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Eugenics in Education Policy and the Impact on African American Students

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Eugenics in Education Policy and the Impact on African American Students

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education International and Multicultural Education
Department

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in International and Multicultural Education

by
Ruth Jones
May 2019

Eugenics in Education Policy and the Impact on African American Students

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

INTERNATIONAL AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

by
Ruth Jones
May, 2019

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

Dr. Colette Cann_____   _____June 14, 2019_____
Instructor/Chairperson   Date

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ABSTRACT

Eugenics was defined as a science which used selective breeding as a mechanism to increase desirable traits in a population while restricting and eliminating undesirable traits. Eugenicists fell out of favor in the United States after the fall of Nazi Germany. Yet, eugenic ideas continued to prevail as they heavily influenced medical, social, and academic systems in the U.S. The country's education system still carries the legacy of eugenicists who helped to build it. The purpose of this qualitative study is to identify eugenic ideas in federal, district and local school policy and determine their connection to the very local school practices on the practices of school leaders and teachers that ultimately create restrictions for African American students at a middle school in northern California. Using a content analysis approach, the eugenic tenets of heredity and degeneracy were found in policy documents. The existence of these ideas has led to problematic characterization and restrictive practices for African American students.

CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Restriction of African American[1] students persist in schools despite a history of reform

dating back to the 1950s. The infamous *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) deemed segregated

schools unconstitutional and sparked the creation of the only federal education policy, the

Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This law was specifically meant to improve the

experiences of students of color and over the years has been reauthorized to include children who

are often marginalized in education settings (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). However,

since its passing and through its many reauthorizations, African American students continue to

have disparate experiences and outcomes compared to their white peers. Restriction, in this

context, is not in the access African American students have to education. Rather, it is the unique

set of barriers that lead to disparate outcomes compared to their white peers (Fine, 1991). Data

from federal policy makers to school leaders who drive policy at the district and school site level,

frames of this problem of restriction by focusing heavily on the experience of the student and

adult actions. What is missing from this data is the historical roots of the policies that drive the

practices of adults and the experiences of students. If the lens were to be refocused on the

policies that undergird school culture and teacher practice, the root of the problem that continues

to disservice African American students may be viewed more holistically.

Data at the national level show that there exist significant gaps between African

American students and white students in the disciplinary and achievement data. According to

the 2015-2016 Civil Rights Data Collection of School Climate and Safety (2018) for the nation,

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[1] I choose to use the term African American to describe the focal group of students I used in my research. I view this term equally to "Black" when describing how people may identify or are identified racially. I use both terms interchangeably when describing my own racial identity. For the sake of consistency, I will use the term African American throughout this thesis.

African American student are receiving disproportionate discipline in schools. Representing about 15% of the total enrollment, African American students accounted for 27% of restraints and 23% of seclusion by school personnel. African American males represent about 8% of enrollment, yet represent account for 25% of out of school suspensions, and 23% of expulsions. African American females are also about 8% of the enrollment population, yet represent 14% of out of school suspensions and 10% of expulsions. Compared to other racial groups, African American students had the highest percentages of overrepresentation in the aforementioned categories. The National Center for Education Statistics (2016) reported a gap in reading achievement still exists between white students and African American students by 26 points in grade 4 and grade 8. The gap is even wider for grade 12 with a 30-point gap. The math achievement gap is similar with differences of 26 points in grade 4, 31 points in grade 8 and 30 points in grade 12.

I am currently in my 8th year as a history teacher at a California middle school. The school has a significant population of students of color presently, though fewer than when I first started teaching. In fact, the school now serves 20% fewer African American students than it did when I first started. Yet, for the better part of a decade the data around discipline and academic achievement are constant. After reviewing suspension data from 2011-2017, I found that African American students received more out of school suspensions than any other ethnic/racial group. More than half of the office referrals for discipline were written for African American students during the academic year from 2014-2015. The great majority of tier 2 restorative justice processes were done for African American students[2] Standardized test scores such as the Smarter

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[2] My school practices restorative justice. This is an alternative disciplinary process meant as an intervention before more punitive punishments (primarily suspensions, expulsions) are administered. Tier 2 processes include restoring conflict (fighting, bullying, harassment, etc.)

Balanced (SBAC) test report more African American students not meeting standards in both the math and English Language Arts (ELA).

Despite numerous years of reform at my school, the problem persists and the "gap" has not significantly closed. At the beginning of every school year, the teaching and counseling staff gather with the teacher leaders and administrators to review academic and discipline data from the year before. The ritual of analyzing and interpreting the data is almost the same every year. We are questioned about what we see. Every year we see that there is a gap in achievement for and we over discipline African American students. The solutions range from reading and math intervention classes, to literacy methods, and even culturally responsive pedagogy training for the staff. This ritual is approached with love and a genuine desire to provide a positive educational experience for all students. Yet, every year we have to have the same conversation because our solutions did not work. This ritual is not unlike what is found at many school sites and policy making spaces. The issue is glaring and solutions are well intentioned. I

Solutions that have been created to "solve" the issues of underserving African American students yielded the same negative results because we fail to see the root of problem holistically. Ladson-Billings (2006) describes the framing of the problem as an achievement gap as misguided. Instead, she suggests that the "education debt"–a combination of historical, moral, economic, and sociopolitical decisions and policies that have adversely affected youth of color– of the United States needs to be considered in accompaniment with the data. The definition of this debt according to Ladson-Billings (2006) is the systematic exclusion of African American students from education through laws and social attitudes that perceived students of color as incapable of achieving academic success. This was perpetuated by funding disparities and resource disparities. African American families generally lacked the resources and access needed

to successfully advocate for equality and equity of educational, thus being excluded from important decision-making settings. The country has failed to admit its historic and current wrongdoings towards African American students as doing so would indicate that measures must be taken to right those wrongs. Considering the culmination of divestments for African American students throughout the history, it is not surprising that outcomes for African American are so divergent from their white peers. Trying to close the "achievement gap" without addressing this educational debt would be a futile effort. This viewpoint unveils a historical consideration of education policy that is lacking. Very seldom are policies–at the district and school level–reviewed, analyzed, and critiqued at the theoretical and ideological levels. This thesis reviews school level policy at these levels to provide a deeper interrogation of these policies that directly influence practices.

The problem is not African American youth themselves as we are often led to believe in the framing of the problem and the solutions offered. There is nothing inherent about African American students that leads to the plight which has impacted them. The problem is also not as simple as how well policies work or the fidelity to which policies are implemented. I suggest that the problem is deeply imbedded in the theoretical foundation of the policies themselves that were birthed through eugenic ideologies that African American students were never fit for success in the education system. By not accepting this fact, policies built to address African American student achievement were doomed to fail from the beginning. That is, the undeserving of African American students is evidence that the education policies are actually achieving their original goal of restricting them from a full, equal, and equitable school experience.

Background and Need for the Study

The theories that U.S. eugenicists heralded as scientifically sound reasons to discriminate against large swaths of the population, were manifested at an amplified level through the horrific crimes committed by Adolf Hitler. In the decades that followed the Holocaust, former American supporters of the science began to publicly denounce ideas (Wilson, 1998). Academic institutions that funded eugenic studies were either dismantled or their names would be changed to fit politically correct tastes. As a result, eugenics is currently understood as a pseudoscience that is no longer utilized. However, eugenic ideas were the foundation of several educational, medical, and social institutions that Americans still depend on. By changing the name and denouncing the science, it appears that eugenics no longer exists. Although the name is no longer used, the ideas still exist and cause discriminatory impacts on many groups in the United States. This study seeks to expose the ways in which eugenics still lives in education policies and how those policies create disparate outcomes for African American students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to identify eugenic ideas in federal, district and local school policy and determine their connection to the very local school practices on the practices of school leaders and teachers that ultimately impact African American students at a middle school in northern California.

Theoretical Framework

This study explores eugenic ideas in current education policy and the ways in which these policies create restrictions for African American students. Three theories informed the framing of the research questions and the analysis case study at the middle school in northern California: Critical Race Theory, Afropessism, and BlackCRiT.

Critical Race Theory

There are four main hallmarks of Critical Race Theory (CRT) according to Ladson-Billings (2013): racism as endemic, counter-narrative, interest convergence, intersectionality, and the social construction of race. For this study racism as endemic and interest convergence are of most importance. Racism as endemic acknowledges racism as the "norm" in U.S. society due to the deep embedment of racist ideology in the very founding of the country. Therefore, racism does not exist only in egregious acts of individuals, rather it can be found in almost every structure that comprises the U.S. Interest convergence suggests that racial justice is predicated on the benefits that white people gain from the aligning themselves with racial practice events (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Even more, racism is so normal that it becomes invisible specifically to white people who do not experience the oppression except as the perpetrator. This allows for racists systems to persist as the first step of acknowledging the issue is often negated.

Interest convergence, as theorized by Bell (1980), suggests that any interest in racial equality for African American people will only occur if the interests of white people are also accommodated. Bell and other critical race theorists who have analyzed various historical events–such as the *Brown vs. Board of Education* case–have observed that behind these attempts at of racial equality exists some benefit to white citizens. This may also explain why these attempts have not resulted in long-term equitable impacts. For example, currently students of color are most likely to attend a school with few or no white students. This implicit need for interest convergence in policies directed at equality for African American people stalls progress towards equality and equity.

Afro-pessimism

Afro-pessimism postulates African Americans are still enslaved in the social imagination of U.S. citizens, therefore, the sociopolitical condition of this group is founded in that reality (Dumas & ross, 2016). While Afro-pessimism share characteristics of CRT, its tenets vary in the way it focuses on people of African descent around the world. Its tenets include social death, the afterlife of slavery, a critique of people of color as a construct, the centrality of anti-blackness, and an interrogation of diversity as progress (Ray, Randolph, Underhill, & Luke, 2017). For this study, social death and the centrality of anti-blackness are most salient. Social death analyzes the impact of African enslavement on the perceived inhumanity of African Americans. It follows, the creation of African Americans on the slave ships and their status as property created an association with whiteness as human and blackness and non-human. Ray et al. (2017) describes three characteristics of the social death experienced by African Americans due to this perception: natal alienation, gratuitous violence, and societal dishonor. Most notable for this study are gratuitous violence and societal dishonor.

Gratuitous violence describes the violence experienced by African Americans without committing a crime. Historically, this started with the use of violence to subordinate enslaved African Americans to maintain compliance. Post-slavery America still practiced this type of violence on African Americans to achieve the same goal. Societal dishonor speaks to the low social status of African Americans in all parts of society. This status transcends socioeconomic status as even a poor white person reaps more state sanctioned benefits (job opportunities, treatment in the criminal justice system, etc.) than a middle class African American person. Afro-pessimist scholars contend that these conditions branch from the centrality of anti-blackness. Not equal to white supremacy, anti-blackness is grounded in the historical

understanding that blackness was the only requirement to be enslaved, therefore measuring humanity through proximity to blackness (Ray, et al., 2017; Wilderson III, Hartman, Martinot, Sexton, & Spillers., 2017). This delineates from white supremacy which is the subjugation of non-whites. By centering anti-blackness, Afro-pessimism highlights the unique history and oppression of African-Americans which has a specific aim of dehumanization.

BlackCRiT

BlackCRiT is akin to a branch of Critical Race Theory. However, it is unique in its focus on anti-black racism in its understanding and analysis of tenets of CRT. Though this area of focus is connected to Afro-pessimism, it distinguishes itself by focusing on policies and practices–including education policies and practices–that "reproduce Black suffering" (Dumas & ross, 2016) and offers an imagination of an optimistic future that involves Black resistance. It is this distinction that becomes most helpful in the analysis of education policy this study seeks to analyze and restriction of African American students this study seeks to raise. By focusing on policies and practices with a lens towards the experience of African American students, BlackCRiT deals with the systems founded on anti-Black racism that continue to create disparate outcomes. Most importantly, BlackCRiT creates a space for resistance of anti-blackness and white supremacy, invoking a Freirean sense of agency that is steeped in hope.

In summary, Critical Race Theory, Afro-pessimism, and BlackCRiT all focus on the endemic nature of racism in all facets of society. Afro-pessimism and BlackCRiT zoom in on anti-black racism that differentiates the experience of white supremacy for African Americans compared to other non-white groups. This framework allows for an examination of education policy with lens for a specific type of racism that is existent in eugenic ideology. This lens will

be utilized to extract the specific types of restriction that African American students experience due to these policies.

Research Questions/Hypotheses

In what ways do eugenics ideas currently exist in federal and local school policy, procedures and practices at a northern California middle school? How are African American students thus seen under these policies and treated accordingly?

Methodology

This study explores the existence of eugenic ideology in education policies. This study is a CRiT walk (Giles & Hughes, 2009) through federal and local policy and procedural documents throughout school systems.

CRiT walking involves the intentional use of critical literature and knowledge to understand the research topic. CRiT walkers understand racism as endemic in American society and uses a multi-layered theoretical approach–including Critical Race Theory–to interrogate racism across sectors in U.S. society. CRiT walkers reject traditional epistemological approaches to research, affirming constructivist methods that allow for data from the experiences of researchers who experience racism in their daily lives. CRiT walking enables epistemological liberation often restricted by academia, which maintains racist, hegemonic structures that often inform education systems.

Instrumentation

The primary research instrument was a collection of policy documents from three levels of the education system: federal, local district and school site. All documents were selected based on content that focused on the behavior, discipline, status, and learning conditions of African American students. Over 45 documents were collected and 20 were analyzed.

Researcher's Background

I have taught middle school social science in a Northern California school for 8 years. During this time, I have participated in two education policy fellowships specifically designed for teachers. The combination of my classroom experience with the experience in education policy informs my approach to this study and the process used in the collection of the documents. Specifically, my position as a classroom teacher has given me access to some of the internal documents at the school site and context on how they were created.

Data Collection

The federal policy documents were based on policies from the previous and current administrations. This includes documents from the Obama era My Brother's Keeper initiative and the current administration's report of school safety.

The local district policy documents included Board of Education policies that pertained to student discipline. Some documents focused exclusively on African American students while others were generalized for all students.

The school site policy documents included school culture guidelines and school plans that guide policies that address academic and behavioral issues. Only the school plans include language specifically about African American students.

Data Analysis

A content analysis approach was used to analyze the policy and procedural documents collected. The emphasis in this approach are the messages interpreted from the documents. Specifically, messages that connected to the eugenic ideas of fitness and control. While U.S. society no longer accepts the notion that fitness can be bred, the argument of this study is that fitness is now being created using education policies and procedures as a tool to do so. Because a

specific message was sought after, codes were predetermined during the data analysis stage of this study. The codes were picked to unveil eugenic ideologies and understand how these ideologies had a negative and disparate impact on African American students. The codes were norm, racialization, creation, restriction, and blame.

The *norm* code was used to find messages in the document that suggested or created a norm of student behavior. Next, the *racialization* code was used to determine if this norm was racialized as or in close proximity to whiteness. The *creation* code identified ways in which the policies were set up to create or mold African American students into the suggest norm that is rooted in whiteness. Then, the *restriction* code helped determine if African American students were then restricted for non-compliance and non-conformity to the norm. Lastly, the *blame* code questioned how the policies then blamed the student for not complying and conforming to the norm.

During the analysis of the documents, I reviewed each document individually. This process included a first read, during which I memoed initial reactions, questions, and insights relevant to the document. Next, I reviewed the same document using the five predetermined codes. I pointed out language or characteristics that signaled messages that connected to the codes. After I completed the analysis of each document, I reviewed trends for each code in each set of documents (federal, local district, and local school site). Lastly, I looked for trends across each set of documents.

The choice to do a textual analysis using only policy documents was intentional. The desired outcome was an analysis of the policies themselves and not the practice of these policies. This study is most interested in the power of policy documents as the foundation of how schools

and education programs operate and impact African American students. All correspondence with individuals were for the purpose of contextualizing the documents and locating documents.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study lie in the additional data sets used to elaborate on the findings from the data analysis at the local school site level. During the 2015-2016 school year, the local school district created an internal dashboard of data for academic, behavioral, and operational areas of focus. One set of datum collected on this dashboard was the frequency of behavior referrals at each school site and across school sites. During the same year, the school site featured in this study altered the way behavior referrals were given out. Before the 2015-2016 school year, if a student was sent to an administrator or a restorative justice coordinator for a behavior infraction, a behavior referral was required. The year after, the process changed. A student would first be sent to the grade level administrator who would assess the situation. Then, upon communicating with the teacher, a decision would be made on whether or not a referral was necessary. This greatly reduced the number of behavior referrals being tracked through the district internal dashboard, though it is unclear if the number of times a student was sent out of class was actually reduced.

Additionally, the school created an internal tracker for students being sent to the administrator for behavior infractions and receiving referrals. This tracker was inconsistent in a number of ways. First, student names were not consistently accurate on the tracker. Second, the student's race was not included on the tracker at all. Third, the tracker was used for face time with the administrator or the restorative justice coordinator who ran the discipline room. The tracker did not indicate if this interaction resulted in a referral that would then be apparent on the district tracker. Additionally, this did not indicated students who were sent directly to a

restorative justice coordinator who did not run the discipline room, circumventing a meeting with an administrator. Therefore, there is a set of students who are being sent out of class but the frequency of this is not being tracked. Last, this tracker was used along with a tardy detention to track student consequences. This means, that if a teacher requested a detention for a student wearing a hood in the hallway, that student may not have been seen or assessed by the administrator. So, the behavior infraction would be tracked on the tardy detention list which was initially meant only to track student's punctuality. Using this data became particularly cumbersome when trying to quantify how often African American students were sent out of class directly due to policy infractions that were analyzed during this study.

Significance of the Study

My interest in the eugenic theoretical framework of educational policies and its impact on African American students stems from my experience as a middle school teacher and working in policy fellowships specifically designed for teachers. These theories, whether implied or explicitly stated greatly affect how policies are framed and how actors on the ground (i.e. teachers, school leaders, etc.) execute these policies. Any negative student outcomes such as the "achievement gap" and the results of disciplinary action taken against African American students are often blamed on African American students themselves; the policies are seen as neutral and objective in their writing and in their application. In this way, policies and policymakers are freed from their responsibility and the theoretical framework undergirding these policies go unquestioned and are seldom critiqued. This results in the creation of new policies using the same theories which created prior negative outcomes. My hope is that this study will call attention to the foundational flaws of these policies at the federal, state, and local levels, and that restriction of African American students can be reframed.

There is a gap in research about the existence of eugenic ideas in modern education. When researching, there is historical research that traces and analyzes the contribution of eugenicists to the early development of the modern education system (Winfield, 2007; Stoskopf, 2002a; Kohlman, 2013). Additionally, many scholars have theorized the experiences of marginalized youth in educational spaces that lead to disparate outcomes (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Fine, 1991; Ferguson, 2000; Paris, 2017; Dumas & ross, 2016). What is missing is research that sufficiently addresses the legacy of eugenics in present-day education policies. Policies created by eugenicists did not suddenly disappear as eugenicists were major decision makers in the formation of educational policies during the early twenty first century. When eugenics was no longer accepted as science, I will show in this thesis how eugenic ideas were rebranded, thus still existing and having the same profound adverse impact on students. No longer called by their originally name, eugenic ideas can be found in policies that are now described as neoliberal. I believe that by not connecting the theoretical roots of current education policy to eugenic ideas, education researchers, policy makers, leaders, and teachers cannot holistically frame the experiences and treatment of African American students. Instead, surface level remedies are applied to an issue that deserves a systemic review for anti-racist transformations. In his analysis about education reforms, Cuban (1990) states, "Reforms return because policymakers fail to diagnose problems and promote correct solutions. Reforms return because policymakers use poor historical analogies and pick the wrong lessons from the past" (p. 6). This study is an attempt to begin naming and locating the problem so that lasting changes to the U.S. education system can be made.

CHAPTER II - REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this qualitative study will be to explore the eugenic ideas that underlie the ESEA and the practices of school leaders and teachers and to connect these ideologies to the effort to create push out environments for African American students at a middle school in northern California. In this literature review I will introduce eugenics and its sociopolitical, and historical connection to education policy. Last, is an exploration of how students are systemically, academically and emotionally pushed out of school spaces.

Eugenics and Education Policy

Eugenics served as pseudo-scientific theories upon which the white, American identity was bred, valued, and allegedly improved during the twenty first century. With the backdrop of Darwinist theories, industrial growth, immigration, and racist ideologies about African American citizens, eugenics was theorized as a solution to the threat of racial decline (Stoskopf, 2002b, p. 74). Initially, eugenics focused on "better breeding" which highlighted innate qualities of the superior race–white people–while degrading people of color and certain European groups for having fewer desirable qualities that were allegedly inherited. The betterment of American society would only be achieved by breeding the most fit for society while stifling the population growth of those deemed unfit. Eventually, eugenic ideologies would permeate a variety of sectors of public life, shaping beliefs and practices of American people. For example, theories about breeding and fitness would have detrimental effects on mental and physical healthcare in the United States, resulting in numerous sterilizations and the institutionalization of the alleged unfit. As will be explored in this thesis, education became a hub of practice for eugenicists as a way to sort and control the population. It is widely believed that after Nazi Germany executed the theories and practices built by American eugenicists that resulted in the genocide of millions

of Jewish and non-Aryan people, eugenics ceased to exist as a viable and publicly supported framework for a scientific understanding of race, health, and intelligence. By that point, however, eugenic ideologies were so deeply embedded in the modern fabric of American identity, that eugenics had already guised itself in the hearts, minds, policies, and practices of the country's most important institutions.

Eugenics in Education

Theories about fixed intelligence, personality traits, and educability were some of the fruit that grew from eugenic theory and found its way into the United States education system. Education was a particularly interesting field in which eugenic ideas could root itself and replicate its beliefs. It would be in the schoolhouse that ideas of who was "fit" would be tested, and the restriction of unfit students would be implemented. Schools would transform from institutions of learning to institutions of sorting out who would be tracked to achieve the American dream, and who would be rendered incapable and undeserving of such a dream.

Stoskopf (2002a) chronicled important figures in the eugenics movement who helped to cement its place in education. He began with an overview of Henry Goddard who introduced the use of testing of the "feebleminded" as a predictor of capabilities. Alfred Binet was a psychologist who developed protocols used to identify students not performing at grade level. Goddard took his test, translated it to English and used it on immigrants arriving on Ellis Island in 1912 and 1913. The results from this test would be used to make negative claims about the connection between the race of the immigrants and their lack of ability to function. He was responsible for the training over 1000 teachers to administer this IQ test who then began separating "normal" students from the "morons" and "defective learners." Lewis M. Terman, the chair of the psychology department at Stanford, built on Goddard's work during the 1920s-

1930s. A self-proclaimed eugenicist, Terman ascribed to the factory model of schools, viewing

students as products. He saw testing as a way to separate the "products" of schools, pushing for

testing as the ultimate judge for a student's academic capabilities. His work would not only

separate white children who could not pass the test, but he also advocated for the racial

segregation of students due to the belief that non-white students were inherently inferior both

socially and academically. His advocacy would lead to the rapid creation of the standardized

tests that were used to track non-white students—including Eastern European students who did

not fit the standards of the white race at the time—into non-academic tracks. Edward Thorndike

(1874-1949), a professor of educational psychology at Columbia, would help to solidify the

place of eugenics in education policy decision making. He believed schools were meant to

hierarchically place students in society based on their academic capabilities, which were often

determined through a combination of testing and racial identification. His establishment of the

norm-referenced test would build on Terman's idea of the test as truth while creating a "normal"

student on which the standards of the test would be based. As a eugenicist, fitness of mind was

central to his epistemological approach, therefore arguing that the common man had no place in

education policy decision making, a space he believed should only be occupied by the experts.

Experts at the time aligned themselves with eugenic beliefs, not leaving much space for the

voices of dissent.

Tenets of Eugenics and Eugenic Ideologies in Education

Winfield (2007) detailed the emergence of the eugenics movement during the Progressive

Era, pointing out foundational tenets. Heredity was a primary tenet behind eugenics driving the

belief that physical, mental, and personality traits were inheritable and therefore unchanging.

Early understandings of genetics were emerged from this understanding as family trees, and

charts and graphs of statistical analysis were gathered to support the argument for better breeding (p. 65). Race, another tenet, was closely connected to the idea of heredity yet presented some differences in where the ideas were accepted. The difference and dominance of the white race over the African American race was a widely held belief throughout society. However, as the early twenty-first century progressed, the scientific explanations of white superiority waned. Despite the lack of support from the scientific community, eugenicists had a powerful presence in socio-political spaces. This created fertile ground for eugenicists to sow seeds of racial inferiority in the minds of both policymakers, educators and students (pp. 71-73). Heredity and race were the basis for the last programmatic tenet of ability and degeneracy. The goals of the eugenic movement were to increase the population of the fit and decrease the population of the unfit (p. 76). Criteria for "fitness" revolved around ability and degeneracy. Disabilities–real or were enough reason to sterilize or institutionalize an individual. Crime and immorality were often linked to race and heredity and served as an impetus to maintain the program of racial cleansing. Laws and policies supported the institutionalization of these beliefs. Even more, these tenets of heredity, race, ability and degeneracy made the schoolhouse a prime location for the identification and sorting of individuals into "fit" and "unfit" categories.

Winfield (ibid) connected Lawrence A. Cremin's characterization of the American education system to the tenets of eugenics. The first characterization is popularization, the wide availability of education to all students in the country. This idea ties to heredity in that eugenicists wished to have total control over the "unfit" population and school was an ideal place to enact this control (p. 103). The school serves as a place where the unfit student can be identified and then sorted for the sole purpose of being restricted from opportunities that were meant only for those deemed fit. Even within groups of white students, ability and degeneracy

could serve as reason to restrict and exclude students from the same opportunities as their superior peers. Multitudinous describes the tendency to create a variety of educational institutions that are widely available to the public. Ability and degeneracy connect to this characterization as it was believed that the taxes should be wisely spent to properly care for the population. This led to an increase of institutions built to house "criminals" and the "insane" as a type of protection for the general population. Again, the school would serve as an identifier for those who would need to be institutionalized in order to relieve the public from the burden of their presence. Lastly, politicization defines using the education system to solve the problems of society rather than solving them through politics. Eugenics, though grounded in pseudoscientific theory, was a movement meant to improve society through the breeding of the most fit members of society. Educators became a vanguard for this goal, allowing classrooms to become the location of identification and sorting of the desirable and undesirable of society. While classrooms are now guided towards full inclusivity of all races and abilities, the "continued ignorance of the knowledge that educational theory, philosophy, and practice were developed both within and as a mandate of this atmosphere" (p. 105) continues to be problematic in how we assess the inequitable experiences of the diverse student body American schools serve.

Legacy of Eugenics and Collective Memory

Leyva (2009) analyzed the existence of social Darwinism in No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the Bush era reauthorization of ESEA. He began by chronicling the use of social Darwinism in creating the white American as the most "fit" in both the American and global context. The author made connections between social Darwinism and its cousin, eugenics, which positioned itself as a science dedicated to breeding the fittest. He argued that social Darwinism maintains its legacy in neoliberal practice through market driven approaches such as school

choice are intertwined with "survival of the fittest" as the best way to approach school reform. He critiqued neoliberalism as it purports free-market capitalism to be colorblind, meritocratic, and individualistic, thus ignoring its roots which are steeped in racists beliefs about the ability of people as determined by race. He then made the connection between neoliberalism and NCLB, arguing that its hyper-focus on standardized testing and preparing students to be competitive in the global market is playing out the neoliberal agenda. Due to its individualistic nature, the failure of a student promotes individual blame, rather than systemic accountability and critique.

In this same vein of neoliberal approaches of school choice for modern education systems, Lipman and Haines (2007) described the restriction of African American students in Chicago's Renaissance 2010 reform. In an attempt to attract elite businesses to the city, Chicago leaders participated in city planning that included the expansion of school choice through charters. This plan had two intended outcomes. The first was to create a working class of skilled workers by making sure students could at the very minimum read, communicate and do math. The second was to improve the educational performance of students of color for the good of the economy. Charter schools, for the most part, were located in gentrified neighborhoods, displacing former residents. Additionally, to attract middle class families to the city, high performing magnet charter schools were created in the more affluent neighborhoods. Both Leyva (2009) and Lipman and Haines (2007) discussed the problematic nature of neoliberal (market) approaches in public education spaces as a trend in modern education reform. Additionally, Leyva (2009) pointed out the connection between neoliberal approaches and social Darwinist theories. What is missing from both critiques is the naming of eugenic ideologies inherent to these approaches. That is, market approaches sort students into categories of those who can achieve and those who cannot achieve within the context of the educational system. Because

achievement is not colorblind, the mechanisms behind the criteria of success and the school system itself are intentional in who can and cannot succeed. Both articles are successful in critiquing the system; however, locating the problem in the context in which neoliberal policies have emerged is lacking.

Winfield (2007) discusses the role of collective memory in framing how we think within a certain society:

> Education, formed as a discrete area of academic inquiry within the same period of history dominated by eugenic ideology, carries a legacy informed and created by eugenic ideology, which has defined, sorted, and categorized students on the basis of a heretofore unexamined yardstick of "scientific" racialism. Put another way, we share a collective memory in America that shapes, frames, and defines our thinking about race, ability, and human worth. (p. 3)

Winfield (2007) explained that eugenicists secured their position in the collective memory of Americans by offering solutions for social problems of the Progressive Era and "reinterpreting Social Darwinism" (p. 6). As ideologies that have been clearly named become marred by poignant events, rebranding and repurposing of those ideologies became necessary. When eugenic beliefs were called by their proper name, the idea was that "fitness" was due to a biological pedigree was widely accepted. Seldom critiqued was the idea that the "unfit" were restricted from experiences and opportunities that eugenic proponents argued were not meant for them in the first place. As eugenic ideas became unpopular, our education systems sought to *create* "fitness" in students rather than suggest fitness could be bred. That is, standards of whiteness–the descendant of fitness–are used to determine fitness in school settings. Students who do not live up to those standards are then restricted in a variety of ways within the school

setting. Remaining from the legacy of eugenics are similar measurement tools, belief in the idea of an ideal student, and practices of restriction when students do not or cannot live up to that idea. This legacy lives in the policies created to manage and guide schools. Students feel the implication of it every time the system has failed to adequately educate them.

<div align="center">**African American Restriction**</div>

Framing African American Students

Ferguson (2000) analyzed the framing of black boys in k-12 spaces by school teachers and leaders. The author focused on a particular school and detailed how discipline is framed by negative perceptions of black boys. Two representations of black boys emerged from her study: black boys as criminals and black boys as an endangered species. The author discussed how teachers' discipline is based on morals or pragmatics but is ultimately influenced by their positionality. This combined, the representations of black males as criminals or endangered species, leads to disparate forms of discipline whenever Black students cannot conform to the "norm" student which is white and male. When the black boy student is viewed as a criminal, he is adultified. Unlike white boy students who are often viewed as precocious, the black boy's behavior is often criminalized and read as violent. When the black boy student is viewed as an endangered species, he is also adultified and punished for not being able to display behaviors that will keep him safe in a world that views him as dangerous. Most important in this analysis is the idea that black, male-identified students are categorized and their educability is judged based on behavior not their actual academic aptitude. These ideas have become normalized as have the reactions of teachers to push them out of academic spaces as a result of it (Young, 2016).

Pushout as Forms of Restriction

Fine (1991) reconstructed the ideas of student dropouts by describing ways in which schools push out students before they decide to drop out. In this study, pushout refers to the practices and policies in schools that create barriers to their ability to fulfill graduation requirements. This is different from dropout in that the barriers are put on the student by the school which ultimately leads to the student dropping out. This questions if dropouts are indeed inevitable based on the impact of the pushout policies and practices on the student. Pushout, according to the author involves curriculum that is not reflective of the student's culture and in some cases includes overt and covert racist ideas. It also includes schools punishing students through grading and attendance systems when home responsibilities outweigh the need to attend classes. Pushout is not appropriately building relationships with parents and family members. It is also the fallacy that education is the key to unlocking wealth and resources when a student's community does not reflect that reality. Fine (1991) pointed out that the act of pushing out a student exist in student unequal outcomes rather than equal opportunities that are promised to all students. Even more, it is the act of silencing that pushes student away from school. She described, "The silenced voices are disproportionately those who speak neither English nor standard English, the voices of the critics, and the voices which give away secrets that everyone knows and feverishly denies" (p.25). When the adults in the school building act on behalf of the policies and mandates handed down to them, cycles of pushout are perpetuated and students are signaled to leave as staying is not in their best interest. Fine's description of pushout is restriction as they are all barriers to students receiving the same education and educational opportunities as their white peers. The doors of opportunities are certainly open, but if the entrance is barricaded, entry is impossible.

Summary

Eugenics has a long history in the United States and modern education has been heavily influenced by its tenets. Most studies that connect the modern education system to eugenics focuses on its influence on standardized testing and special education. More research is needed to show the legacy of eugenics in other aspects of education, especially those that impact African American students. On the contrary, African American restriction in schools is well documented. Scholars have studied extensively the discriminatory ways African American students are treated. Over the last decade, research has focused on African American male student. More research is needed on the unique experiences of African American female students as their intersectional identities result in nuanced experiences but have similar outcomes to their male peers.

CHAPTER III - RESULTS

Heritable Traits

Eugenic ideas were most popular and widely accepted during the early twenty-first century. Heredity is a tenet of eugenics that asserts that a person's status in society can be determined by characteristics that are inherited. But, characteristics such as intelligence, economic status, and mental health conditions have long been refuted by scientists, who suggest that they do not have any bearing on genetics. Even so, heredity was central to eugenicists' advocacy for the breeding of "fitter" babies to advance the white American race. It also used heredity to legitimize the sterilization of those who were unable to produce "fit" babies (Stoskopf, 2002b). Even within white communities, a family could be ostracized if a family member's behaviors or characteristics were considered unfit. For example, if a parent was labeled feebleminded, the child could be legally institutionalized due to concerns that the child would become a menace to society.

During this same time period, schools utilized heredity arguments to group students of certain races together as having undesirable traits. Racist testing practices were used to confirm existing beliefs about the inferiority of African American individuals compared to those who identified as white. For example, an intelligence test would be pre-arranged for "literates" and "illiterates." These tests were different, and exams for "literates" contained questions that could be answered logically, whereas those for "illiterates" had questions that were impossible to answer because of missing information (Stoskopf, 2002b, pp.164-166). The literate test would be given to white people, whereas the illiterate test was often administered to African American people. The results from these exams were then used to claim lower intelligence levels of African American students and confirm the need to have segregated schools by race (Stoskopf,

2002b, pp. 164-166). In addition to applying heritability to the intelligence of marginalized groups, behavior was also heritable and therefore predetermined.

The post-antebellum period of the United States ushered in stereotypes of the violent African American. During this time, eugenics was used to scientifically validate this stereotype. To be African American was to lack intelligence and have a propensity for violence (Stoskopf, 2002b). The education policy documents analyzed for this study showed patterns that shared similarities with the definition of eugenics and the use of heredity as it pertains to breeding a fit society. This section explores how policy documents frame African American behavior and intelligence as natural occurrences within the African American community. The federal policy documents that were analyzed show an explicit use of heredity to describe African American student behavior. In slight contrast, district and local school policy documents show how concepts of heredity are used to shape the behavior of African American students.

Federal Policy Guidelines

The Final Report of the Federal Commission on School Safety (Devos, et.al., 2018) was released following the tragic shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. The goal of the report was to provide recommendations that would increase safety in U.S. public schools. Part of the recommendations included removing Obama era guidelines (Lhamon & Samuels, 2014) that sought to reduce the overrepresentation of students of color in punitive discipline data. According to these guidelines, if discrimination was found in a district or school's discipline data, the U.S. Office of Civil Rights (OCR) could investigate. The report suggested that Obama era guidelines disrupted discipline in schools rather than improving school environments. The guidelines named students of color as a primary group that experiences discriminatory discipline practices, and African American students were highlighted in the

research and data that supported the guidelines. In turn, the report denied the existence of

discriminatory practices against African American students and used racist research findings to

support the elimination of existing protections for students of color, specifically African

American students. Furthermore, the research employed racist stereotypes of African American

students, suggesting that differences in discipline data were attributable to behavior patterns

among African American students that diverged from those of white students.

The report outlines three reasons the guidelines should be removed. However, only two

of those reasons are relevant to the scope of this study. The first reason is the belief that

educators in schools know best what type of discipline is necessary; therefore, the federal

government should not intervene. The report reasoned that the guidelines caused schools to

improperly discipline students to avoid an investigation and loss of federal funds, rendering

unsafe school environments. The report states, "Students are less safe at school when teachers

turn a blind eye to misbehavior by disruptive or violent students in the interest of avoiding

running afoul of federal investigators" (as cited in Devos, et.al., 2018, p. 69). The report goes a

step further and purports that data commonly used to prove racial bias in exclusionary discipline

practices are misleading because they fail to highlight the fact that "the racial gap in suspensions

was completely accounted for by a measure of the prior problem behavior" (as cited in Devos,

et.al., 2018, p. 70).

This flawed framework was used to bolster the argument that punishment for these

behaviors cannot be racially motivated because the data were skewed, since the same few

students were disciplined multiple times. While the report uses colorblind language to discuss

disparities in discipline practices, the research used to form these arguments is racially explicit.

In the evidence used to back the argument that all students have lower achievement when

schools use less punitive approaches, Mac Donald (2018) is cited for her explanation that Black

students and white students do not misbehave at the same rates. She states, "It is fanciful to

think that the lack of socialization that produces such elevated rates of criminal violence would

not also affect classroom behavior" (Mac Donald, 2018). She goes on to highlight the differences

in rates of juvenile homicide between the African American and white students and explains that

this type of violence "indicates a failure of socialization" (Mac Donald, 2018). The author claims

that Black students have a propensity for violence because they are not socialized appropriately.

Her argument rests on biological understandings of race that essentialize Black students as

violent and white students as less violent. Another piece of research reference cited in the report

shares similar views. It describes:

> Black youth are significantly more likely to enter school unprepared and are significantly
>
> more likely to have deficits in many social skills (in particular, deficits that parents are
>
> unable to correct) that may translate into behavioral problems to be managed by teachers
>
> and school officials. (Wright, Morgan, Coyne, Beaver, & Barnes, 2014)

This quote advances the eugenic definition of heritability by including a deficit view of African

American parents as unable to discipline their children to behave appropriately in school. These

arguments perpetuate false stereotypes that African American students as a group are not only

violent and prone to misbehavior, but also that they deserve to bear the brunt of punitive

discipline practices in the name of school safety.

Furthermore, these arguments frame white students as innocent, well-behaved, and in

need of protection from the disorderly "other." Eugenicists used these same arguments to

legitimate segregation by race. Today, schools are less likely to segregate large swaths of

students using this type of reasoning. Instead, schools utilize exclusionary discipline tactics that

encourage—and in many ways incentivize—whiteness. African American students, who resist this mold of "the ideal student" rooted in whiteness, are at disproportionate risk of experiencing punitive discipline. This is exemplified by the report's recommendation to remove protections for discriminatory disciplinary practices against African American students.

District Agreement with the Office of Civil Rights

In 2012, the school district in this study entered into an agreement with the OCR ("Agreement", 2012) due to an investigation into discriminatory discipline practices against African American male students. The agreement was a joint effort between the district and OCR with the goal of implementing fair discipline practices that would reduce missed instructional time. This agreement was preceded by a study conducted by the Urban Strategies Council (2011), which defined problematic discipline practices in the district and provided recommendations for improvement. This study and its recommendations, which created a profile of African American students as "violent" and "endangered," were heavily used in the agreement between the district and OCR... Additionally, by presenting characteristics that were racially coded as heritable traits, the report paints a picture of African American students as an unnuanced group.

The Urban Strategies Council (2011) report highlighted three potential differences that contributed to disparities in rates of suspension: structural differences, behavioral differences, and treatment differences. The description of structural and behavioral differences both contained language that suggested African American students had issues with socialization. The explanation for structural differences stated, "Low achievement is associated with higher suspensions" (Urban Strategies Council, 2011, p. 76). In discussing low achievement, the study stated, "On average, poor children enter school with fewer math, literacy, and vocabulary skills

than their middle-class peers" (Urban Strategies Council, 2011, p. 45). Here, the word "poor" functioned as a proxy for African American, placing the blame for low achievement on the student's home life. Tropes of the single parent home, the welfare queen, and the absentee father have been historically applied to describe of the home environment of African American children and their lack of achievement in school.

The study continued with a description of behavioral differences that suggest, "exposure to violence impacts suspensions" (Urban Strategies Council, 2011, p. 76). The explanation followed, "Many violence exposed children suffer from anxiety, irritability, stress, and hyper-vigilance. This leads to negative behaviors in classroom, resulting in increased discipline referrals" (Urban Strategies Council, 2011, p. 76). Here, African American students were generalized as misbehaving because their violent communities had victimized them. To be clear, this is not meant to suggest the data presented in this study are incorrect. Rather, the singular description of this group is problematic. The monolithic portrayal of African American students' behavior was solidified when the study mentioned, "The behavior of African American males is different than that of other students . . . they are legitimately subjected to disciplinary action as a result of their more frequent violation of school rules" (Urban Strategies Council, 2011, pp. 46-47). That is, while the seriousness of student behaviors doesn't vary between white and Black students; rather, the types of offenses vary. For African American students, the report suggested that these behaviors required discipline, as they are rooted in deficit characteristics stemming from their homes and communities. Similar to eugenic definitions of heritable behaviors, the argument used in the report focused more on the individual and less on the structures that influence the behaviors. The study did offer critiques of structural practices that lead to the overrepresentation of African American students in the district's discipline data. However, the

policy changes recommended by the study focused on programs that sought to utilize less punitive discipline practices to prevent student misbehavior, rather than a thorough interrogation of the rules and structures with which students must comply.

Teaching Parents

While the overall number of suspensions has declined substantially over the past five years, racial and ethnic disparities in rates of suspension have persisted. The local school in this study is no exception. The Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) is a document all schools must complete at the end of an academic year. It outlines a school's plan for learning and culture along with specific actions schools can take to address any issues within these areas, and the document informs the approach to the reduction of African American male suspensions used by the local school in this study. For three academic years, parents were cited in the SPSA as part of the root cause of African American males being overrepresented in suspension data. The SPSA indicated the need to build and maintain strong relationships with the school's African American families. Yet, it also explained that "some students/parents lack knowledge in systems, rules, regulations, protocols of school" (ABSD, 2018). The SPSA recommended that the school "create learning nights for parents around empathy and conflict" (ABSD, 2018).

This recommendation reflects eugenic ideas in at least two ways. First, it suggests that African American parents lack knowledge around empathy and conflict, two words that are loaded with moral inclinations. To lack empathy and to have a propensity for conflict invokes notions of inhumanity–a status historically used to legitimize fear of African American people. Second, this statement frames a generational ignorance that ultimately results in the student's misbehavior that necessitates discipline. Students are not the only actors that won't comply; parents are also complicit for passing down their "ignorance" of empathy and conflict.

Therefore, the school becomes a site to mold the ideal parents, not just ideal students. While the parent "learning nights" would certainly be open to all, the action was motivated by a concern for African American students. While the school does take some responsibility for the disproportionately high rates of suspension of African American students–citing a lack of adequate training for teacher, a need for culturally responsive teaching, and the adultification of African American male students–the "learning nights" reinforce a narrative about heritable traits similar to that found in the federal and district policy documents. That story is not just about the failure of the child to comply with school rules. Rather, it is the collective failure of the student's home and community that has failed to prepare them for school, as opposed to the school failing to develop a space for the student to thrive.

Degeneracy

The eugenic definition of degeneracy describes the decline of physical, mental, and moral characteristics, which ultimately leads to social degradation (Billinger, 2014). Eugenic supporters believed degeneracy existed among people of lower socioeconomic classes and non-white races. Some eugenicists identified immoral behaviors such as drinking, drug use, and adultery as degenerative behaviors. Others broadened the definition to include mental illness and poverty. Definitions of degeneracy worsened with each generation and therefore "represented a regression in human evolution" (Billinger, 2014). The degenerative label determined one's value in society and ultimately one's fitness in society. To be degenerate also meant that one was socially degraded, or less valued in society.

During the early twenty-first century, evidence of degeneracy in a family could result in sterilization, institutionalization, or other forms of social control. With such broad definitions of degeneracy, the label was widely used. This allowed rich, white families to both avoid the label

and uphold their values and behaviors as the model for a life free of degenerate behaviors and characteristics. Degenerate behaviors were viewed as personal flaws rather than symptoms of discriminatory systems and structures. For example, the fact that a family was poor was enough evidence to determine their degeneracy. The system of capitalism, which depends on the existence of a poor class, was not a consideration in that person's status. As mentioned, race alone could be a factor that determined one's degeneracy. Because African American people were considered socially and intellectually inferior, the belief was that they could "only be educated within clear limits" (Stoskopf, 2002b, p. 172). Currently, schools no longer explicitly label students degenerate. However, there are ways in which schools evaluate and view certain behaviors of African American students that are reminiscent of degenerative definitions formerly utilized by eugenicists. This section will examine the ways in which policy documents at the federal, district, and local school levels suggest degenerative characteristics of African American students. Even more, the documents suggest behaviors need to be fixed, focusing primarily on the student, and less on the systems and structures that influence student behavior.

A "Fitter" Brother

One aspect of the Obama presidency that continues to be a core focus of the Obama Foundation today is the My Brother's Keeper (MBK) initiative. The goal of the initiative is to fund and support organizations and school districts that use programs and policies that address six key areas identified as root causes of unique issues facing African American and Latino males. Deservedly, MBK has been praised for the targeted supports it provides while uplifting the concerns of students who are often unheard. However, the initiative was criticized for its framing of African American males as "essentially damaged, as problems in need of a technocratic public–private solution" (Dumas, 2016, p.95).

The root causes presented in the MBK policy documents have elements of degeneracy. In the My Brother's Keeper Blueprint for Action (Office of the Press Secretary, 2014), the initiative is supported by data that paint a deficient picture of young African American men. These data include literacy levels, parent involvement, graduation rates, suspension rates, workforce participation, and crime data. In 2014, Obama discussed MBK during a press conference, highlighting the data as central to the purpose of the initiative. He describes, "Too many of them are falling by the wayside, dropping out, unemployed, involved in negative behavior, going to jail, being profiled" (Obama, 2014). While his intentions were altruistic, his description of the data misplaced the onus of responsibility for these problems on young African American males themselves. By this logic, young African American males are going to jail as opposed to being over-policed; they are unemployed, not encountering barriers through the application and interview process; they are dropping out rather than being pushed out.

Obama solidified this point of view in two ways throughout the speech. First, he described how he was similar to the young men, but pointed out an important distinction, which was that he "grew up in an environment that was more forgiving" (Obama, 2014). He credited his family, teachers, and community for holding him accountable and giving him several opportunities to correct his behaviors. In other words, he was saved from being degenerate. This distinction juxtaposes Obama's community, which saved him, to the communities targeted by MBK who haven't saved their sons from degeneracy. It is a well-known fact that Obama primarily grew up with his mother's family, who are white. Indeed, his proximity to whiteness was an important factor in his ability to escape the plight MBK participants face. Obama continued to link the behavior of these young men to their home lives. When Obama suggested that an active father "keeps his son out of trouble" and that "parents will have to parent–and turn

off the tv and help with homework" (Obama, 2014) he was hinting at a collective failure. The young men are not in need of this initiative because society failed them; rather, their parents allowed them to fall into decline. One of the features of eugenic degeneracy was its heritable characteristic. That is, degeneracy was never an individual issue, rather it was familial and collective. Not only could a family member's behavior label the entire family as degenerate, but entire racial groups were assumed degenerate based on their distance from whiteness.

The narrative of escaping degeneracy is advanced by uplifting specific profiles of African American males who prevailed through the challenges they faced. These are the type of men whom MBK would consider mentors for the young students. In the aforementioned speech, Obama emphasized that "hard work" and "no excuses" would help them achieve their goals and that they should resist settling into their stereotype. He uplifted the young men in the room who were "starting to make those good choices because somebody stepped in and gave them a sense of how they might go about it" (Obama, 2014). By holding up mentors who are making "good choices," Obama places the responsibility of overcoming racist structures on the young men. Likewise, eugenicists ignore the structural and systemic barriers that cause behaviors they labeled degenerate. It is the person's behavior that is degenerate, despite outside factors. Obama's suggestions that overcoming stereotypes through the help of mentors is less hopeful and more admonishment. In other words, MBK is the savior from degeneracy the African American male students need. Therefore, they are admonished to resist the systems and stereotypes placed on them to improve their behavior and outcomes. Without sufficiently interrogating the anti-black racism that contributes to the plight MBK students face, their choices are sealed. MBK students will either continue to degenerate or they will use the resources of the program to be rescued.

Character Development Remedies Degeneracy

The district in this study uses a culture guide to assist secondary school leaders in fostering school cultures that are conducive to learning. The guide includes a student culture rubric, which details adult and student actions that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's practices and procedures. Most of the rubric establishes adult actions that support building a positive school culture. The parts of the rubric that interpret positive student behaviors, though, are all based on compliance. For example, the highest mark on the student engagement strand prescribe that "students internalize and model behavioral expectations without teacher supervision" (ABSD, 2015). While adults are prescribed several roles through which to shape school culture, the student's only responsibility is to follow what adults have created for them.

This rubric serves as lens for how student and adult behavior can be understood. Adults are expected to create and engage, while students are required to conform. Therefore, when reviewing the agreement between the district and the OCR, the framing of African American students became clearer. The agreement was created because the district was investigated by OCR for discriminatory discipline practices. The goal of the agreement was to "ensure that all District students are provided schools that are safe and that create an environment that is conducive to learning" ("Agreement", 2012, p. 1). It went on to state, "It is critical that students learn and are reinforced in appropriate behavior so that they are engaged in the District's education program, rather than its disciplinary system" (p. 1). The culture rubric suggested the ideal engagement of students is realized by compliance. The agreement suggested that compliance not only helps create an optimal learning environment, but also that students should be disciplined into meeting that norm. There is no indication in the agreement that the rules and

structures students are expected to follow in order to show compliance were interrogated at all.

By not interrogating this, one can assume that the rules are supposedly colorblind and anti-racist.

However, the existence of this document suggests African American students are viewed as

unable to comply compared to their white peers. This is why the agreement is full of

interventions for student behavior aimed at reinforcing student behavior that will keep them from

experiencing punitive discipline.

Though subtle, the agreement hinted at the degeneracy of African American students in

their supposed inability to comply with the rules. In other words, the report suggested that non-

compliance was the primary cause of disproportionately high discipline rates. The district's

agreement with OCR mandated schools to use the Response to Intervention (RTI) system, to

bolster student achievement and reduce suspensions ("Agreement", 2012). Again, this policy

underscores the need to "fix" student behavior. It follows that, because they are over-disciplined,

the approach to the discipline must change. Yet, the ultimate goal of disciplining the student into

the desired behavior remains. That is, the goal of discipline should be to get rid of students'

degeneracy so that they can fully participate in the district's education program. Policies such as

these are geared toward changing the *student*, not changing the *system* to which the student

responds.

Teaching Students to Care

The local school site used the SPSA to address the issue of disproportionality of African

American students in the discipline data. As mentioned in the previous section, the SPSA

outlines a school's most important issues, the root causes, and the action plan to address the

issues. The SPSA submitted for the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 academic years listed

overrepresentation of African American males in discipline data as a key area of concern. The

SPSA submitted for both academic years, the root cause analysis presented in the SPSA admitted that further progress needed to be made with culturally responsive teaching and restorative justice training–a program under the district's RTI system. Even so, the SPSA submitted for the former academic year noted that "some students lack the critical thinking and coping skills to understand the implications of their actions" (ABSD, 2017) as part of the root cause. The SPSA submitted for the latter year explained that "an emphasis on social standing causes students to value image and social currency over empathy and community" (ABSD, 2018) was the root cause. The language used in these analyses reveal degenerative qualities at least two ways. Because this portion of the document specifically addressed African American students, all statements that were student-specific were referencing this group. Hence, stating students lack the critical thinking and coping skills suggested a mental decline of African American students compared to their peers. By this logic, whereas students of other races are able to understand and process the repercussions of their actions, this document suggested that African American students do not have the mental capacity to do the same. As a result, they behave in ways that ultimately lead to their discipline. The other nod at degeneracy was in the description of what African American students value. Overvaluing image and social currency is an argument that was used to describe why African American communities continue to face socio-economic hardships while simultaneously devaluing education. The belief was that if African Americans shifted their focus to education and improving their lives financially, their hardships would be alleviated. The nod at image and social currency suggested that student's values were misplaced and less valuable than mainstream manifestations of empathy and community. Even more, the accusation of not valuing the community and lacking empathy positioned the students as lacking moral capacity. In comparison, eugenicists have long used racist images of African American

people to suggest they were less human than white people. These images have been used to keep them separate from white communities that were deemed fully human. These notions are strong indicators of degeneracy in that it calls into question the humanity–morally and mentally–of African American students.

CHAPTER IV–DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

This study explores the existence of eugenic ideas in current federal, district, and local school education policies. The documents analyzed presented examples of both conceptual and concrete examples of eugenic logics through the frames of heredity and degeneracy. These analyses explain how African American students are disciplined under these policies and how their humanity is devalued.

Conceptual vs Actual Eugenics

The documents had various connections to eugenic definitions of heredity and degeneracy. Most of the ideas found were conceptual examples of eugenics. That is, there were elements of eugenic beliefs around heredity and degeneracy that existed in the ways students were viewed in the policy documents analyzed. While some of the examples were subtle, there was enough evidence in the documents to draw connections between the policy language and ideas held by eugenicists in the early twenty-first century. There was only one concrete example of actual eugenics, in which the ideas presented in the policy document mirrored those of eugenicists.

The danger of both conceptual and actual eugenics in education policy is how it frames African American students in stereotypical ways that constitute "truth." Whether the policies suggest all African American students are mentally and morally deficient or naturally inclined to engage in violent behavior, the narrow viewpoints represented in these policies are problematic. The ways in which students are constructed in the imaginations of educators determines how they are treated. If educators view students as dangerous, then students will be disciplined out of fear. If students are viewed as troubled, they will be disciplined out of pity. What students need

instead is discipline that supports them in building mentally, physically, and emotionally healthy lives. Educators should be critical of all policies that have undertones of eugenic beliefs. The very foundation of the eugenics movement relied on the dehumanization of people who were deemed "unfit" for the sake of advancing "the fit." It is imperative that modern education make space for all students to realize their own unique strengths. Even more, eugenic ideas veil problematic structures within schools by focusing on individual behaviors. When this happens, reforms are created to target controlling student behavior, as opposed to interrogating the structures themselves. This creates a band-aid effect in which reforms are proposed but are off target. This creates a vicious cycle of attempting to fix the wrong problem with the wrong solution.

Norming Behaviors Through Discipline

This study sought to understand how African American students are treated according to how they are viewed through policy documents. Because behavior was the area of focus for the analyzed documents, the distinction between discipline and punishment is necessary. Discipline and punishment serve different purposes in the K-12 context. Discipline seeks to train the student, whereas punishment seeks to harm the student. This study uncovered that, at all levels of education policy, educators were attempting to reduce the amount of punishment–suspensions, expulsions, or any action that resulted in the loss of class time– in favor of less punitive disciplinary measures. Despite this, discipline still had a specific behavior or set of behaviors as the goal. That is, discipline sought to train the student to become a specific type of person. Rules presented in these policy documents outlined the desired behaviors and created the norm to which students should eventually conform. The ideal (fit) student would be the one who complies with the rules either by responding to the discipline or not needing the discipline at all.

But, as this thesis argues, the issue is not in the discipline itself, but the norm that discipline seeks to inculcate in students. In many of the analyzed documents, there was an ideal student, even if they were not explicitly described. This was evident in the binary Black and white framing of discipline, which positioned African American student behaviors against white student behaviors. The fact that white students can avoid discipline and punishment shows their behavior is considered ideal and fit for the school setting. This allows the norm to go un-interrogated, allowing whiteness to be maintained as the standard.

The tendency to normalize or standardize whiteness was an important tenet of eugenics. Eugenicists sought to maintain power in elite, white classes by upholding their values, knowledge, and behavior as the standard. Fitter family contests that essentially evaluated a family's whiteness were events that showcased the importance of proximity to these norms (Stoskopf, 2002b). While society no longer explicitly seeks to breed fitness through birthing babies, upholding a norm and attempting to discipline students into that norm constitutes the same function. School policies in this study suggested a norm to which African American students were compared. Degenerate and heritable traits could be highlighted only because they fell outside the norm. The common thread in all the documents was that discipline was the tool used to try and change African American student behavior to fit the norm. This indicates that school policies take on the role of breeding fit students. That is, the policies uphold a norm that requires African American students to be disciplined into fitting the norm.

Conclusion

One could consider African American students "breaking the rules" as a form of protest of the norm. Students are well aware of the function of school discipline. These students are not pushing against the essence of education; rather, they are resisting the norm that schooling

requires them to fit in order to be educated. In an article that uses queer theory to explore issues in education, McWilliams (2016) explains, "Failure . . . is not merely a viable pathway through education but is a strategy for self-fulfillment and rejection of the regime of the normal" (p. 267). When the school fails to discipline the student into the intended norm, the student must be restricted (suspended, sent out of class, etc.). What this may also mean is that this restriction is a consequence of student protest, or refusal to be created into the school's version of the ideal student. If this is the case, schools are missing a great opportunity to leverage the student's understanding of their own identity to allow the student to naturally fit the mold they best see fit for themselves.

The first part of the research question asks about the existence of eugenics in current education policy. Both conceptual and concrete examples of eugenic ideas were found in policy documents at the federal, district, and local school levels. Most prevalent were ideas around heredity and degeneracy. The policy documents suggested that African American students biologically and culturally inherit certain characteristics that lead to misbehavior. The documents also hinted at characteristics that show mental and social decline, which were used to explain both the misbehavior and the disproportionate number of African American students in discipline data.

The second question asks how students are seen and treated accordingly under these policies. The characteristics and behaviors these policies highlighted were sought to be corrected through discipline. The purpose of this discipline was to get students to comply to school rules and expectations. The intended goal was to mold students into a norm grounded in whiteness. The tendency to norm is rooted in eugenic ideas and suggests deficiency of the students who

cannot or possibly refuse to be normed. Failure to comply results in restrictions such as time out of class using office referrals and suspensions.

The existence of eugenic ideas is subtle, with the exception of reports that explicitly used biological understandings of race to explain student behaviors. Nonetheless, ideas about who is fit for schools still exist. What is different from the use of eugenics as an acceptable understanding of race and ability is that schools are trying to create the ideal through discipline as opposed to breeding through birth. While the disparate conditions under which African American students experience school is well known, this study offers an alternative perspective that shows that eugenic ideas are still present.

Recommendations

This study seeks to uncover eugenic ideology in current education policy that impacts African American students. While the intention was to look at both African American males and females, much of the discipline data focused on males. There is gap in data available that includes female students, although research suggests that African American female students have similar school experiences. More data around discipline and policies that impact African American female students may give a clearer picture of how African American students experience discrimination due to eugenic ideas in education policy.

This study was written with policymakers in mind. The hope is that they understand the theories that underlie research and concepts that inform policy decisions. It is not the goal of this study to label policymakers as good or bad. This study wishes to depart from that binary construction so that policymaking can be understood on a spectrum of how informed it is and the epistemological approaches that were used to inform the policy. Additionally, it is crucial that policymakers have a clear understanding of how race plays a role in both the creation and

implementation of policies. There is no such thing as a colorblind policy. Policies that are colorblind will inevitably privilege those who are already privileged. If policies are meant to support students of color, race and racism must be considered.

The last recommendation is for educational institutions to teach the history of eugenics. This is not to indoctrinate students in eugenic thinking, as was the primary goal of eugenic educators in the early twenty-first century. Rather, it is important to teach as to not forget. Relevant connections can be made to show how these ideas still live in our society today. Without knowing it exists, eugenic ideas will continue to be hidden.

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