all groups except Native Americans. Further layered in this pattern is that among schools with predominantly (75% or more) Black, Latinx, and Native American student enrollment, 80% largely enroll students eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program. The concern about such patterns is twofold: (1) the external policy factors that extend these patterns and (2) the associational and affinity bias perpetuated in all schools.

Before we explore these concerns, let us understand more about these patterns of segregation. The U.S. GAO (2022) also highlights that segregation is most pronounced in the Midwest and Northeast for White students, the South for Black students, and the West for Latinx students. More specifically, of all schools in the Midwest and Northeast, 52% and 41%, respectively, have enrollment comprising 75% or more White students (U.S. GAO, 2022). In the West, of all schools, nearly 17% have enrollment comprising 75% or more Latinx students. And in the South, nearly 7% of all schools have enrollment comprising 75% or more Black students. These patterns highlight school segregation as regionally based. Additionally, the concentration of segregation by locale is the following:

- Majority of White schools are in rural areas followed by towns and suburbs.
- Majority of Latinx schools are in urban areas followed by suburbs.
- Majority of Black schools are in urban areas followed by suburbs.
- Majority of Asian schools are in suburbs.
- Majority of Native American schools are in rural areas. (U.S. GAO, 2022)

These patterns demonstrate the distribution of this segregation. However, they only showcase de facto segregation, which on the surface has no explicit exclusionary laws based on race/ethnicity. These patterns of segregation create conditions that sustain associational and affinity bias. An example of these tools in use occurs in the growing practice of communities seceding from each other. Between 2009–2010 and 2019–2020, 36 new school districts successfully seceded from existing districts (U.S. GAO, 2022) despite various levels of legal precedence, such as *Wright v. Council of City of Emporia* (1972), that continue to serve as reasoning for the limitation of secession. However, as Taylor et al. (2019) argue, “These structures and decisions use rational discourse citing race-neutral reasons or structures to further racial inequality without invoking intentional racist

beliefs” (p. 3). This rational discourse is of particular interest because of its implied narrative of monopoly and fear.

For example, Shelby County, Tennessee, has created six new school districts since 2011. Shelby County encompasses Memphis City schools and surrounding suburbs. In 2008, the Shelby County school board sought a new status designation that would allow it to raise funds just for the suburb schools. Prior to receiving that special status, various taxes such as school tax were shared countywide. Given the imbalanced funding between Memphis City and the suburb communities, the suburb communities provided the greatest amount of school funding. By the 2014–2015 school year, six new, wealthier, and Whiter school districts were created. The Shelby County commissioner at the time was reported as stating, “There are a lot of problems in the inner city and big city that we don’t have in municipalities in terms of poverty and crime . . . We’re able to give folks more opportunities because our schools are smaller.”<sup>11</sup> During the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, in the height of school desegregation, many predominantly White communities used the fear of losing as language to explicitly communicate a fear of the other group. In our current era, fear language is cloaked in notions of community safety such as crime, loss of employment, neighborhood safety, and unknown community members. Additionally, the language of monopoly is used and framed in terms of neighborhood schools, parents’ rights, religious liberty, and local control. Communities in various parts of the country—the Bayou area of Louisiana, central New Jersey, Maine, Boston, and others—demonstrate ways in which Whiteness plays a role in sustaining or reconstructing schools that parallel the public school enrollment of the 1950s. Unfortunately, in our current era, parallel social movements of anti-integration disguised in fear language such as “anti-CRT” (critical race theory) and “anti-trans” furthers such actions through curriculum. Thus, fear of losing and monopoly orientations are the current fashioned strategies to employ Whiteness ideology in sustaining segregated schools.

### **Whiteness Ideology in School Practice: Special Education, Gifted, and Discipline**

Several years ago, I visited with an elementary school principal (biracial male) to discuss his latest attempts to racially and ethnically integrate his gifted program. The district was 45% Black, 30% White, 15%

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<sup>11</sup>Bauman, C. (2017, June 21). Memphis–Shelby County spotlighted in national report on school district succession. *Chalkbeat Tennessee*. <https://tn.chalkbeat.org/2017/6/21/21102787/memphis-shelby-county-spotlighted-in-national-report-on-school-district-secession>

Latinx, 8% Asian, and 2% Native American; however, his elementary school was 90% White, 5% Asian, and 5% Black due to a long history of housing segregation that dictated school enrollment policy, which focused on “neighborhood schools.” During my visit, he shared that the prior week he met with a Black female third grader who hit another Black student. When he asked her what happened, the student shared that she felt so angry about “being Black at the school.” She referenced how none of the Black kids were pulled for the enrichment gifted program, a process in which the gifted teachers went to various classes and requested the “gifted” students be pulled out and sent to the enrichment class. The principal shared this story as testimony of how this educational practice affected Black students and as justification for fixing this high-priority issue.

This story highlights the manner in which the current patterns of disparity in special education, discipline, or gifted/AP/Honors enrollment serve as evidence of the harm that occurs from these patterns. From this Black student’s perspective, students experienced an associational bias developed and implemented at the school. Unfortunately, we base our orientation for how we validate programming like gifted/AP/Honors on the assumption that cognitive “gifts” are inherited or natural and based on validated assessments (both subjective and objective). Let’s discuss how within the four walls of schools we use tools of validity (assessments, observation tools, etc.) to determine levels of cognitive development; however, such tools emerged from an ideology that placed White populations as the standard.

In 1869, Francis Galton, an anthropologist and geneticist, published *Hereditary Genius* in which he discussed a study of intelligence among 400 British men and concluded that intelligence was hereditary:

The general plan of my argument is to show that high reputation is a pretty accurate test of high ability; next to discuss the relationships of a large body of fairly eminent men—namely, the Judges of England from 1660 to 1868, the Statesmen of the time of George III, and the Premiers during the last 100 years—and to obtain from these a general survey of the laws of heredity in respect to genius. Then I shall examine, in order, the kindred of the most illustrious Commanders, men of Literature and of Science, Poets, Painters, and Musicians, of whom history speaks. (p. 2)

While he originally intended for the book to explore the degree to which intelligence was hereditary via the examination of 400 British



White men, Galton also shared his opinion about Black people, especially their lack of intelligence. In fact, Galton argued that “negroes” exist in the lower-class levels he developed (i.e., *a* to *f*):

[T]he number among the negroes of those whom we should call half-witted men is very large. Every book alluding to negro servants in America is full of instances. I was myself much impressed by this fact during my travels in Africa. The mistakes the negroes made in their own matters were so childish, stupid, and simpleton-like, as frequently to make me ashamed of my own species. I do not think it any exaggeration to say that their *c* is as low as our *e*, which would be a difference of two grades, as before. I have no information as to actual idiocy among the negroes—I mean, of course, of that class of idiocy which is not due to disease. (p. 338)

Such research, as well as work from Hollingworth (1926) and Terman (1916), in the early 20th century was representative of the concept of eugenics. Eugenics promoted the idea of identifying populations of greater intellectual stock and possibly improving a society through a genetic selection process—that is, removing populations with genetic defects. Terman (1916) described “Spanish-Indian, Mexican, and Negro”:

Their dullness seems to be racial, or at least inherent in the family stocks from which they come. . . . Children of this group should be segregated in special classes and be given instruction that is concrete and practical. They cannot master abstractions, but they can often be made efficient workers. . . . There is no possibility at present of convincing society that they should not reproduce. (pp. 91–92)

Terman specifically revamped the Stanford–Binet IQ test to measure cognitive abilities and promoted its use in military assignment and school segregation. Hollingworth (1926) similarly argued for lower cognitive capacities particularly among “negro” children and in particular using IQ tests to rationalize the segregation of children:

Several surveys have been made to test the mentality of negro children. These surveys unexceptionally show a low average of intellect among children having negro blood. Comparatively few of these children are found within the range which includes the best one per cent of white children.



It is, however, possible by prolonged search to find an occasional negro or mulatto child testing about 130 IQ . . . more than a mere suggestion that negro children furnish fewer gifted individuals than white children do, in the United States. (pp. 69–70)

Such eugenic notions were bound not only to race but also to socioeconomic class. Hollingworth (1926) rationalized that since the greatest number of gifted children came from “skilled” households, something about economic status engendered the development of gifted children:

More recent and much wider investigation carried out by Terman has served only to confirm these findings. In a sample of a thousand gifted children there have occurred a few whose fathers are semi-skilled or unskilled manual laborers; so that the contribution of families at these economic levels is not absolutely nil. However, it is extremely meager; and the professional classes, who include not over two per cent of the total population, furnish over fifty per cent of the children testing in the highest one percent. (pp. 53–54)

In 1922, Hollingworth opened the Special Opportunity Class at Public School 165 in New York City, which recruited students for the longest-running longitudinal study of intelligence. And in 1925, Terman published *Genetic Studies of Genius*, and concluded that gifted students were

(a) qualitatively different in school, (b) slightly better physically and emotionally in comparison to normal students, (c) superior in academic subjects in comparison to the average students, (d) emotionally stable, (e) most successful when education and family values were held in high regard by the family, and (f) infinitely variable in combination with the number of traits exhibited by those in the study. This is the first volume in a five-volume study spanning nearly 40 years.<sup>12</sup>

Educators moved to establish a system for programming children with talents and gifts. The National Association for Gifted Children

<sup>12</sup>National Association for Gifted Children. (2005). *The history of gifted and talented education*. <http://people.uncw.edu/caropresoe/GiftedFoundations/EDN%20552/NAGC%20-%20History%20of%20g-t.htm>

was created in 1954, the U.S. Department of Education established an Office of Gifted and Talented Education in 1974, and the U.S. Congress passed the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act in 1988. These legal and policy provisions established the recognition of gifted children. However, they did not explore *whose* notions of gifted were being utilized to establish children as gifted.

Though we may argue, at times, that notions of eugenics are not explicitly prominent, the constructs of associating one group as having more cognitive capacities than another continues to be present in our educational environments. That associational bias results in a pedestrian belief that some groups have fewer individuals with advanced cognitive abilities because of their cultural or genetic qualities, also known as deficit thinking (see more in Chapter 3). Such a belief lives within the shopping carts of many educators. The concern is whether they draw on such notions when recommending students for gifted, AP, International Baccalaureate, Honors, or other accelerated programs. The ongoing reality is that our schools continue to generate the disparity data that keep feeding such “eugenics-like” beliefs: If I continuously see one group in gifted, advanced, Honors, or AP classes, that group becomes the archetype of advanced cognitive ability.

These sorts of associational biases and beliefs exist within our shopping carts of experiences as a “normalized” understanding that emerges from continuously experiencing racially, culturally, and linguistically isolated lives. In other words, the more often we see White and Asian students in gifted programming, the more we are susceptible to creating archetypes of “giftedness” based on the cultural renderings or demonstrations of those groups. Our charge is to understand and interrupt Whiteness ideology.

This chapter is intended to demonstrate the history of Whiteness ideology usage in orchestrating our school systems, specifically who we went to school with, who our families could get to know, how our school playgrounds were shared, and so on. Furthermore, the chapter explores the ways this ideology morphed over time to do other forms of segregation not in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment and *Brown v. Board*, such as seceding into a new community under the auspices of “preserving resources for their community” or creating gifted programming for those who demonstrate cognitive qualities based on assessments with a history of validation based on a eugenics frame. Overall, the history of Whiteness ideology employed in schools is long-standing. Our journey to interrupt that ideology in our shopping carts requires more than policy and laws. It requires an individual change to develop into a more cross-cultural humanity for use in the implementation of improved policies, practices, and procedures.

## Chapter Reflection Questions

These reflection questions are intended to encourage unpacking and replacing of our shopping carts.



1. What is in your shopping cart about the history of Mexican Americans, Native Americans, and African Americans?
2. Given the current climate of state education departments removing the histories of Queer communities and African American, Mexican American, and Native American history, what experiences are available for you to replace this information?
3. What do you know about how gifted programs operate? Do you consider giftedness to be inherited, or can it be nurtured?
4. What are ways that you see and hear language of “fear of losing” or “monopoly” happening in your school and community? What groups are perceived as the ones to fear?
5. What are the bright spots in your journey to enhance your cross-cultural experiences?
6. What are difficult tensions in your journey to enhance your cross-cultural/experiences?

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