

## Chapter 6

### Equality and Justice For All? Examining Race in Education Scholarship

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Does race (still) matter in educational discussions, analyses, and policies? This question seems to be a perennial that comes and goes, is hidden and reemerges, but is consistently (if implicitly) present. Consider, for example, educators' and educational researchers' concerns with assimilation, civilization, vocational training, IQ, poverty, cultural difference, remedial education, school readiness, achievement gaps, accountability, and standardization—all of these conversations were and still are intimately connected to race and racism regardless of whether we name them as such. Although the scholarship on race in education is vast, we attempt to review some of the most pressing and persistent issues in this chapter. We also suggest that the future of race scholarship in education needs to be centered not on equality but rather on equity and justice.

It is important in this chapter for us to outline what we mean by equity and equality and to explicate the differences in these terms. In the areas of race and education, “commonsensical” uses of these terms have been conflated. Within popular discourse, what is meant by equality is the same thing as what is meant by equity, and having equal resources for schools means that the schools are equitable, fair, and equal. But we understand these terms and their relationship differently and suggest that notions of justice must be intimately connected with these terms for equity and equality to have meaningful emphases.

By equality, we mean sameness and, more specifically, sameness of resources and opportunities. This concept of equality is the long-term goal of a just society: children, regardless of race, socioeconomic class, or gender, should have access to the same

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resources and opportunity outcomes. It will become apparent that we have reached this goal when schooling and economic successes and opportunities look the same for all groups of children. A closer examination of test scores, schooling facilities for particular children, and life outcomes of children from different racialized groups demonstrate that there is not currently equality (i.e., sameness) in resources or opportunity outcomes.

The often heard, commonsensical response to the inequalities of outcomes rests in a number of areas: Some families care more about education than others; some children and families are more motivated to do well in education; some children are simply more gifted than others; or everyone has the same opportunities as everyone else—what else could we ask for? In these responses, there is an overwhelming reliance on the individual, the idea that individual values, motivations, and talents determine individual outcomes. We believe that individuals certainly matter, and individual traits and actions can, in many circumstances, have an effect on individual outcomes. However, such individual distinctions cannot explain large-scale group realities. Large-scale inequalities are rooted in more pervasive, systemic, and structural issues rather than in the individual motivations or giftedness of the individual. Concomitantly, issues of motivation or giftedness often are tied directly to these larger structural factors. Students at New Trier High School, for example, have access to different educational, cultural, and social resources than do students at East St. Louis High School—two public schools in the same state and only 150 miles away from each other (cf. Illinois Report Card, 2005; Kozol, 2005). Table 1 offers a comparison of the two schools.

New Trier High School, located in Winnetka, Illinois, is 88.6% White, and the school has a low-income population of 1.5% in a state with an average 40% low-income population. The average ACT score for its students is 26.8 and its graduation rate is 98.5% (the state average is 87.4%). The average teacher has been in the classroom 13.9 years (roughly, the state average is 13.6 years), 85.5% of the teachers have graduate degrees, and the average teacher salary is \$84,151 (the state average is \$55,558). In terms of school spending (for the 2003–2004 school year), New Trier High School spends \$8,557 per pupil per year and has an additional \$15,403 per pupil per year in operational expenditures. There are more than 100 cocurricular organizations and the school boasts its own radio station, theater, rugby team, and audio recording studio.

East St. Louis High School, located in East St. Louis, Illinois, is 99.6% African American and 93.3% low income. The average ACT score is 14.8, and its graduation rate is 61.2%. The average teacher (in the district—figures were not available for the school in this measure) has been in the classroom 20.3 years, 32.9% have graduate degrees, and the average teacher salary is \$58,534. East St. Louis High School spends an average of \$5,215 per student in operational expenditures and \$9,007 per pupil per year. We were unable to locate the number of cocurricular activities for the school.

In the case of these two schools, it is evident that they are quite separate and very unequal. We use equality to mean sameness, but the concept of sameness is complicated. If every school in Illinois had access to the same quality of teachers, resources,

TABLE 1 Comparison of New Trier and East St. Louis High Schools

	New Trier High School	East St. Louis High School
Racial composition	88.6% White	99.6% African American
% Low-income students	1.5%	93.3%
Average ACT score	26.8	14.8
Graduation rate	98.5%	61.2%
Average teacher years in the classroom	13.9 years	20.3 years
Average teacher graduate degrees	85.5%	32.9%
Average teacher salary	\$84,151	\$58,534
Average per student operational expenditures	\$15,403	\$5,215
Average expenditures per pupil per year	\$8,557	\$9,007
Number of cocurricular activities	100+	Unavailable

Source. Illinois Interactive Report Card, 2005. <http://iirc.niu.edu/Scripts/school.asp?schoolID=1401620300001&colName=SCHLNAME&searchStr=new%20trier&ttest=all> and <http://iirc.niu.edu/Scripts/school.asp?schoolID=5008218900043&ttest=all>

expenditures, and current infrastructure, the schooling experiences of the students might be more closely aligned with the academic successes of the students at New Trier. Yet, sameness does not exist either in structural factors or in the achievement levels of the students. To work toward every student having access to teachers with high salaries and graduate degrees, a system of *equity* must be put into place. By equity, we mean a system where unequal goods are redistributed to create systems and schools that share a greater likelihood of becoming more equal. In the case of New Trier and East St. Louis High Schools, this would mean that East St. Louis High School would get more and better access to facilities (physical and structural ones), teachers with advanced degrees, monetary resources to build cocurricular activities, and a focus on graduating students with higher ACT scores and better prospects for college and life. We are not arguing that resources should necessarily be taken away from New Trier; rather, we are arguing that an equitable system will provide extra resources for the students to have the possibilities of excelling academically and socially. Currently, one school (New Trier) clearly has more resources (monetarily and otherwise) than another (East St. Louis)—we consider this neither equal nor equitable and achieving equity requires a nonequal distribution of resources with the hope that sustained equity will eventually result in more equal educational opportunities for students.

Conservative commentators have argued that money is not the answer. In part, we agree. There are other issues at work in the cases outlined above; school facilities, teachers, and attitudes about education certainly come into play. Yet, as the two desegregation cases recently argued before the Supreme Court highlight, parents whose children attend New Trier High School would not sit quietly if their children

attended a school with the infrastructure and academic results of East St. Louis High School. It is, of course, unlikely that the parents of students attending East St. Louis High School are quiet either, but these parents clearly do not have the same avenues for being heard. Why, we must ask, are the differences in access to resources and academic results so different in two schools that are, for all intents and purposes, segregated based on race? If we are going to have equality and justice for all, there must be a period when those who have been without resources for long periods of time are provided compensatory resources to create a just society. In this way, we believe that equality and justice for all are incommensurate with the current system; instead, there must be a sense of justice to create such a system. The research outlined below points to the systematic differences that create differences in academic achievement linked to the race of certain students.

Two recent cases heard by the U.S. Supreme Court in the fall of 2006 have renewed a conversation among many of the citizens of the United States and educational researchers regarding the role of race in education and educational achievement. Perhaps the sentiments of the two main competing arguments are best captured by opinions of individuals on different sides of the constitutionality of using race as a factor in school attendance assignments.

In one case, *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*, No. 01–35450, a group of parents in Seattle, Washington, objected to the use of race as one tie-breaker to determine school assignment within a school choice system. In this particular case, one side of the disagreement is clearly articulated by Washington Supreme Court Justice Tom Chambers, who argued, “In a society such as ours, it is not enough that the 3Rs are being taught properly, for there are other vital considerations. The children must learn to respect and live with one another in multiracial and multicultural communities, and the earlier they do so the better.” On the other side of the issue, a legal think tank, called the Pacific Legal Foundation (who brought the case forward on behalf of the parent’s group), through one of its lawyers, Arthur B. Mark III, argued that the case amounted to “racial gerrymandering” and that the White students in the case are victims “who are pulled from their local schools for *no good reason* [italics added].” Later, Mark’s colleague, Sharon Browne, argued that “children should not be stereotyped by the color of their skin, but rather treated as individuals.”

The second case, *Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education* No. 05–915, is slightly different because of Louisville’s history with mandatory desegregation in its schools. Although the court’s desegregation order ended in 2001, the Jefferson County Board of Education (JCBE) continued to require that its schools be between 15% and 50% African American. A parent of a White child joined others to bring the case forward when her son was denied entry (she tried to enroll him 1 month after the school year had begun) at a local school because he would upset the racial balance. The school district argues that it is seeking desegregation of its schools and that every school receives equal funding, qualified staff, and programs.

At the heart of these cases appears to be a battle between those who view the use of race in desegregating schools as a compelling state interest (as articulated in the 14th

amendment) versus those who argue that admissions policies must offer supremacy to the role of “individualized considerations.” The former position calls for race conscious policies (see Moses, 2002a), whereas the latter focuses on colorblind policies that are rooted in a stance that centers the individual. Each of these stances reflects one side of a continuum or one end of a binary. Of importance, there are historical aspects that are related to each position, and this chapter will make connections that link the present with the past (e.g., see Donato & Lazerson, 2000, for a provocative overview of connections between issues of race and education in a historical frame).

This chapter focuses on the basic idea that having equality and justice for all in schooling cannot be achieved in the current climate where students are viewed solely as individuals. In fact, given the educational debt (Ladson-Billings)<sup>1</sup> and achievement gaps, the ideas of equality and justice are necessarily contradictory. Achieving justice, in light of the differentiation in academic achievement, cannot be done through equal means; rather, more equitable (or fairer) solutions must be used. Importantly, the use of equitable solutions necessarily means that some schools and some members of racialized communities may receive more than others. It does not mean, however, that they will receive more than their fair share. It simply means that justice is achieved through unequal (although not inequitable) means. An important factor in this article is that we intend to examine the ways that equality and equity often are conflated or interpreted as the same when they are actually quite different. The purpose of more closely examining the nuances of these concepts, and their concomitant arguments toward how society’s schools should work, is to explore the ways that educational research offers a blueprint for how society can better meet the educational needs of all students rather than only some.

Such emphasis on individuality is an important part of calls for equality or having equal access to things such as schooling; we see this play itself out in the race-conscious student assignment cases in the Supreme Court. Consider the language being used by those who have brought suit: taking race into account is “illegal” or some students are being kept out of schools “for no good reason.” The reasons often stated for having diverse school populations are that diversity creates better learning environments or means better learning opportunities for all elementary and secondary students. This is an argument rooted in both empirical studies and beliefs about morality (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Orfield & Lee, 2005, 2006). These studies, however, are rarely being discussed, and those opposed to using race in any decisions tied to schooling also make moral arguments (e.g., it isn’t fair to exclude White students from schools in their neighborhoods) and legal arguments (e.g., it is against the law to discriminate based on race).

At the heart of discussions about the role of race in education and of the cases currently before the Supreme Court appears to be a battle between those who call for race conscious policies (see Moses, 2002a) and those who focus on colorblind policies that are rooted in a stance that privileges the individual. Each of these positions reflects one side of a continuum or one end of a binary tension inherent in the notion of democracy. Simply stated, democracy is a socially constructed idea in which every individual has the ability to be heard and have their vote/voice/ideas matter equally. We have seen

historically, however, that democracy has not fully addressed the needs of the Other. The Other has been constructed as less civilized, less spiritual, and less intelligent. As a result, the principles of liberty and equal status under the law have not applied to their everyday lives. This socially constructed nature of a democracy is founded largely on the rights of individuals; however, this view is ahistorical and fails to recognize fully that the U.S. voting system (the Electoral College) and form of government make it a republic rather than a true democracy.

The doctrine of individualism has allowed those individuals with privilege to (falsely) believe that their stations in society are wholly earned. They have gotten what they deserved only through their talent and hard work. For example, in theory, anybody can be president of the United States. But given our history, only White men (who meet the citizenship and age requirements) can achieve that goal. Many groups present in our nation since its inception have not been president, and they do not have a realistic opportunity to be president in the foreseeable future.

In this chapter, we operate under the assumption that our policies and practices must be rooted in the idea of equity. As previously discussed, equity represents what is fair; what is fair is potentially more contested than what is equal. Equity requires affirmative action in the recruitment and hiring of individuals from groups who historically have been underserved. Equity would mean that people of color are strongly present in positions of power in economic, political, legal, and educational institutions throughout society. To achieve this equity, however, we may have to enact policies that fall outside the boundaries of traditional definitions of equality. Namely, we may take up measures such as those articulated by Lani Guinier (1994) to address the “tyranny of the majority.” In these policies, the marginalized receive more votes than those who historically have been privileged. The leveraged votes would be one way of addressing inequities manifest in the political spectrum, for example, the marginality and powerlessness of many under the current fundraising schemes. Although we are not necessarily arguing Guinier’s points, we do believe that equity and equitable solutions will upset the balance of power and access to services that are limited and coveted by individuals in our society.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter focuses on the basic idea that having equality and justice for all in schooling cannot be achieved in the current climate where students are viewed solely as individuals. In fact, given the educational debt and achievement gaps, the ideas of equality and justice are necessarily contradictory. Achieving justice, in light of the differentiation in academic achievement, cannot be done through equal means; rather, more equitable (or fairer) solutions must be used. Equality reaches the goal of sameness, but it does not necessarily mean justice. Equity reaches the goal of justice, but it is often achieved through unequal means. That is, some schools and some racialized communities (communities who, in a world of Whiteness, are marked as non-White) may receive more than others in a just solution. Although such a solution does not meet the demands of equality, it may meet the demands of equity. Justice is often achieved through unequal means. Equality and equity often are assumed to be synonymous, although we take them to mean quite different things. By more closely

examining the nuances of the words *equality* and *equity* and their concomitant arguments toward how schools should work, we also explore the ways that educational research offers a blueprint for how society can better meet the educational needs of all students rather than just some.

We address a number of important issues directly related to race and education with an eye toward considering how issues of educational achievement or the educational debt may be addressed. We analyze the ways in which various educational policies and practices maintain, (re)create, and legitimate the structural inequities in schools and society. We focus on K–12 educational contexts with an eye toward educational opportunities, structural inequities, and implications for teacher training. Finally, we close with a theoretical discussion of race and its relationship to colorblindness, meritocracy, Whiteness, self-determination, and identity. This concluding discussion is meant to draw important concepts out of the empirical work in the previous sections and point toward ways that race must be thought about in future research agendas.

### **RACIAL INEQUITIES IN K–12 SCHOOLS**

There is a long history of structural inequality in high minority schools; these inequalities include, for example, academic tracking practices, inadequately trained teachers, and unacceptable student-to-counselor ratios (Hillis, 1995; Jones, Yonezawa, Ballesteros, & Mehan, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Reid & Knight, 2006; Yun & Moreno, 2006). All too often, children of color are excluded from the social, political, and economic opportunities to which formal education should provide access (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999). Instead, students of color are pushed toward academic failure and continued social disenfranchisement. Racist policies and beliefs, in part, explain why children and young adults from racially marginalized groups fail to achieve academically at the same rate as their White peers (Blanchett, 2006; Delpit, 1988, 1995; Deyhle, 1995; Fordham, 1996; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Hedges & Nowell, 1999; Kaomea, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1996; Lee, 1996; Ogbu, 1992; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; O'Connor, 1997; Thomas, 2004). Although there have certainly been structural changes to schools throughout the past 100 years, inequality has remained, with students of color consistently provided a lower quality education in a system that purports to provide equal educational opportunities (Alexander, 2001; Lewis, 2003, 2004; Vigil, 1999). This inequality is demonstrated in the test scores from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) shown in Tables 2 and 3. Although there are many who interpret these disparities as evidence of collective individual traits or motivations, such interpretations cannot account for such clearly group-based disparities.

### **HOW ASSIMILATIONIST POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATE TO RACIAL INEQUITY**

Some members of racialized groups have fewer educational choices, which is the result of policies and practices that are imbued with Whiteness, creating and sustaining

**TABLE 2 NAEP Reading Scores by Race**

Race/Ethnicity	Reading Grade 4 (Scale Score) 2005	Reading Grade 8 (Scale Score) 2005
White	229	271
Asian/Pacific Islander	229	271
American Indians/Alaska Natives	204	249
Hispanic	203	246
Black	200	243

*Source.* National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Institute for Educational Statistics, The National Report Card, Washington, DC.

**TABLE 3 NAEP Math Scores by Race**

Race/Ethnicity	Math Grade 4 (Scale Score) 2005	Math Grade 8 (Scale Score) 2005
White	246	295
Asian/Pacific Islander	251	295
American Indians/Alaska Natives	226	264
Hispanic	226	262
Black	220	255

*Source.* National Assessment of Educational Progress, Institute for Educational Statistics NAEP, The National Report Card, Washington, DC.

structural racism (Artiles, Klingner, & Tate, 2006; Reid & Knight, 2006). Consider, for example, the assimilationist policies and practices throughout the history of U.S. education. Public schools were created in part to assimilate and Americanize the nation's youth, and they have consistently discriminated against immigrants and students of color (Donato & Lazerson, 2000). Urban public school systems were organized in the image of "one best system" (Tyack, 1974) that denied the legitimacy of public participation in educational decision making, undermined teacher professionalism, and rejected the validity of ethnic and racial cultural values that were not White. Other assimilationist policies and practices include the early common schools that aimed to create patriotic Americans among the nation's early immigrants, the boarding schools for Indigenous youth, English-only policies and expectations, and current efforts to force the singing of the national anthem and the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance while saluting the American flag that must be hung in some states' classrooms—just to name a few. Although we recognize that some scholars have argued that assimilation is a necessary part of academic success in U.S. schools (D'Souza, 1991; Hirsch, 1987, 1986), we would suggest that although this has historically been true, it does not



necessarily have to continue to be true. By assimilation, we mean an act or series of policies that force those who are not like those in power to become more like them or to model themselves after the “norm.” Programs or policies of assimilation rarely (if ever) take into account what marginalized groups desire or want and, therefore, deny their right to self-determination. Such policies and practices (such as curricular emphasis on English and Eurocentric history) carry out the will of those who have the power to determine how others can behave within a given context (Apple, 2000). Assimilationist policies are intimately related to calls for equality because equality and sameness are conflated such that history, difference, and differential power are obscured and replaced with one same, Eurocentric structure. Thus, to truly achieve equality and justice for all in our schooling system, we suggest that assimilation must *not* be a prerequisite for academic success.

We fully recognize that schools, through explicit and implicit policies, closet and tamp down some identities while promoting others (Artiles et al., 2006; Fine, 1991; Fordham, 1996; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Friend, 1991; Kaomea, 2001; Lee, 1996; Hoffman, 1998; McDermott, Goldman, & Varenne, 2006). These policies often are promoted as colorblind. That is, they seek to make all the students abide by the same rules, protocols, standards, and so forth; however, we argue that they fail to recognize the unique abilities of all learners and they force some students to abandon aspects of their identity that are central to their being, survival, and success. We also recognize that identities are dynamic and contested. When institutions force students to adopt practices and ways that conflict with their own identities, they hinder communities’ rights to self-determination. This has been particularly evident in the history and contemporary practices of educating Indigenous and Puerto Rican students in the United States because of the shared emphasis on sovereignty in these communities (although these are certainly not the only communities with this interest). A number of scholars have documented the ways in which education for American Indian students supports deficit assumptions and assimilatory agendas and, therefore, fails to provide equitable educational opportunities for this group of students at both the K–12 and higher education levels (Brayboy & Castagno, 2006; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Garrod & Larimore, 1997; Lomawaima, 2000; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002, 2006; McCarty & Lomawaima, 2002). Del Valle (1998) makes a similar argument for the education provided to Puerto Ricans in New York City; in this context, the efforts toward bilingual education by community members were subverted by lawyers and other professionals in favor of a remedial model of education. Unfortunately, the list of assimilatory projects in U.S. public schools is long (Bonacich, 2000; Olsen, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999).

Fortunately, some researchers have documented and theorized the ways in which students and communities of color engage in accommodation rather than straight assimilation. We use accommodation to mean making the choice to adopt some behaviors or values for the benefit one sees in them. It can be an act of agency, power, and resistance against assimilation. The process of accommodation may be political and strategic. This accommodation may be seen in academic achievement

(Brayboy, 2004, 2005; Fordham, 1996; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Lee, 1996, 2005; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) or in setting aside the dominant norms of society or of the institution to achieve some other set of goals (Dehyle, 1995; Gibson, 1988). That individuals can make these choices is empowering, although it remains problematic because those who hold power are not forced to examine or reassess. A caveat is in order here; we would argue that there is a state of liminality (V. Turner, 1977) between assimilation and accommodation—that is, there is a place of in-betweenness with respect to assimilation and accommodation; the two can never be fully distinct or separate from one another. This is so, in part, because accommodation is often tinged with resistance-agent movement against assimilation.

### **HOW SEGREGATION AND DESEGREGATION RELATE TO RACIAL INEQUITY**

Perhaps the best-known case of confusing equality for equity occurred in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling and its aftermath. Recognizing the deep inequities of the segregated schooling system, the court ruled for an end to segregation. The court ordered that equality in education should be achieved through desegregation of schools, improving the quality of education for all students (Meyers & Nidiry, 2004; Smiley, 2004). The court cited the research of Dr. Kenneth Bancroft Clark, whose data, along with others', indicated that segregation resulted in negative psychological effects for both Black and White children, although the effects on White children were never cited by the court and are not much discussed even now (Orfield & Lee, 2006). The court's ruling operated on the assumption that if Black and White students went to school together, they would share the same classrooms, teachers, books, and facilities, and this sharing would result in equality. The hope that material equality could be achieved and that it would rectify the inequities of educational and other societal structures has not proven to be the case. The equality sought by the court was in opposition to notions of White supremacy and did not advance individual White interests. It was strongly resisted through White flight from cities, the movement of students from public to private schools, the continued unequal allocation of resources within and between schools, and White control of desegregated schools (Mawdsley, 2004; Peller, 1996). Despite changes in the law to ensure equal access to schools, the hoped-for equality has never reached a state of equity. Equity in this case would mean that every student has access to all the resources that they need in light of persisting historical inequalities, and it would ensure commensurate educational opportunity and true integration (Blanchett, 2006; M. C. Brown, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Fine, Weis, & Powell, 1997; McDermott et al., 2006). The resistance to desegregation was such that more than half a century after the *Brown* decision, segregation still affects the progress of school reform (see Anyon, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2004). This is not to say that desegregation policies have been entirely unsuccessful; they have been at least partially successful in some contexts (Baker, 2001; Orfield & Lee, 2006). But despite the forceful resistance desegregation has encountered, and despite the impossibility of desegregation overcoming all

effects of structural inequities, desegregation is still a worthy and viable goal (Crain & Mahard, 1978; Frankenberg, Lee, & Orfield, 2003; Orfield & Lee, 2005). Importantly, however, many school districts are resegregated/ing (Anderson, 2006; Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2002; Frankenberg et al., 2003; Lee, 2006; McNeil, 1993). The irony of judicial and legislative measures promoting educational equality is the way that they have been marshaled (as in the Seattle case before the Supreme Court) to continue educational inequity through colorblind arguments for present-day individual equality, regardless of the effects of long-term historical inequality.

In 1954, the Supreme Court recognized that segregation was correlated with unequal distribution of resources. This remains the case. Segregation, achieved through various means, continues to be mired in resource inequality (Kahlenberg, 2001). Mickelson's (2001) research indicates that material resources are highly correlated to race. White students continue to have access to more and better material resources—indication that schools are unequal and inequitable. Equity can only be achieved when students of color have equitable (which may mean unequal to ensure fairness) access to the material resources associated with increased academic achievement. This association is predicated not only on access to financial resources but on the ways in which such money is used to advance the equity of students (Greenwald, Hedges, & Laine, 1996).

Schools with fewer resources—disproportionately, schools that serve students of color—have higher levels of focus on discipline than their better-funded counterparts (Kozol, 2005; *The Advancement Project and The Civil Rights Project*, 2000). This focus often leads administrators to prefer “ready-made” discipline policies (N. U. Murray & Garrido, 1995). Zero-tolerance policies are prominent among these policies, but reportedly they do not meet the needs of students, are applied unfairly, and deny rather than advance educational opportunities to students (Bennett, 2002; Casella, 2003). The negative effects of more pervasive emphases on discipline are made even worse because they often are combined with “teaching to the test,” rote memorization, drills, worksheets, and less emphasis on critical thinking (Kohn, 2000, 2004; McNeil, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999)—the cumulative impact being a substandard education for students of color and students in underresourced schools. These policies unequally affect not only students by their race but also by disability (Blanchett, 2006; Losen & Orfield, 2002; McDermott et al., 2006; *The Advancement Project and The Civil Rights Project*, 2000).

Indeed, special education is another school site where students of color are segregated from their White peers (Hosp & Reschly, 2004). Of importance, Artiles et al. (2006) note that “general education cannot afford to ignore the disproportionate representation of minority students in education” (p. 3). Students of color are over-represented in special education (Bennett, 2002; Hosp & Reschly, 2004); this is attributed to a variety of causes, including racism, the use of culturally and linguistically biased assessments, and power differentials between school leaders and parents of color (Eitle, 2002; Losen & Orfield, 2002; Tippeconnic & Faircloth, 2002; Wells & Serna, 1996). This disproportionate representation means that students of color

are attached to the stigma of special education and limited educational access. This stigma attached to the child is one problematic area in the larger debate of race and education. O'Connor and DeLuca Fernandez (2006) note that "disabilities inhere in the child, and the school is merely one site at which special education needs are diagnosed. In contrast, [educators should] hold that schools determine who is more likely to be designated as disabled" (p. 6). McDermott et al. (2006) point out that disabilities are socially constructed and that students of color, or raced students, are at greater risk of being labeled in ways that hinder their abilities to have open educational choices. Reid and Knight (2006) powerfully point to the fact that children (labeled as learning disabled) from White families with annual incomes of more than \$100,000 are increasingly going to college, whereas racialized students, who are labeled as learning or emotionally disabled, have fewer and less open educational choices. McDermott et al. (2006) note, "The American classroom is well organized for the production and display of failure, one child at a time if possible, but group by group if necessary" (p. 15). We would add that the U.S. school system and society is well organized for the production of failure for many racialized students. This educational access is limited not only by special education but by other tracking practices, which are entrenched in limiting educational access (Donato & Lazerson, 2000; Hallinan, 1994). When students of color are steered into lower track classes, any initial differences in achievement are only exacerbated (Holzer & Ludwig, 2003; Oakes, 1985; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2002).

### **HOW CURRICULUM, ASSESSMENT, AND PEDAGOGY RELATE TO RACIAL INEQUITY**

Even when students of color are not officially tracked into remedial classes, they often are subjected to less rigorous curriculum. Under the banner of equality, the learning done in such classrooms is subjected to increasing levels of standardized assessment. When standardized tests are attached to high stakes and resources are taken from schools that already have disparate access to resources in the name of equality, equity is not served. Particularly in classrooms with predominantly racialized student populations, teachers tend to focus their teaching on the low-level skills of these tests (Lomax, West, Harmon, Viator, & Madaus, 1995). Standardized tests and assessments also are detrimental to many students of color because they are culturally and linguistically biased (Jimenez, Garcia, & Pearson, 1995), emphasize low-level thinking skills, and often lead teachers to refocus classroom practice around test-taking at the expense of genuine learning (Foster, 1994; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; Lomax et al., 1995; McDermott et al., 2006; McNeil, 2000). This low-level skill emphasis is not only limiting because of its level of rigor but also because of its Eurocentric emphasis and lack of representation of the experiences and realities of students of color both in materials and content (Banks, 1998; Bernal, 2002; Conti & Kimmel, 1993; Jimenez et al., 1995). Recently, some scholars have argued that standards and assessments theoretically can be aligned with multicultural and culturally relevant education but that in

practice they often are not (Bohn & Sleeter, 2000; Kornhaber, 2004). Unfortunately, the majority of standards and assessments that have been employed in schools have served to reinscribe and reproduce the status quo. These practices are veiled under the banner of meritocracy and equality in that they are touted as being fair—in this case, the idea of fairness actually serves to obscure structural and persistent inequities.

This reproductive nature of curriculum and assessment is closely tied to the low expectations for students of color held by those teachers and policy makers responsible for their development and implementation (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Downey & Ainsworth-Darnell, 2002; Farkas, 2003; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lipman, 1998; Valenzuela, 1999). Given that all of us are enmeshed in the structural racism of society, it is not surprising that teachers often internalize negative messages about students of color; such teacher perceptions negatively affect the academic achievement of their students of color (Bennett, 2002; Buendía, Ares, Juarez, & Peercy, 2004; Buendía, Gitlin, & Doumbia, 2003; R. T. Carter & Goodwin, 1994; Farkas, 2003; Jones et al., 2002; Katz, 1999; Sleeter, 1993; Solórzano, 1997; Tatto, 1996). Such a situation negates not only the potential of students but also the knowledge and skills that students of color bring from their homes and communities to the classroom (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992; Villenas & Dehyle, 1999). School systems rely on meritocracy, which is presumed to be an equalizing power, but when curriculum and assessment are grounded in Eurocentric knowledge paradigms and skills, students of color appear deficient. When the knowledge and skills a student has are not represented or understood in schools, that student is less able to access educational opportunities (Rogoff et al., 2005; Trueba et al., 1997). And when schools do not teach students how to access those educational opportunities, they remain bereft of them (Delpit, 1988, 1995).

Recognizing the racism of such low expectations, many teachers choose to follow colorblind ideologies, doing their best to ignore the racialization of their students. Such a refusal is tantamount to refusing to see the reality that students of color face and only serves to further alienate students and make schools less relevant to their lives (Cochran-Smith, 2000; Pollock, 2004; Trueba et al., 1997).

Recognizing that much of the curriculum directed at students of color is not advancing their educational achievement, educators have tried a variety of inadequate solutions (Diamond & Spillane, 2004). For example, Internet education has been touted as a colorblind solution to such inequities, but the unequal access of students of color to technology only means that the inequities are reentrenched (Moran, 1998; Morse, 2004). There also have been efforts to add programs, classes, and units of curriculum that reflect students' own knowledge and interests, but when these are simply add-ons, they fail to transform the curricula, which can serve to alienate students of color (King, 1995b).

But there also have been successful reforms to curriculum, brought on by teachers and institutions committed to the potential of their students. Much research has documented the power of culturally and linguistically relevant pedagogy to improve the academic achievement of students of color (Braithwaite, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1995b;

McCarty & Romero, 2005; Pewewardy, 1999). Although numerous scholars have explicated theories, definitions, and approaches to multicultural education, most agree that greater equity will ensue and that students of color will be better educated when schools and teachers embrace more critical forms of multicultural education (Abu El-Haj, 2003, 2006; Banks & Banks, 2001, 2004; R. T. Carter, 2000; R. T. Carter & Goodwin, 1994; Cornbleth & Waugh, 1995; Gay, 2000; Grande, 2000; Grant, Elsbree, & Fondrie, 2004; Grant & Sleeter, 1996; Howard, 1999; King, 1995a; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 2004; Sleeter, 1996, 1991; Sleeter & Grant, 2003; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995; Smith, 2005b). When teachers, curriculum, and assessment draw on the strengths students bring to the classroom, students are not only more successful but they also are able to see the relevance of school to their own lives (Apthorp, D'Amato, & Richardson, 2002; Gonzalez & Moll, 2002; Hillis, 1995). This requires that teachers engage with the lives of their students and participate in their communities (Cummins, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1996; Stachowski & Frey, 2002). Culturally and linguistically grounded assessments also are more accurate in determining students' needs, including special education placement (Heimbecker et al., 2001). In addition, when curriculum engages the realities of racism in the classroom, students see their own lives and learn means of navigating the barriers that stand between them and educational achievement, advancing students' own understandings of equity (Banks, 1995; Jarvis, 1996; Moses & Chang, 2006; Yosso, 2002). This unveiling of racism and Whiteness in the curriculum affects the learning of all students, including White students who are likely to know less about structural racism through their own experience (Gurin & Nagda, 2006; Humphreys, 1998). Finally, in the midst of all the structural barriers in schools, teachers' nurturing and belief and interest in students improves their academic achievement (Abu El-Haj, 2003, 2006; Conchas, 2001; Jussim, Eccles, & Maddon, 1996; Smith, 2005a; Terenzini et al., 1994).

Even with good intentions, teachers who lack support and training for teaching toward equity may not have the knowledge and resources to carry through such intentions (Achinstein & Barret, 2004). Thus, if educational reform is going to be successful, teacher training programs must prepare teachers with the knowledge and skills they need to participate in equity-driven changes. For such innovations to reach the teaching force at large, teacher education programs must participate. Even those teachers who aim for social justice often are constrained by their own lack of awareness and end up undermining their ability to transform their own practice. As such, Cochran-Smith (1995) argues that teachers need to be able to engage in "unflinching interrogation" of their own teaching (see also E. Brown, 2004; Mazzei, 2004). Thus, institutions of higher education have an important role to play in both providing increased educational opportunities for students and in preparing future teachers for K-12 schools. At the K-12 level, there is a clear need for both a more diverse teaching force and an increase in the number of White allies on the teacher force. White teachers need better training so that we can educate greater numbers of White allies. Part of this training must include exposure to and dialogue about Whiteness and White identity (Alcoff, 1998; Giroux, 1983; McIntyre, 2000). As

Kailin (1999) has argued, preservice and in-service training is necessary to help White teachers see the complexity of institutionalized racism in schools and in their own classrooms. Ideologies of meritocracy and colorblindness work in opposition to this awareness, which makes this work that much more difficult but also that much more crucial.

### THEORIZING RACE IN THE EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH LITERATURE

Having reviewed the multiple ways race matters and structures inequities in K–12 and having made some preliminary connections to why this matters for higher education and potential life choices for racialized students, we turn now to a discussion about how scholars might connect the idea of race to colorblindness, meritocracy, Whiteness, self-determination, and identity to draw attention to the concepts we believe are most pertinent to addressing the racial inequities outlined above. We suggest that although much good work has been done, scholars need to combine the current work on racial inequities with a stronger focus on how the educational debt is tied not only to race but also to colorblindness, meritocracy, Whiteness, self-determination, and identity. We recognize that these are contested terms, but our understandings of them are grounded in much research and literature.

#### **Race: A Socially Constructed Concept With Material Consequences**

Race is a socially constructed idea (e.g., see Omi & Winant, 1994, for a fuller expression of these notions of the socially constructed nature of race) based on the notion that skin tones are a sign of intellectual and moral competence. Much of the early work of Terman and Yerkes (Terman, 1916; Yerkes, 1915) claimed that certain races inherited inferior IQs that no amount of schooling could ameliorate—nor should it when certain groups were better suited for menial service work. American Indians, African Americans, and Latinos/Latinas are not able to participate fully as informed voters or capable citizens. Out of this eugenics research came the recommendation for special instruction directed to children of these races that would prepare them to be effective workers. The racist idea that aimed to link melanin and intelligence engendered a racist hierarchy (Kamin & Omari, 1998). This is one example of how an institution (science) fabricated the foundations for an ideology that not only devalued people of color but also justified their exploitation. Terman and Yerkes and the later work of C. A. Murray and Herrnstein (1994) have undermined and continue to undermine the possibility for equality of educational opportunities. The systems of oppression and privilege that have emerged from eugenics shape our interactions in ways that work against democratic ideals and goals.

Researchers have long known “that human populations are not unambiguous, clearly demarcated, biologically distinct groups.” Moreover, “evidence from the analysis of genetics (e.g., DNA) indicates that most physical variation, about 94%, lies *within* so-called racial groups. Conventional geographic ‘racial’ groupings differ

from one another only in about 6% of their genes” (American Anthropological Association, 1998). If we know that race is not biological and that there are no direct connections between an individual’s racialized status and her or his ability to learn, then we must question society, its educational and social institutions, and its evaluation mechanisms used to determine who achieves. Importantly, we are convinced that teachers, schooling systems, and societies have constructed physical appearance to mean that some students are more capable than others in intellectual abilities.

The notion that racism is real in spite of the fact that race is socially constructed has been the work of Critical Race Theorists (see Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Lopez, 2003; Lynn, 2004; Parker, 2001; Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Tate, 1997), among others, who acknowledge that racism exists in individual, societal, institutional, and civilizational forms (Scheurich & Young, 1997, 2002). To be sure, racism is not only an antagonistic force with which people of color contend. Racism is also a system of values and practices embodied and enacted by powerful Whites that they need to explore, understand, and undermine. Finally, we recognize that racism is responsible for (overt and covert) calls for assimilation and colorblindness.

### **Colorblindness and Meritocracy: Mechanisms of Equality**

We understand the notion of colorblindness to be (among other things) the inability or unwillingness to see or talk about race and its implications. The gap in understanding in White consciousness comes from generations of lives lived in freedom and immunity from the manifest tribulations of racism, as well as from the retelling of stories that comfort and absolve them from racism. These stories form a history, which, with help from the media, has taught us that color is undesirable and noticing it is offensive. Proponents of colorblindness aim to protect innocence, yet that innocence is pernicious. Ignoring race erases the social and economic implications of a system where the boundaries between success and failure, poverty and privilege are drawn largely across racial lines. The concepts around colorblindness are often most clearly articulated by individuals who say they either “do not see skin color” or by falling back into a democratically based assumption (rooted in a modern reading of the Constitution) that argues “we’re all human beings.” Notably, in his dissent regarding the University of Michigan lawsuit, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia wrote, “In the eyes of the law, we are all one race—American.” It is precisely this language that conservative (and, more recently, neoconservative) scholars, associations, think tanks, and legal organizations have taken up as a guide in their quest to remove all mention of race from educational discourse, admissions and hiring policies, and research. On the other hand, race-cognizant individuals confront their complicity as people who gain privilege from racist structures. They are watchful of the way they think about, and relate to, the Other and how the language they use may implicate them in the structural racism that limits the opportunities of the Other.



Colorblindness is tied to the illusion that race no longer matters in the life of an individual, community, society, and its legal, financial, political, and educational institutions. Directly tied to the illusion is either an explicit denial or an ignorance of the history, present, and future of race relations. If race no longer matters, it allows individuals and groups who hold financial, political, and educational power the ability to maintain policies and the resulting practices that keep them, and those like them, in power—the result of colorblindness.

In addition, colorblindness can be a defense mechanism used by those in power because of the direct connection between race relations (historical, present, and future) and conflict and shame. Recognition of race and racism are necessarily tied to these emotions; nevertheless, it is imperative that our attention stays focused on the salience of race in today's society. Such recognition allows us to engage in conversations and research that ask important questions, such as, why are there such disparate results between the level of academic achievement of marginalized students (such as students of color) and of those students who fit dominant society's ideal? How is their group membership treated in education?

Colorblindness and meritocracy are very much connected. Both concepts are touted as positive and fundamental American ideals. Both relate to understandings of freedom, equality, and justice, and perhaps most important, both serve as barriers to achieving greater equity in schooling and larger society. Much of our understanding of colorblindness is based on a meritocratic ideology that teaches that individuals move ahead on the basis of their inherent talent and hard work. Under this ideology, the individual is paramount. All other aspects that give meaning to the way we as Americans (or more precisely, citizens and residents of the United States) live our lives are not considered when assessing achievement. This worldview fails to recognize that many individuals of color; women; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people identify as both individuals and as members of groups, so others treat them simply as members of the larger group: society. This larger group membership is assumed (incorrectly) to negate all other group memberships. Racism exists, in part, because policies and those who create and enact them treat individuals solely as members of society, effectively negating any semblance of fairness by erasing the very real and powerful implications of their group memberships. The erasure or invisibility of these implications has profound implications on privilege, inequity, and maintaining the racial status quo in academic achievement. It is to an examination of Whiteness that we now turn.

### **Whiteness: Maintaining Privilege, Inequity, and the Racial Status Quo**

Examinations of race in education have recently included numerous explicit discussions of Whiteness and White supremacy. Whiteness studies are so crucial because the so-called “underachievement” of students of color must be understood as made up of both “Black” and “White” causes and predecessors (Powell, 1997). As Winant (2001) has argued, Whites and Whiteness can no longer be exempt from

racial discourses and projects. Although educational researchers all need to do a better job of talking about race, racism, and Whiteness (Rains, 1998), we do not mean to imply a decentering of the experiences, learning, and achievement of students of color (Howard, 2000). Rather, we argue that some attention to Whiteness may help illuminate why the educational debt is so persistent and why equality is a continuous stand-in for equity in educational debates, policies, and practices. Blanchett (2006) is more direct when she writes,

The problem of disproportionate representation of African Americans [and we would argue American Indians/Alaska Natives, some Asian Americans, Latinas/Latinos, and Pacific Islanders] in special education is not just a special education issue or concern but, instead, must be viewed in the context of White privilege and racism that exist in American society as a whole and the educational system, specifically. (p. 24)

Whiteness is sometimes difficult to name and often slips between various definitions without warning (Rasmussen, Klinenberg, Nexica, & Wray, 2001). Discussions of Whiteness also become complicated because of the ways in which it intersects with class, gender, sexuality, and other identity categories. Although most Whiteness scholars agree that it is intimately connected with power, there is less consensus regarding what Whiteness is exactly (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998). Multiple scholars have written about Whiteness as a set of unearned privileges enjoyed by White people, a normalization of what's right, and a norm against which everything else gets measured (Fine, Powell, Weis, & Mun Wong, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993, 2001; McIntosh, 1988; Roediger, 2000; Thompson, 1999, 2000, 2003, 2004). Other scholars have provided illuminating historical analyses of Whiteness—particularly how Whiteness has been conflated with property and individual property rights through the law (Harris, 1995), how Whiteness has been possessively invested in by groups throughout history to secure their own interests and guard those interests against the encroachment of others (Lipsitz, 1998), and how Whiteness has morphed and taken on new forms depending on time and context (Duster, 2001). These characteristics of Whiteness help illuminate its connections to meritocracy and colorblindness. Of importance, history and the law have conspired to veil the fact that Whiteness equals privilege and to allow White people to claim (and genuinely believe) that we are all equal in a democracy—the connections to colorblind ideologies are never hard to find (Blanchett, 2006; O'Connor & DeLuca Fernandez, 2006; Reid & Knight, 2006).

One helpful explanation of Whiteness is provided by Dyson, who argues that Whiteness is an identity, ideology, and an institution (Chennault, 1998; Dyson, 1996). As an identity, Whiteness refers to the racial characteristic of being White, and although some good work has been done on Whiteness as an identity in various contexts (Perry, 2002), we are more concerned here with Whiteness as an ideology and an institution because of the ways this informs educational achievement and issues of equality and equity in education. Put bluntly, institutions are organized such that being White buys both privilege and protection from discrimination, distrust, questions, and a host of other negative experiences (Brookfield, 2003; Fine, 1997). This subverts opportunities

for people of color in policies and practices that appear race-neutral. The system of dominance allows for the re-creation and continuation of privilege, even by those who are well intentioned. The system was set up by White people to benefit White people, who mystify the system and remove the agent and then continue to benefit from the system without being held responsible (Leonardo, 2004). In other words, Whites have successfully made it appear that meritocracy is real and that the United States is a level playing field while *also* obscuring their (our) own role in creating and maintaining a system that is neither level nor meritocratic but instead benefits them (us).

Because we are primarily interested in Whiteness as an ideology and an institution, we employ the notion of White supremacy to make sense of the pervasive and oppressive nature of Whiteness. By White supremacy, we do not mean the notion that drives hate groups around the world; rather, we refer to the historical power of White people in this country manifested particularly in the law and its practice. Because Whites have believed themselves superior to all others, their laws have made them beneficiaries. The Constitution of the United States, for example, summarily endorsed White supremacy when it counted a Black person as three-fifths of one person. This supremacy was fortified with the policies and treatment of slaves and ex-slaves, American Indians, immigrants from China and other Asian countries, Mexicans from annexed Mexico, Japanese citizens who were interned during World War II, and other groups who were relegated to stations that served at the whim of those in power. White supremacy is sometimes blatant, as is evidenced by the above examples. At other times, it is insidious and quite subtle in the everyday microaggressions experienced by people of color and perpetuated by White people (Lee, Spencer, & Harpalani, 2003; Pierce, 1974; Smith, 2005a; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Either way, White supremacy leads to entitlement among those who are privileged and, too often, tacit acceptance by those who are not, in such a way that we come to expect certain social conditions and view those expectations (and conditions) as natural and normal. Hence, when benefits are perceived to be infringed on (as in, e.g., affirmative action and school desegregation), it is understood as unfair and reverse racism—as evidenced in the 2006 Seattle case heard by the U.S. Supreme Court.

### SELF-DETERMINATION

Self-determination is the ability to define oneself and what's best for oneself and one's own community (economically, politically, and socially—in this case, as related to education). In each case of self-determination, there are both implicit and explicit moves to resist the pressures to assimilate. If a community decides who they are as people, this may (or may not) differ from what may be viewed as the "norm." However, claiming the right to make those decisions is a direct challenge to the power of others to define community and self. Self-determination entails giving communities the power to take charge of both the curricular material presented in schools and the preparation of teachers who understand the local political, economic, cultural, and racial contexts (Cochran-Smith, 1995, 2000, 2004; Fine et al., 1997; Freire, 1973; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Darling-Hammond, 2000; Nieto, 1999). The

ways in which American Indians have responded to assimilationist educational policies such as boarding schools (Adams, 1995; Almeida, 1997; Child, 1999; Lomawaima, 1994, 2000; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002) and Indian schools (McCarty, 2001; McCarty, Yamamoto, Watahomigie, & Zepeda, 1997; Philips, 1983; Wax, Wax, & Dumont, 1964) stand as notable examples of what communities can do to determine for themselves how the education of their youth will proceed (McCarty, 2005; Trujillo, Figueira, Viri, & Macuelito, 2003).

But American Indians, in their quest to actualize their unique political status, are not the only group that has engaged new notions in their struggle for self-determination. There is a clear connection between self-determination and resistance (Giroux, 1983). Resistance is a political act whereby individuals and communities refuse to be defined by, assimilated by, or coerced into inauthentic behaviors by individuals and policies that wield power in institutions such as schools, which are key sites where self-determination can have maximum impact for equity (Moses, 2002b). There are examples of such resistance to assimilation through self-determination in all communities of color in the United States and through various strategies (Cammarota, 2004; Knight, 2003; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Some of this resistance is readily identifiable as resistance-faculty and students working within schools (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Donato, 1999) and academia (hooks, 1994; Napier, 1995; Williams, 1991) and exercising self-determination through parental involvement (López, 2001) and community networking (Walsh, 1998; Zine, 2000). Other resistance strategies may be less identifiable to power holders. For example, schools that enforce colorblind policies—effectively closeting identities of students of color—encounter explicit forms of resistance, such as “behavioral problems” and students who drop out (Deyhle, 1995, 1998; Fine, 1991). There are other subtler forms of resistance that individuals enact to skirt the stifling, restraining policies and practices that include conforming to accepted practices of schooling to be academically successful (Brayboy, 2004, 2005; Cammarota, 2004; P. L. Carter, 2005; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Fordham, 1996; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Gayles, 2005; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; Yosso, 2000). Ultimately, self-determination is a political act whereby communities and groups seek to define for themselves the conditions of schooling and life. We do not deny the salience of power that others often hold over marginalized communities, and we are not under the impression that these communities can simply change the social order. We do, however, recognize that groups and communities can and do work toward defining themselves in spite of the power differential.

Central to a return to the natural state of self-determination is the work of researchers challenging assimilationist policies in research methodologies and the epistemologies that undergird those choices (Tillman, 2002). A significant methodological shift in education research is the growing focus on Critical Race Theory (CRT; see the recent Lynn, Yosso, Solórzano, & Parker, 2002, review of CRT literature). One of the important issues that CRT and other methodological concerns highlight is the importance of a researcher’s positionality (Banks & Jewell, 1995; Best, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Twine & Warren, 2000). Scholars also have

raised the question of how the underrepresentation of people of color in the field limit the discoveries possible (Donato & Lazerson, 2000; Garcia & Baird, 2000; Gordon, 1997). Also limiting to the research about race in education is the domination of Eurocentric epistemologies in the field (Gasman, Gerstl-Pepin, Anderson-Thompkins, Rasheed, & Hathaway, 2004; Maher & Tetreault, 1993; Scheurich & Young, 1997). However, a number of researchers have advanced research methodologies that rely on the epistemologies of communities of color (Bernal, 1998; Grande, 2004; Kaomea, 2001).

### **Identity: Multiple Variables Affecting Racial Inequities**

When researchers, policymakers, and teachers recognize that individual and community histories are not equal, they can move policies toward equity. Often, members from marginalized groups who are able to exist and are successful on a number of levels under the policies articulated by those with power may be called assimilated by those with power and members of their own group. We recognize that there is conflict as to what counts as assimilation or the idea that identity politics are real and contested. As scholars, regardless of our racialized status, we must recognize that we are, in fact, part of a system that has racist policies and procedures that we may enact and be complicit in carrying out through our presence and participation in the institution. At its base, however, assimilation exists in a manner that is incomplete. By this, we mean that the verb *assimilating* exists but the actual state of being assimilated is an illusion. A state of liminality can never be overcome by assimilation. Because we believe that race still matters, those individuals who are physically different continue to encounter the racist policies and assumptions that will never fully allow complete assimilation. Returning to the biological definition of race, society returns to a state of homeostasis by marginalizing individual members of a certain race or marginalized status. In this way, individual and community identities are targeted by society.

Identity has become a catchall term to discuss how individuals make sense of who they are in relation to other individuals, communities, and society (Hoffman, 1998). We suggest that identity is a social process in which individuals mutually constitute each other in and through their relationships with others, community, and society, that is, it both includes and moves beyond notions of self (Gergen, 1995; Goffman, 1955; Hoffman, 1998; Wortham, 2001) to incorporate notions of how community and society play into the discussions of who individuals are (Bradley, 1995; Brayboy, 2004; Davis, 1996; Deyhle, 1995; Eckert, 1996; Fordham, 1996; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; K. Hall, 2002; S. Hall, 1992; Lee, 1996; Pillow, 2003; Warriner, 2004a, 2004b). We also recognize that there is a multiplicity of identities that make up individuals, communities, and societies. Scholars have examined how these identities intersect with one another and affect the way that individuals act on and are acted on by institutional structures. These scholars have focused on a variety of intersections—race and geography (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Buendia et al., 2004), race and class (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Crain & Marhard, 1978; Hones, 1999; Lareau & Horvat, 1999), race and ethnicity (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Lee, 1996; Pang,

Kiang, & Pak, 2003), race and culture (De Graaf, 1986; Downey & Ainsworth-Darnell, 2002; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; James, Chavez, Beauvais, Edwards, & Oetting, 1995; Lee et al., 2003; Smith & Kulynych, 2002; Trueba et al., 1997; Valenzuela, 1999), race and language (Abedi, 2004; Cummins, 2000; Trueba et al., 1997), race and immigration status (Hones, 2002; Lee, 1997, 2001, 2005; McKay & Wong, 1996; Midobuche, 2001; Olsen, 1997; Rong & Brown, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999), race and gender (Alemán, 2000; Allen, 1986; Fine & Weis, 1998; Jackson, 1998; Lopez, 2003; C. S. V. Turner, 2002), and race and sexual orientation (Athanases, 1996; Snider, 1996). Within an individual's multiple identities, those identities that come to the fore are often strategic, based on the spaces in which the identities are negotiated and enacted and the demands coming from these contexts. Often, these identities get conflated; parts of people's identities are hard to isolate and there are strong correlations between many of these factors and race. However, it is important that we not lose sight of the fact that race alone (as well as in intersection with other identities) is a socially constructed reality with significant educational consequences in U.S. schools.

### **CONCLUSION: RACE STILL MATTERS DESPITE OUR UNANSWERED QUESTIONS**

In this chapter, we have examined recent research on race in education. This research makes clear that racialized groups continue to have unequal access to educational resources. It also makes clear that equality by itself may not be able to overcome the long history of influence of structural racism on American schools and racialized communities. Equality, that is, sameness, would not create equity for these communities. Students in racialized communities continue to score lower on national standardized tests. They also continue to be subjected to policies and practices focusing on assimilation, which create situations where students are less able to make identity choices. These students are increasingly segregated from their White peers by school and track, and racialized students' schools and tracks are provided with fewer resources and less rigorous curriculum. All this has not gone unnoticed by many teachers; many of these teachers have found ways to alter their pedagogy to create more equity in their classrooms. This research points us to a stronger focus on how Ladson-Billings's educational debt is tied to race and also to colorblindness, meritocracy, Whiteness, self-determination, and identity.

Race still matters in the sense that structural racism is abundant and children of color continually underperform according to standardized measures of achievement in the current educational system. Most African American, American Indian, Latinas/Latinos, and Pacific Islanders are underrepresented in gifted areas and overrepresented in special education. These groups too are less likely to be adequately prepared for college and have fewer opportunities to make choices about their futures. Through policies and institutional mechanisms, racism is firmly entrenched yet invisible to many. The preponderance of research we have highlighted in this chapter points to the fact that there are tremendous racial inequities in schooling. Ladson-Billings (2006) remarked that the educational debt for people of color is at a crisis level and her use of the term

“educational debt” rather than “achievement gap” highlights the fact that the United States still has debts to pay to communities (especially children) of color.

Equitable democracy can exist only if we choose to see color and are attentive to it and conscious of our existence in all its nexuses. We must ask questions such as, How is our life tied with the lives of others? How is our privilege at someone else’s expense? How are the decisions we make tied to the well-being of others no matter how removed by race, nationality, or geography? Ultimately, what happens when individual perspectives of equal or equitable access conflict within a system that is rooted in zero-sum relationships that conceive of resources as limited? Furthermore, we wonder if access is indeed equal and if equality of educational opportunity exists or if it is simply an imagined ideal that allows those who have real opportunities to claim that those who do not are either inferior or simply need to work harder.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The education debt refers to the *cumulative* impact of centuries of educational inequities related to funding, curricula, resources, teachers, segregation, and so forth. This education debt is composed of historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral components and requires a more holistic, historic, and comprehensive analysis of schooling than that implied by the focus on achievement gaps.

<sup>2</sup> Of importance, Guinier’s (1994) writings and views eventually cost her a nomination as an Assistant Attorney General under the presidency of William Jefferson Clinton. Clearly, engaging in this work is not without costs.

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