

Reflections on The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schools in America

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Forty years after the Civil Rights Movement, “little black boys and little black girls [are not] able to join hands with little white boys and little white girls . . . ,” or at least that is what I think when I observe today’s schools. The isolation of schools is presenting a problem that is causing students of penurious schools to fall behind students of more prosperous schools. Most of the students of the former are African American. Many of those children are not meeting the standard academic goals of any school system.

According to Jonathan Kozol in his article *Segregated Schools, Shame of the City*, only 2.7 percent of the population of Stuyvesant, an affluent school in New York City, is black or Latino, down from about 13 percent over 25 years ago. Kozol also wrote that students in cities such as the Bronx happen to live within short busing distances from well advanced school districts such as Bronxville, but New York’s Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Klein have not used their authority to control the schools and to allow inner city students to enroll in suburban districts. Kozol’s solution to ending segregation in schools is to assign student to schools interracially by busing them to schools on a cross-district basis. I agree with Jonathan Kozol. If the way to position children who deserve an adequate education into better schools is to assign them to schools on a cross-district basis, then it should be done. Apartheid of schools causes student to be unaware of different cultures and makes minority children feel inferior to the seemingly smarter students of majority white schools. Integration is important because students become accustomed to other cultures, and minority students who may have otherwise gone to a substandard school do not have to be deprived of an education.

People learn the truth from first-hand experience, naturally. If we are not provided with first-hand experience, then we form ideas to make up for what we really do not know. Those ideas that we form do not just pop into our brains; they are given to us by media, entertainment, and family. We then individually analyze those learned ideas, and we accept them as truth. White students that attend all white schools and black students that attend all black schools conceive of ideas of what the other race is like. They know that each other exists, but they seem so far away. Those ideas are just like dreams or fairy tales, but not fairy tales that involve stories of imagining uniting with the unknown people that live only a few minutes away yet seem so distant in the abstract, but ideas that involve thinking that they are superior to the other or that the others are superior to them. Either way, those ideas are

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stereotypes. Those black and white students cannot learn about each other, learn from each other, or learn to appreciate each other if they do not come in contact with each other.

I have had my own experience with the result of segregation. During the summer of my eleventh grade school year, I attended a program called "The Martin W. Essex School for the Gifted." When I arrived at the school, I experienced a "culture shock." I expected the majority of the students there to be white, but I did not expect only six out of the seventy kids to be "other." I wanted diversity, all cultures. I was not used to these people at Martin Essex. It was as though we were total opposites. I came from an urban school, they came from rural ones. I like to write, but they liked politics; or maybe I just did not know much about politics. Most of the other kids who came from other parts of the state seemed to be right at home, like they were with long lost pals. I began to think that I was more alien to them than they were to me. At a psychology session, I sat in a row towards the back, which just happened to be next to a white boy, who explained to me that he was going to move because he could not see the board, and asked me if I could see. Maybe he could not see, but I could see perfectly clear. I wondered why he had to move. I am still unsure. I could not stop thinking of possible reasons why white students could seem so strange around me. Was it just because everyone was afraid of being in a larger city like Columbus, Ohio, coming from a smaller city like Marion, Ohio? Was it only my imagination? Or was my first instinct right: that they were not "used" to me.

The Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence and Research has said that *Brown v. Board of Education* extended beyond segregation in schools, that it related to "human tendencies to prejudge, discriminate against, and stereotype other people by their ethnic, religious, physical, or cultural characteristics." Before the civil rights movement, assigning students to schools according to their race was legal. Many of the students, like Oliver L. Brown's daughter, had to travel miles on foot to their schools, which were sometimes much farther away than white schools (*Brown v. Board of Education*). They received education that would not prepare them for America's fast-paced and rapidly growing economy. They received education that would not prepare them to become successful businessmen and businesswomen, doctors, lawyers, writers, or scientists. People were reluctant to accept black men and women into their college if they only had 12 years of education from poor Kansas schools.

Segregation really did go beyond schools, and even beyond color. Jim Crow laws were supposed to make people with any kind of African ancestry feel inferior. In the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case of 1896, Homer Plessy was arrested for being on a white train car. To most people, Plessy looked white, and he argued that he should be allowed to sit in the white train car, because more of his ancestors were white than black, but the U.S. Supreme Court did

not agree with him. This case proves that segregation exceeds past skin color; it is a code of cultural disgrace. Segregation was meant to prove to people that they would not be judged by the “content of their character,” but by their bloodline, and whoever had an ounce of black culture was low in American society; black blood was bad blood.

Segregation should be in the past. Schools were more united in 1968 than they are now, which is phenomenally disastrous to the well being of the United States. Today’s students will not be in the classroom forever. Soon, they will be adults who are supposed to run this country. The “inferior” students will not be well suited to run the country, and the “superior” ones will not be able to successfully run the country without ideas that would come from the different cultures. In the end, everyone is deprived of knowledge. But this can be stopped now; integrating schools is an essential step to ending the division of people in America.¹

¹ Works cited in this article include Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence and Research, *Brown v. Board of Education, About the Case* (2004), <http://brownvboard.org/summary> (last visited Feb. 20, 2008); Martin Luther King, Jr., *I Have a Dream*, available at <http://www.usconstitution.net/dream.html> (last visited Feb. 20, 2008); Jonathan Kozol, *Segregated Schools: Shame of the City*, GOTHAM GAZETTE (Jan. 16, 2006), available at <http://www.gothamgazette.com/article/feature-commentary/20060116/202/1718> (last visited Feb. 20, 2008); and § Thomas Zimmerman, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, (1997) available at <http://www.bgsu.edu/departments/acs/1890s/plessy/plessy.html> (last visited Feb. 20, 2008).

