

# Cognitive Dissonance and the Reproduction of the Black Achievement Gaps in the US



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By

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*To my beloved purple gang who live and thrive oblivious to the  
rules and limits of the dominant paradigm:*

*Hassan*

\*

*Muhammad, Omar, Iman & Salam*

\*

*Hanief, Safiyah & Maimuna*

\*

*Hassan & Maryam*

\*

*Khadijah*

\*

*Abdul Rahman & Ayah*

*May Allah give you good health, clarity of mind, sound purpose, a  
heart overflowing with love for all mankind, and the strong drive to  
advocate for the rights of the voiceless and those most in need.*



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## PREFACE

For researchers and social scientists, no country in the world is more absorbing and perplexing than the United States (U.S.), where democracy and equal opportunity is its claim but racism is its practice. The problem of race in the U.S is so stubborn and discrimination so widespread, that it gives reason for serious concern over the future of the country. America's inability to shake off its racial constructs is not confined to Black Americans. Racism is a significant challenge to human progress, democracy, social harmony, and peace. These fears are with good reason. As riots, police atrocities, premeditated mass killings, Anti-Muslim and Jewish targeted attacks, and predictions of explosions have punctuated news forums and symposiums nationally and internationally, revealing America's social defects and racial inequities.

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois is one of America's most prominent race theorists. Du Bois (1903a) asserts that the secret to social progress is to understand who, what part, and how the forces of domination develop social constructs that define and shape the destiny of future generations and the century. Mindful of the influence of America's dominant social and racial constructs, this book explores the-who; the-what, and the-how public school systems are reproducing the Black student achievement gap and reaffirming the dominant hierarchical structures.

The book integrates Du Bois's racial theoretical framework and the theory of cognitive dissonance to describe the schism between principled objectives and objectionable actions. It also attempts to explain the operational employment of cognitive dissonance, selective perception, and cognitive bias that allow school leaders and teachers to hold and express laudable ideals while implementing disparate school policies and practices tailored to target Black students. This book also examines why and how the categorical employment of cognitive dissonance sanctions the mistreatment of Black students, authorizes their academic exclusion, and

pushes Black students to neglect and abandon their education (McIntosh, 1996).

Education is not a quantitative exercise but a qualitative endeavor. The book argues that the various federal school reform initiatives genuinely proposed to address the Black student achievement gap are undermined as a result of cognitive dissonance and deeply embedded racial beliefs that foster the articulation of bias and anti-Black school policies. Deep-seated bias triggers *de facto* racial constructs, and cognitive dissonance masks educators' hidden partiality. Corrupt social/racial beliefs undermine the quality of teaching and learning of Black students, and infect the perceptions and values of White students and every ethnic and racial subgroup of students (Allport, 1954; Ellemers, 2017; Holmes & Stanfield, 1995; Katz, 1998; Kelman, 1976; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). All of which make it possible to reproduce cyclical and intergenerational social and racial inequities, and warp and influence the perspective of White students as well as other students (Allport, 1954; Bar-Tal, 2001; Bird & Higgins, 2011; Goffman, 1963; Memmi, 2014; Wray, 2006).

Racism coupled with cognitive dissonance at the school level is defining and shaping the destiny of Black students and the character of the nation. Nevertheless, this is not meant to suggest that the U.S. public school system is doomed. On the contrary, schools are made up of people, and the values they hold shape school policies. Human values are not terminally set and could evolve to reflect higher moral and ethical standards to produce positive and nurturing school cultures and restore the character of America's future generations.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 81% of public schoolteachers are White (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2022a). Since the 1960s this rate has been largely static. Thus, White educators cannot escape their responsibility for the past and current conditions and outcomes. Nevertheless, considering the large representation of White educators in public school systems, they are by far the most consequential factor in transforming the U.S. public school system. And that is a good thing. A great number of public school educators are stunned and outraged by the uptick in the number of legislations that limit their ability to freely explore racism in their classrooms (Strauss, 2021), and

more than many desire a genuine cultural and social shift. However, this requires educators to fully understand how any trace of bias including subtle bias within the deep crevices of their minds affects their interaction with Black students and infects White students.

Although racialized belief systems are structurally and narrowly set, armed with facts and under the right conditions, social beliefs can expand and evolve more tolerant (Karlins, Coffman & Walters, 1969; Katz, 2003; Perception Institute, 2014). To change school leaders and teachers' social beliefs and behavior requires an authentic appraisal of the role public schools play in saturating racially biased school policies, and to identify and remove school practices that profoundly impact students and society.

Armed with facts, school districts, school leaders, and teachers can reset public school policies. But it takes a serious and sincere effort to cleanse school systems of their built-in structural and institutional prejudicial practices. Simply examining the social factors that brought about the acceptance of differential school policies is not enough. System change requires analyzing the historical role the U.S. public school system played in maintaining the White paradigm. It also requires deconstructing educators' social and cultural beliefs that are responsible for producing successive Black achievement gaps. This is not to resist or escape reality, but to surpass and 'turn its prose into poetry' (Royce, 1913, 1916).

Knowledge is power (Hobbes, 1651). Racism is a White predicament (Massey & Denton, 1993, Memmi, 1965; Miller, 2013; Omi & Winant, 1986). Whiteness, its social and racial constructs, its complicated implicit knowledge, its problematic history, deformed theological underpinnings, and cognitive processes, is associated with the experience and parallel reality of one group of people- and none other (Freire, 1970; Gaunt, Leyens & Sindic, 2004; Goff, Eberhardt, Williams & Jackson, 2008; Mathews, 2004; Memmi, 1965). Confronting truths informs school leaders and empowers schoolteachers. The Black student achievement gap is not the problem of Black students, but a problem generated within the schoolhouse. It is a problem that can only be resolved by those responsible for articulating and implementing racialized school practices.

The transformation of the U.S. public school system requires a commitment to learning and improvement. How, after all, do school

leaders and teachers transform school culture and practices without first learning about the history and roots of past school failures? Solving school failures requires the reengineering of the school cultures where educators see themselves in a new light and act accordingly. In the absence of learning, the U.S. public school system and its entire workforce will simply repeat old failed practices and outcomes. And even if educators agree to change, without a comprehensive plan to uproot cognitive bias from every school policy and practice, school change would remain superficial and improvements would be either meager or short-lived. According to Senge (1990), transformative change occurs when the organizational perspective of the collective and the individual is confronted and a better understanding emerges of how these perspectives interact and influence the operation and policies of the institution. Understanding these simple truths brings about the necessary knowledge to create a learning school community that is prepared to use factuality and acquire the necessary skills to transfer school cultures and change school policies, practices, attitudes and behaviors to reflect knowledge based on truths and insight (Belenky & Stanton, 2000). Knowledge-based transformative institutions are the most efficacious and productive organizations (Senge, 1990).

For public schools to transcend the realities they fostered and perpetuated, it demands the active involvement of school leaders, teachers, and staff to learn, grasp, interpret, teach, and appreciate the powerful impact of bias on school policies and student teaching and learning. Healing begins by recognizing and confronting truths (Bryant-Davis, 2007). Healing equips and motivates schoolteachers and staff with the social competencies to overcome personal and professional barriers (Elliot & Church, 1997). Healing creates room for the involvement of the affected Black community to gain an understanding of the predicament of Whiteness and the presumption of privilege that facilitates the production of exclusionary school policies (Tutu, 1999). It allows educators to assess, monitor and address bias before it becomes an irreversible problem. Engaging with the affected community reduces bias (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000, 2006). Collaborating with the affected community and advocating for social justice and equity heals students and the school community. All

of which are necessary to usher school-wide initiatives for school transformation and breakthroughs (Muhammad, 2009).

Democracies are anchored on sound educational systems. Democratic societies depend on schools that educate children in the same manner whether they may be rich or poor (Grote, 1880). Righteous educators never fail to produce “multitudes” of enlightened national heroes (Adams, 1785). Virtuous educators build and sustain good societies (Royce, 1916). They honor every student and invoke courage, strength, character, boldness, ability, talent, vigor, ingenuity, competence, shrewdness, effort and energy (Tutu, 1999). Moral educators restore democracies and build beloved communities (Royce, 1916). Reforming schools and society begins with virtuous educators who directly affect the education of the multitudes to advance the social progress of the nation (Adams, 1785; Sen, 1999).

School leaders have the means to orchestrate the transformation of the schoolhouse. By exercising their full authority to rid schools of structural bias, they place teachers in a position where they can employ all available tools to achieve the aims of equal and inclusive education (El Bouhali, 2015; Muhammad, 2009). Once equal education is cemented as the primary and authentic goal of school activities, school leaders’ semiotic moral authority, unbiased standards, and vigilance in uprooting structural bias and predatory beliefs are sufficient to ensure the educational process is truly inclusive (El Bouhali, 2015). The coupling of virtuous school leaders and impartial teachers is the most efficacious and revolutionary force in reshaping the trajectory of public schooling and society.

This book does not aim to lay the blame or incriminate the U.S. public school system or color White educators as intentional participants in creating the Black student achievement gap. This book intends to connect the dots and make the argument that genuine equal public education is important not just for Black students, but for the progression of society and the nation. Since its inception, America has aspired for equality and justice for all its citizens. Most would argue equality is the foundation of this nation, however, it remains a work in progress. Similarly, public school systems aspire to provide equal education, and they too are work in progress. In the meantime, public schools can get us

closer to or further away from realizing our democratic principles and rights.

To explain the Black student achievement phenomena, the book systematically analyzes public school policies in a wide variety of circumstances and periods, especially those related to the historical evolution of White educators' assumptions, accepted values, and behaviors that feed into public school procedures. The book also attempts to conduct a candid review of the historical and situational context of Whiteness, the built-in racial, social, and personal constructs that compromise the integrity of educators and the public school system, and proposes organizational and structural changes to transform schooling and expunge predatory belief systems to build healthy school environments and create the space for authentic teaching and learning.

Constructive school change will not happen with angry confrontation or incrimination- both of which lead to destructive backlash and suppress self and institutional reflections. The transformation of the public school system requires a dynamic process that is demanding in its reliance on facts and the building of trust and safe spaces, affirming relations with public schoolteachers, school leaders, and the affected Black community to conduct a spirited inquiry to enlighten and focus on the pertinent issues. This requires personal and professional courage to examine oneself and the institution. To discover that which needs to be reorganized, altered or outright erased. To tackle the issues that educators are aware of, but most would rather ignore. To gain insight from inspecting school policies, daily procedures, habitual thoughts, and actions that impact Black students, the school community, and the nation. Matters that are often assumed benign and unnoticed, and problematic issues that most would rather ignore. Only then would public school leaders and schoolteachers usher in an illuminating, dynamically organic and self-affirming educational process to reconstruct public schoolhouses, heal society, and restore democracy.

And yet, for public school educators who aspire to build the 'Ephesian' social unity for school, community, and society, they need to be able to see what is inhibiting them. If the obstacle is personal or a result of collective will, they need to see and confront it. But where there is no personal or collective ill will, then what are the possible structures that

perpetuate and even increase the racialization of the nation? These questions are not hypothetical. In fact, one of the unintended consequences of the growth of the school privatization movement stems from public school systems' racialized school climates and outcomes, where students are singled out and divided from each other.

The purpose and focus of this book are limited in scope. However, the impact of racialized school policies extends beyond the nation's borders. None can underestimate the important role public school educators' play in shaping the attitude and behaviors of America's future leaders. The early formation of cognitive bias sways and shapes America's intergenerational attitudes and behaviors towards other nations and peoples. Public schools' differential values impacts the moral compass of the young Americans responsible for leading and crafting the future institutional decisions of America's public and private sector, and the international priorities and geopolitical policies of the nation.

*Finally, the candid content of this book may ruffle some feathers. However, the intent of this book is to raise awareness about the most critical factors that impede the progress of society and the nation. While this book may not be an exciting read, if it touches the heart of one, then this book is worth its spilled ink.*





# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

The educational process is deliberate. And the moral character and perspective of educators cannot be divorced from the educational process (Adams, 1785; Helliwell, 2001; Wolf, 2004). The educational process, its procedures, and outcomes reveal the subjective values, incentives, postulations, and motives of school leaders and teachers (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Educators' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors flow into the academic rituals of the schoolhouse. The educational process can enlighten students to become beacons of knowledge, or damper and dim students' knowledge and ambitions into buried amber.

Educational systems are powerful institutional centers that could arrest the progress of society or contribute to the progression of society. Public school officials are endowed with the authority to expand students' academic opportunities or limit students' educational access and future progress. Public school educators are either social liberators or agents of oppression. Education is either an instrument for the maintenance of the status quo or facilitates students' acquisition of the tools and knowledge to empower them to realize their potential and become agents of goodwill.

Young Americans, irrespective of color, background, ethnicity, social status, and ability, have one single protected right: the right to free K-12 public education. Educators are tasked with inspiring students to attain a high-quality education regardless of students' racial affinity and background (Mann, 1980). Quality schooling develops students' intellectual, social, cultural, and moral capital (Dewey, 1916; Du Bois, 1903b; Mann, 1907; Vygotsky, 1987). Education expands students' choices and the freedoms they enjoy (Adams, 1785; Du Bois, 1903a, 1903b; Sen, 1999). Educators shape Black students' academic progress and future economic status (Barro & Lee, 1996; Vinovskis, 1970). Quality education contributes to upward intergenerational economic mobility (Wilkie, 2007). Quality

teaching and learning enhances students' human capital and spurs the growth of the nation's economy (Wolf, 2004; Harmon, Oosterbeek & Walker, 2003; Hanushek & Kimko, 2000; Heckman et al., 2008; Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2004). Consequently, educators are the most effective societal agents in advancing the social progress and upward mobility of students (Barro & Lee, 1996; Hanushek & Woessmann, 2012).

Education, democracy, and social justice are inextricably linked. Quality education is one of the few available methods to combat social and racial inequities in the U.S. (Akiba, LeTendre & Scribner, 2007). Educators liberate students from prejudice, promote equality, and foster civic solidarity (Neem, 2017). Public schools reflect educators' personal values, coveted interests, and instructional objectives (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). They can strengthen or weaken democracy, arrest or promote racial bias, and restrain or advance academic and social inequities.

According to recent data, White educators represent 81.5% of public schoolteachers (NCES, 2021a). Consequently, White public school educators are the most influential actors in shaping the educational process of public school systems. Educators influence students' social progress and future earnings (Barro & Lee, 1996; Hanushek & Wößmann, 2007). Meanwhile, the history of public schooling is no more than an archive of policies and practical examples where racial and social inequities are procreated.

Centuries of discriminatory policies produced generations of poor Black Americans. Black Americans constitute 13.2% of the U.S. population and make up 23.8% of America's poor (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020, Tamen, 2017). In 2020, the U.S median family income was \$78,500 (U.S. Department of Health and Urban Development [HUD], 2021), and one in five (19.5%) Black Americans earned less than the federal poverty threshold (\$26,500 for a family of four) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

Educators stimulate the social and economic progress of students and spur a more equal distribution of income (Barro, 2001; Hanushek & Wößmann, 2007). Inclusive school systems expand students' opportunities and economic benefits, and curb social inequities (Barro & Lee, 2000, 1993; The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 1998). Pluralistic and democratic societies depend on public school systems to expand young peoples' economic opportunities and

restrain social inequities. According to Bird & Higgins (2011), poverty and intergenerational transmission of poverty are largely driven by the social and educational structures that influence the lifelong earnings of individuals and their families.

The values and beliefs of the people who run public school systems dictate the progress of young Americans and society (Du Bois, 1903a, 1903b; Helliwell, 2001; Wolf, 2004). Public school systems are made up of school leaders, administrators, and schoolteachers engaged in the education of young people. Collectively, they control and regulate the academic and economic progress of Black students, shape and mend the values of White students' and the social progress of society. Educators' values and the school programs they design and implement can either promote or depress students' social competencies and economic prospects. Accordingly, public school systems determine the social development and future status of young Americans (Barro & Lee, 1996). The forces that control the levers of social progress mold the destiny of future generations (Aldridge, 2008; Du Bois, 1903b; 1915, 1920).

Black students' progress hinges on the proclivity of public school systems to prepare them to become impactful learners and well-functioning adults and citizens (Colby & Witt, 2000; Muhammad, 2020; Unite for Quality Education, 2013). Educators form the ethos of future generations (Dewey, 1916). They reinforce society's values (Farr-Darling, 2002; Gutmann, 1987, 2004; Jones, Bouffard & Weissbourd, 2013; Westheimer, 2006). Thus, the progress of Black students- past and present- is contingent on the social constructs and values of public school educators.

Public school systems, when galvanized to meet the needs of students, set in motion the entire spectrum of students' developmental processes that would have not been possible without quality schooling (Vygotsky, 1978). Conversely, ethically compromised school systems set in motion school policies that impede the academic progress of Black students and infect the perceptions and values of all other students.

A mountain of research found the U.S. public school systems share the largest responsibility for generating the Black student achievement gap (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Giroux, 1988; Faubert, 2012; Fryer & Levitt, 2004; Field, Kuczera & Pont, 2007; Hanushek &

Rivkin, 2009; Morris & Perry, 2016). Unfair school practices bear the blame for the academic outcomes of Black students (Faubert & Blacklock, 2012; Field, et al., 2007; Heckman, 2011). For example, a study that analyzed 16,248 student records and reviewed large hierarchical and longitudinal school data sets and records uncovered specific school policies that single out Black students (Morris & Perry, 2016). Critical pedagogical analysis of school systems' disparate school practices found racism and prejudice are woven into the fabric of public schooling (Anyon, 1981; Apple, 2014; Au, 2008; Blackburn, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Giroux, 1988). These practices are bound to deliver odious results.

Schools employ one set of policies specifically fashioned to target Black students and another for White students. Such targeted school practices are at best negligent if not cruel. When considering the long history of racism and the important role members of the dominant social construct play in reinforcing group values leads to one conclusion. Disparate school policies are designed to exclude Black students and challenge their academic progress and future progress.

Moreover, public schools' chronic employment of targeted school policies reveals the cultural and racial fault lines of educators. They also inform teachers' expectations (Boser, Wilhelm & Hanna, 2014; Ferguson, 2003; Gershenson, Holt & Papageorge, 2016; Good, 1981; Goldstein, 2002; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). And determine students' performance and future orientation (Freire, 1970; Graham, 1994; Hamilton & Gifford, 1976; Harro, 2010; Rosenthal & Babad, 1985). Thus, the harmful impact of these practices is much greater than its intended target (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998; Rothbart, Fulero, Jensen, Howard & Birrell, 1978; Tropp, 2003).

While public schools' systematic application of dissimilar school policies is inexcusable, the implementation of targeted school policies is harmful to the entire public student population, including those students who observe the administration of dual and separate rules, disparate student expectations, and differential school procedures (Dunton & Fazio, 1997; Esses, Haddock & Zanna, 1993; Rothbart, et al., 1978). Meanwhile, educators' low expectations of Black students transmit their intrinsic attitude and judgment (Hansen, 2001a, 2001b). All of which inform

students' racialized notions, values, and perspectives (Derman-Sparks & Ramsay, 2006). Accordingly, the influence of differential school policies is not confined to Black students. Repressive school systems are instruments for moral suppression and social oppression (Sen, 1999).

The systematic employment of exclusive school policies harms the interest of all students irrespective of color or background. Disparate school policies impact the future disposition and behavior of White students (Deming, 2017). Targeted school policies arrest the academic progress of Black students, and the social development of young White students (Clark, 1995; Derman-Sparks & Ramsay, 2006).

Du Bois's (1900, 1989, 1908, 1945) theory on how and by what means the social progress of students is advanced or hindered directly implicates the U.S. public school system for developing and implementing the constructs that have determined the destiny of generations of Black students and the disposition of White students. Those responsible for educating the multitudes shape and modify the character of the nation (Adams, 1785; Aristotle, 2003; Plato, 375 BC). According to Freire (1970), the perspectives and social beliefs of the dominant class are recycled and reproduced by members of the dominant group. School policies and procedures articulate the intrinsic values and motives of educators. Differential school practices and policies reinforce stereotypes and protect the dominant racial hierarchy (Jost, Liviatan, van der Toorn, Ledgerwood, Mandisodza, et al., 2012).

Until recently researchers assumed schools are safe spaces where students could heal and reduce the effects of their personal challenges or traumatic experiences. However, for Black students, schools are often trauma producing (Carter, Johnson, Roberson, Mazzula, Kirkinis, et al., 2017; Chen, 2021; Darensbourg, Perez & Blake, 2010; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Gilliam, 2005; Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, et al., 2011). The extent of the damage of school's prejudicial policies on the well-being of young Black American students is still not fully captured within trauma-informed research and practice. Likewise, researchers are yet to examine the long-term impact of racism and segregation on former and current White students. Nonetheless, if one only considers the countless studies that document how public school systems unfairly and selectively choose to target Black students, it leads to one conclusion. The U.S. public

school system is responsible for tailoring policies that produce considerable situational and long-term hardships on Black students (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Scialabba, 2017; Williams, Neighbors & Jackson, 2003).

The fundamental purpose of education is to promote the interest of students and produce good societies (Dewey, 1916; Royce, 1916). Democracies educate children in the same manner whether they may be rich or poor (Grote, 1880). Before Grote (1880), Plato and Aristotle defined moral educators as those who honor and relate to poor and rich students in the same manner (Aristotle, 2003; Plato, 375 BC). Moral educators are the most effective social agents in promoting social harmony and restoring democracies (Aristotle, 2003; Grote, 1880; Plato, 375 BC). Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle assigned great merit to educators' moral character in shaping the values of future generations and society. Moral educators are protectors of just societies and democracies (Aristotle, 2003). Moral educators repair and uphold democracies and instigate greater social harmony (Aristotle, 2003; Plato, 375 BC). Depriving students of their "capital right" to education endangers democracies (Plato, 375 BC).

According to Grote (1880), within each social class and creed are the future geniuses, innovators, and social leaders, which democratic societies await and depend on. Moral educators disseminate the same quality education and develop the character and intellect of students to become good citizens and national leaders (Aristotle, 2003). Moral teachers cultivate and develop the hidden potential of students irrespective of class, faith, race or national origin. Inclusive schools with sympathetic teachers are organic advocates for equal education and functioning democracies (Du Bois, 1935b). Righteous educators dismantle divisiveness and build loving communities (Tutu, 1999).

Quality public education advances the intellectual, moral, and economic capacities of all students, and levels the divide between those born rich and those born poor to benefit society (Mann, 1907; Messerli, 1972; Tharp, 1953). Quality education imparts knowledge, good habits, and virtue enabling people to live in harmony with others, become good citizens, live well, and enjoy a good life (Aristotle, 2003). Conversely, inequitable and differential school policies challenge the fundamental purpose and moral standing of the U.S. public school system and endanger

society. Consequently, the moral strength and weaknesses of the U.S. public school system rest on its assumed values, the universality of purpose, and inclusivity.

Recent census projections affirm that the U.S. is a White majority population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). And Whites represent the vast majority of public school educators (NCES, 2021a, Schaeffer, 2021). However, the majority of America's public school student population is non-White (NCES, 2019a, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). According to Allport (1954), the dominant group in the U.S. is largely made up of conformists and malleable conformists, who passively or actively reinforce the dominant group's social values. Intentionally or unintentionally, the vast majority of White school leaders and schoolteachers either actively or passively reinforce the social values of the dominant group and the cyclical propagation of prejudice (Farr-Darling, 2002; Gutmann, 1987, 2004; Jones, Bouffard & Weissbourd, 2013; Roberts & Rizzo, 2021; Westheimer, 2006). Racism, bigotry, and racial prejudice are socially and structurally contrived problems associated with Whiteness. They are fundamentally a White predicament.

Whiteness and all the perceived privileges associated with it drive public school choices and pedagogical practices. As a result, Black students are collectively subject to differential and unequal treatment by the dominant group that holds power (Wirth, 1945). The U.S. public school system defines the academic experience of Black students by legislating and re-enforcing categorical and disparate school measures (Fiske & Neuberger, 1990; Roberts & Rizzo, 2021).

Meanwhile, the failure of state and district-run public schools in meeting the educational needs of Black students is fueling the push for alternative schools (U.S. Office of Management and Budget [OMB], 2018; U. S. Department of Education, 2018; U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pension, 2014). Public schools' differential policies are challenging the legitimacy of the US public school system. The survival of the U.S. public school system depends on its ability to erase the threats that lie within it. To assert the societal value of public schooling requires the removal of the flawed rationales that facilitated the development of differential school policies responsible for producing the Black student achievement gap.

The persistence of the Black student achievement gap offers valuable insight into the dominant forces that are squeezing away the academic opportunities that Black students are entitled to receive (Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam, et al., 2016; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2014a, 2014b). It also explains by what means public schools are limiting Black students' academic progress (Du Bois, 1900; Lewis, Hancock, James & Larke, 2008). It sheds light on how the school system's social beliefs and teachers' actions towards Black students influence the development and progress of Black students as well as all other students (Clark, 1995; Derman-Sparks & Ramsay, 2006). Above all, public school measures offer insight into how the U.S. public school system is subverting the progress of Black students, organically generating the Black student achievement gap, reproducing socio-economic inequities, and undermining the social progress of all Americans (Du Bois, 1903b).

In the meantime, the authentic transformation of public school institutions dictates the re-examination of the objectives and role of public schooling, the factors that sanction the implementation of racially disparate school policies, and the outcome of racialized school practices. This includes public schools' direct and indirect influence on the progress of Black students and the progress of the nation. In other words, it requires a serious and sincere assessment of the history that shaped public schooling and how school practices have crafted and influenced the destiny of Black students and controlled the progress of the nation (Du Bois, 1903b, 1910).



# CHAPTER 2

## METHODOLOGY

This book explores the influence of America's unique racial beliefs and constructs responsible for creating the problems associated with Whiteness, the predicament of Whiteness and its influence on public education and the nation. The information contained in this book relies on the existing literature that describes and quantifies the effect of implicit bias on Black students, White students, and the nation, including federal and state archives, open sources, public master files, peer-reviewed studies, and research. The book covers the following:

- Employs W. E. B. Du Bois's theoretical framework to uncover the forces responsible for the Black student achievement gap,
- Examines cognitive dissonance and its operational influence,
- Describes America's dominant identity, beliefs, motivational constructs, and controls,
- Reviews the historical evolution of America's predatory White racial constructs,
- Explains how the innate and selective nature of cognitive dissonance at the school level stimulates the reproduction of the Black student achievement gap,
- Systematically analyzes public school policies in a wide variety of circumstances and periods, especially those related to educators' assumptions, accepted values, and behaviors to explain the Black student achievement phenomena,
- Illustrates how public school policies and accountability measures affirm the dominant social values and constructs,
- Looks into the nature and function of disparate school policies in retarding the progress of public school students and society, and

- Explores a set of practical approaches to expunge predatory beliefs and end racially motivated school practices that infect students and impede the social progress of society.

Since this book employs Du Bois's race theory and educational philosophy, it is important to briefly review Du Bois's early life, academic journey, and the important role education and educators played in shaping his views and scholarship.

### **Du Bois: His Background, the People Who Helped Him, and his Accomplishments**

Interestingly, Du Bois's situational experience, hardships, and ancestry resemble the lives of many of today's public school children. W. E. B. Du Bois was born to Mary Du Bois and Alfred Burghardt on February 23, 1868, in the town of Great Barrington, Massachusetts. Du Bois (1968) was of mixed ancestry, African and European (Dutch and Gallic). Alfred Du Bois deserted his family a few months after the birth of his son. And his mother suddenly died when Du Bois was sixteen years old and a few days after he graduated from high school leaving him orphaned and poor (Du Bois, 1968; Moon, 1972).

Du Bois's life and work were shaped by the events that he witnessed. Much of his work relates to the intense impact of America's legal and educational systems on the life and livelihood of Black Americans. Du Bois was born five years after the Emancipation Proclamation (Du Bois, 1920), and three years after Congress ratified the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment and soon after the Black Codes became institutionally ingrained (National Archives, 2016). In 1883, Du Bois was 15 years old. That year, the majority opinion of the U.S. Supreme Court justices proclaimed the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment merely abolished slavery, but did not award Blacks and their descendents equal civil and legal rights bestowed upon America's White citizens (Civil Rights Cases, 1883). Thirteen years later (1896), the Court adopted the phrase '*separate but equal*' (Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896). And three years later the Court unanimously endorsed school districts' plan to abandon high school education for Black students (Cumming v. Richmond County Board of Education, 1899).

According to Du Bois (1968), his mother, like other Black American mothers (Allen & White-Smith, 2018), taught him to value education. She instilled in him the belief that the only path to escape the discrimination, hopelessness, and the poverty that surrounded him was to academically surpass and exceed White expectations. Without wealthy parents to fund his education and money to buy school textbooks, he depended on kind White teachers and abolitionists to graduate from an all-White high school, where he was its only Black student.

After his mother's death, Du Bois sought the counsel and financial help of White educators, White theologians, White churches, and White abolitionists to attend Fisk and Harvard University, travel to Europe, attend Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität (what is today Humboldt University), and back to Harvard University where he was the first Black man awarded a terminal degree. His views on education as an instrumental tool to ease the confines of the color bar were shaped by his mother. However, it was the financial support and encouragement of many White Americans that made it possible for him to become the most credentialed Black American of his time, and an internationally renowned sociologist, author, researcher, and advocate.

The force of Du Bois's intellect continues to influence the study of race, class, and gender (Balfour, 2005; Gillman & Weinbaum, 2007; Rabaka, 2003; Watkins, 2016). His pioneering work on social and racial constructs is still relevant today (Du Bois, 1900, 1903a, 1903b, 1915, 1944). Du Bois was the first American scholar to define racism, classism, and gender bias as similarly structured and interlocked forms of institutional oppression. The elimination of the color lines would uplift the individual soul, the Black soul, and women and also refine and restore the nation's character (Du Bois, 1940, 1965). Du Bois (1898) strongly believed quality education would tumble America's Jericho caste system. Social, historical, and scientific truths cure stupidity and ignorance, and free American men and women- Black and White (Du Bois, 1898; Rabaka, 2003). Du Bois's educational accomplishments gave him the tools to articulate the harmful outcomes of America's racial hierarchies on future generations (Aptheker 1973; Lemert 1994; Marable 1998; Zuckerman 2004).

Morally upright White educators demonstratively instilled in him the belief that teachers are social transformative agents capable of inspiring students to realize their potential and expand their opportunities. Education is the most important tool available to Black Americans to achieve political and civil equality (Du Bois, 1915). Du Bois (1935b), urged Black Americans to engage their communities and all other Americans, and call attention to the need for the equity and fair treatment of all races. And he also warned that as long as racial animosity and prejudice exists, Black Americans' right to education would be denied, and U.S. democracy would suffer (Du Bois, 1935b).

Du Bois (1920) firmly believed that not all who belong to the dominant White culture share the same perspective. To illustrate: While surrounded by bigotry and prejudice, Whites helped Du Bois buy his school textbooks, loaned him books to read, and taught him Latin, Greek, and the art of debate. White school leaders chose him as valedictorian of his all-White graduating class and gave him the tools to speak and be heard (Du Bois, 1968). After graduating from high school, it was principled White Americans who made it possible for him to realize his dream of seeking higher education, harness his knowledge and skills, meet and engage with scholars, historians, philosophers, and social scientists, explore and test his ideas, travel, study abroad and expand his horizon, document his research findings and publish them (Du Bois, 1968; Moon, 1972). His White friends who fought along his side against bigotry and hate nurtured his belief that "friendship, goodness, and love" are not the exclusive domains of one people or race (Du Bois, 1935b). It is precisely because of the important role these good White women and men played in meeting his education that Du Bois was able to achieve great heights.

Whites helped Du Bois understand that the progress of Black Americans and the liberation of White Americans from the shackles of racism are intertwined. Those who encouraged his academic learning gave him the means to realize his intellect and potential even when he was doubtful, and those who honored his friendship informed his opinion and gave him much hope that a better future for all Americans is possible (Du Bois, 1903a). Ethical educators reinforced his belief in the power of quality education. And the quality of his education facilitated his interest

in observing, understanding, and documenting the role of race in inhibiting social progress.

With the proper education, Du Bois emerged as one of the most prominent American race theorists (Aptheker 1973; Lemert 1994; Marable 1998; Zuckerman 2004). His race theory and emphasis on place as central to individuals' physical and social environment in the development of racism, gender bias, and sexism was the result of his meticulous documentation of the dominant social and racial constructs (Zuberi, 2004). And his understanding of the color lines was primarily informed by his personal experience as a Black man living within the constraints of the White dominant social, racial, and cultural constructs (Rabaka, 2003). Nevertheless, Du Bois had many White friends, colleagues, and benefactors who gave him hope that racism is not a terminal affliction (Lewis, 2000). It is for this reason that he used universal truths to deconstruct racism and liberate Americans from its unwholesome grip (Lewis, 2000; Marable 1998).

Du Bois's quest to understand the dominant structural forces that limit social progress was based on his American experience as a Black man. His environment and skin color gave him reason to focus on White Americans' interpretation and articulation of privilege, power, and status. He studied and observed the values of the dominant American culture and contextually lived the consequences of their actions (Du Bois, 1920). Consequently, his extensive work reflects his personal experience and knowledge of how the dominant social and cultural values divide the nation, control social progress, and limit Black Americans.

Du Bois masterfully used his education to critically analyze and study the mechanics of racialized social structures (Du Bois, 1903b, 1905, 1920). Thus, his work and scholarship focused on the corrupting nature of the structural forces that compromise the moral character and values of the nation and its institutions (*academic, executive, legislative, and administrative*). All of which directly impacted the living experience of Black Americans, as well as White Americans, women of every shade, and all other Americans.

## CHAPTER 3

# THE PREDICAMENT OF WHITENESS: PRIVILEGE REAL OR FICTITIOUS DEFINES ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS

Poverty exacts identical hardships on people, whether they are White or Black (Cunha & Heckman, 2007, 2009). The number of White poor Americans is twice (15.9 million) the number of Black Americans (8.5 million) (Basic Statistics, 2020; Temin, 2017). Poor Americans share a distinct socio-economic class and similar challenges within the U.S socioeconomic hierarchy. According to Du Bois (1935b), there are no two groups of poor Americans with “particularly identical interests” and indistinguishable challenges who are farthest apart.

America’s White poor experience poverty much like poor Black Americans. Collectively, their class status is associated with under-resourced schools and neighborhoods, poor education, low wages, and high incarceration rates (Books, 2004; Rabuy & Kopf, 2015). According to Rabuy & Kopf (2015), “predictably” the U.S prison system is “bursting at the seams” with poor White and Black Americans without quality education. Poverty increases exposure to crime, violence, environmental pollutants and toxins (Braveman, Egerter & Mockenhaupt, 2011; Temin, 2017). It is also detrimental to the mental health and physical well-being of individuals (Murali & Oyebode, 2004; Wilkinson, 2005). Irrespective of color, poor Americans experience higher mortality rates and early morbidity (Marmot, 2004). In a nutshell, the U.S. class system is much like its racial system (Wray, 2006). It is an informal caste system whose members are denied access to education, health, good jobs, resources, security, the benefit of the doubt, and human kindness.

Across the board, U.S. income inequality and poverty rates are greater than almost all other advanced economies (The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2021a, 2021b, 2021c).