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## Excerpts from the 2006 Report: Racial Transformation and the Changing Nature of Segregation.

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## ARTICLE

### **Excerpts from the 2006 Report: Racial Transformation and the Changing Nature of Segregation.**

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### **Racial Transformation and the Changing Nature of Segregation**

Gary Orfield and Chungmei Lee

*Editors: The excerpts below are from "Racial Transformation and the Changing Nature of Segregation," a report by Gary Orfield and Chungmei Lee for the Harvard Civil Rights Project. Too often in our national conversations, racism and segregation are treated as though they are things of the past or problems that remain only in isolated pockets. This report makes clear that racism in education remains a significant problem and that segregation has reasserted itself with a vengeance over the last decade. It also points out that racism and segregation can no longer be understood as simply a black/white problem while reminding us that no serious discussion of these questions can take place without considering economics, class, and the symbiotic relationship between race and poverty in U.S. history and contemporary society. This report is crucial for anyone wanting to understand the truth about access to quality education in U.S. society. A link to the full report follows the excerpts.*

## **RACIAL TRANSFORMATION AND THE CHANGING NATURE OF SEGREGATION**

When Martin Luther King made his first speech at the Lincoln memorial in 1957 three years after the Brown decision, desegregation was about a battle to give black students access to schools previously established for whites only, mostly in the seventeen states that had practiced segregation by state law. King called for action to enforce the desegregation decision. The nation's schools were overwhelmingly white, and when King marched against segregation eight years later in Chicago in 1965, it was still about a black-white conflict. Forty years later, however, the nation's schools have changed almost beyond recognition; the white majority is continuously shrinking, and the segregation has taken on a multiracial character. Unfortunately, though generations of students have been born and graduated, segregation is not gone. In fact, in communities that were desegregated in the Southern and Border regions, segregation is increasing; and in regions that were never substantially desegregated, including many metropolitan areas in the Northeast, Midwest, and West, segregation is growing in degree and complexity as the nation becomes increasingly multiracial. The resegregation of blacks is greatest in the Southern and Border states and appears to be clearly related to the Supreme Court decisions in the 1990s permitting return to segregated neighborhood schools. These changes, and the continuing strong relationship between segregation and many forms of educational inequality, compound the already existing disadvantage of historically excluded groups. The rapid growth of these excluded populations in conditions of intensifying segregation make urgent the development of plans and policies to transform diversity into an asset for all children and society, rather than continuing to separate children in a way that harms both those excluded from better schools and white students in those schools who are not being prepared for success in multiracial communities and workplaces of the future.

School segregation is often perceived as an old and obsolete issue. Reactions include claims that it was solved long ago, that, on the contrary, experience shows it cannot be solved, or that we have learned to make separate schools genuinely equal. None of these perceptions is true. Past research showed that,

after a period of desegregation in the late 1960s, black students became increasingly resegregated in the South and Border states. Latino students, who have been excluded from serious desegregation efforts, are becoming even more segregated than black students in Southern and Western regions. Yet, despite recent trends in resegregation, the South and Border states remain among the least segregated for black students, suggesting that desegregation orders in the past have been effective, and that segregation is not an intractable issue. Further, the strong relationship between poverty, race and educational achievement and graduation rates shows that, but for a few exceptional cases under extraordinary circumstances, schools that are separate are still unquestionably unequal. Segregation is an old issue but one that is deeply rooted and difficult to resolve and extremely dangerous to ignore.

If segregation were just about race or ethnicity, it might be of only academic interest. However, segregation is rarely only by race or ethnicity. It is almost always double or triple segregation, involving concentrated poverty and, increasingly, linguistic segregation, and this multiple segregation is almost always related to many forms of tangible inequality in educational opportunity on multiple dimensions. When the Supreme Court decided the *Brown* decision that began the desegregation revolution, it emphasized the psychological harms of segregation and said nothing specific about the educational gains connected with desegregation. The decision was largely about giving students the right to attend the normal public schools where they would presumably receive more equal education and not face the stigma of apartheid and overt racial exclusion. Not much could be known about segregation outside the South because many schools and state governments did not even collect racial statistics that would permit people to know how much segregation there was, much less what it was related to.

Further, though urban desegregation was resisted, it has been viewed as a positive experience by both white and minority parents whose children experienced it as well as teachers and students. In a 2004 poll held by Education Week, Americans expressed their belief in the importance of racially integrated education. Our project surveyed African Americans and Latinos in metro Boston in 2005, in the city that saw what was probably the most bitter conflict in any American city over school desegregation back in the 1970s. We found that even there, where minority families feel unwelcome in many settings, a large majority wants more done to integrate the schools. An earlier study of black Boston parents who sent their children on long bus rides to suburban schools showed that their motivation was overwhelmingly to obtain better school opportunities for their children, and they found both the opportunities and the interracial experiences strongly positive. Surveys we have conducted among high school juniors in cities across the country show very positive responses to interracial educational experiences among all groups of students, who feel well prepared to live and work in a multiracial society. In a survey conducted in 2003, more than half (57%) of adults surveyed believed that racially integrated schools are better for kids, and only seven percent believed the opposite. The fact that desegregation is not being discussed by political and most educational leaders does not mean that it is not highly important or that it failed or that there are no viable alternatives, only that it is controversial.

Lastly, there has not been a serious discussion of the costs of segregation or the advantages of integration for our most segregated population, white students. The lack of discussion of this issue in public schools stands in sharp contrast to the intense national discussion of the question in colleges during the long struggle that led up to the Supreme Court's 2003 decision upholding affirmative action in college admissions. In that decision, the Court concluded that there was compelling evidence of tangible benefits of college integration for white and all other groups of students, and that the nation's major institutions and the democracy itself needed to have students trained in interracial settings who were prepared for adult lives in the kind of society we are becoming. Research that The Civil Rights Project and others conducted in colleges clearly showed such benefits for white students, whose

previous schooling had been the most segregated, and this research was recognized by the Supreme Court in upholding affirmative action. A recent national poll in 2004 found that close to two-thirds of Americans surveyed believe it is “very important” that colleges and universities prepare students to participate in a diverse society. Further, more than 70 percent of those surveyed believed that students acquiring a diverse educational experience on college and university campuses would bring society together.

This report is about the changing patterns of segregation in American public schools through the 2003-2004 school year. We begin by examining the transformation of racial composition in the nation’s schools, the dynamic patterns of segregation and desegregation of all racial groups in regions, states, and districts by using data from 1968 until 2003-4. We examine both the changes over the last decade (1991-2003) as well as those over a much longer period (1954-2003). Unless otherwise specified data from this report are computed from the Common Core of Data of the National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education for the years 1991 and 2003. Where data for a given year is missing, such as the racial statistics from Georgia and Virginia for 1991, it is noted in the tables and the nearest year is substituted and noted. We then explore the relationship between racial and economic segregation, document the growing presence of multiracial schools, as well as discuss the implications of the lifting of desegregation orders on districts and the possible policy alternatives. The report ends with a brief discussion of what could be done to increase integration in schools.

We rely on two kinds of measures to examine the dimensions of segregation. The exposure index measures the share of a particular group in the school of the average student of another racial group. We also examine the distribution of students in schools with different racial compositions: majority minority (defined as 50-100% minority), majority white (defined as 50-100% white), and intensely segregated minority schools (defined as schools with more than 90% minority). In some tables we include calculations of the number and percent of students in “apartheid schools” that is, schools with zero to one percent white students.

## **Demographic Transformation of American Public Schools**

Since the 2000 Census a great deal has been written about the demographic transformation under way in many American communities as the U.S. moves toward the day when citizens of European background will no longer be the majority, but the changes are much more rapid and dramatic in the school age population. In the 2003-2004 school year the national totals showed Latinos are the largest minority group at 19 percent, followed by 17 percent black students, four percent Asian students and one percent American Indian students (Table 1). All of the minority communities are growing much faster than whites, with Latino and Asians increasing most rapidly. The fact that Latinos are the youngest group, have the largest families, and have children at younger ages will result in population growth independent of immigration. For African Americans, on the other hand, child bearing is now similar to the white rates, though the population is younger and thus producing relatively larger numbers of children.

Latinos, now clearly the largest minority in the schools, have the largest presence in the most rapidly growing regions in the Sunbelt and make up 14 percent of students in the Northeast, long the center of immigration from the Caribbean and now drawing Latinos from many regions in spite of its slow growth. Given the upsurge in Latino enrollment and the low white birth rates, the regions of the historic South, stretching from Virginia to Texas, and of the West, from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific, no longer have a majority of whites. The South, the nation’s most populous region, in 2003 had 50 percent white students while the West had 47 percent. While the South has always been home

to the majority of U.S. blacks and has by far the highest proportion of black students at 27 percent, it is also a region where Latino enrollment is rising rapidly so that in the 2003-04 school year, one in five of its students is Latino. Even in the South, where the traditional black-white models of U.S. race relations are most deeply rooted, the framework is clearly breaking down.

In the West, where blacks have played a large role in raising civil rights issues and movement, there are now five times as many Latino students as black students, who now constitute only seven percent of the enrollment. The West is the great center of Latino enrollment with 36 percent Latino enrollment, and like the South, also foreshadows the increasingly multiracial nature of U.S. education.

The other major regions of the country still have very substantial majorities of white public school students—69 percent in the Border states stretching from Oklahoma to Delaware, 66 percent in the Northeast, which reaches from Pennsylvania through New England, and 74 percent in the slow growing Midwest, stretching from Ohio to the Rocky mountain states. The Midwest and the Border states, lagging in job creation, have relatively small Latino and Asian numbers though there are growing local concentrations.

Viewed in historical perspective, the nation’s schools are going through an astonishing transformation since the 1960s, changing from a country where more than four of every five students were white, to one with just 58 percent white enrollment nationwide and changing slightly each year. Within a decade it is likely that there will be fewer than half white students in our public schools, which serve nearly nine in ten U.S. students. This will not be true because of flight to private schools, which serve a much smaller proportion of students than they did in the 1950s and are expected to serve a declining share in the future. It is because of a changing population structure created by differential birth rates and age structures and a largely nonwhite international flow of millions of immigrants. Since whites are older, marry at later ages, have smaller families, and account for a small fraction of immigrants, these changes are almost certain to continue. The end of the white majority will lead to a nation of schools without a majority of any one racial group.

**Table 1**  
**Regular Public School Enrollments by Race/Ethnicity and Region, 2003-04**

	%Native				
%White	%Black	%Latino	%Asian	American	
West	47	7	36	8	2
Border	69	21	4	2	4
Midwest	74	15	7	3	1
South	50	27	20	2	0
Northeast	66	16	14	5	0
Total	58	17	19	4	1

Source: Common Core of Data, 2003-04

Given this transformation of the nation’s public schools, white students are attending schools with more minority students than before. However, of all racial groups, whites remain the most isolated group: the average white student attends schools where more than three quarters (78%) of his or her peers are also white (Table 2). As a result of this isolation, most nonwhite groups experience less exposure to white students than one would expect given the racial composition of the nation’s public schools. The average black student attends a school that is 30 percent white and the average Latino

student, 28 percent. Asian and American Indian students attend schools with larger proportions of white students, likely due to the fact that their populations are far smaller and less residentially segregated than either the black and Latino populations.

## Why Segregation Matters

Racial segregation is not just about race. If race were not linked to other forms of inequality we would be a different society, the society we hope that we can eventually become. There is no evidence that the long struggle of civil rights groups to end school segregation was only motivated by a desire to have minority children sit next to white children; there was a strong belief that predominantly white schools offered better opportunities on many levels—more competition, higher graduation and college going rates, more demanding courses, better facilities and equipment, etc. and that the “separate but equal” principle enunciated by the Supreme Court in its 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision had never been honored. More than that, the Supreme Court concluded in 1954 that in America’s racially polarized society, separate schools were “inherently unequal.”

Past research has documented that for the segregation of black and Latino students the great majority of cases is closely related to concentrated poverty. The important fact is that we are not talking simply about racial segregation but about the whole syndrome of inequalities related to the double or triple segregation these schools typically face. For Latino students, in many cases it also involves linguistic isolation in schools with many native Spanish speakers and few fluent native speakers of academic English, which students must acquire to be successful in high school and college. Concentrated poverty is shorthand for a constellation of inequalities that shape schooling. These schools have less qualified, less experienced teachers, lower levels of peer group competition, more limited curricula taught at less challenging levels, more serious health problems, much more turnover of enrollment, and many other factors that seriously affect academic achievement. There may or may not be severe inequalities of school finance, but a very basic problem in any case is all the added instructional costs and burdens that are concentrated in these segregated high poverty schools—language training, some forms of special education, constant training and supervision of new teachers because teachers leave much more rapidly, remedial education, social work and counseling for kids from severely troubled families, health emergencies, frequent moves and school transfer in mid-year, and many others. This means that equal dollars cannot produce equal opportunities. This syndrome of inequalities is so profound that there is a very striking relationship between a school’s poverty level and its test scores, independent of any other factors. Reformers for the past 40 years have consistently noted and celebrated the exceptions to this pattern, partly because they are so rare, but they have never figured out how to “scale up” those patterns of leadership and extraordinary dedication found in many of those schools or even, in many cases, how to maintain that success in specific schools after their great leader leaves, or faculty teams break up, or resources are withdrawn in a budget crunch.

The data in the following table show that in 2003-4 almost one-seventh of U.S. schools reported that they had 80-100 percent minority students, and three-fourths of those schools reported that 50-100 percent of their students were from families poor enough to qualify for free or reduced price school lunches (Table 14). Given that some schools do not offer the lunch program and that many children in poor high schools either do not eat in the cafeteria or are too ashamed to apply for free lunch by documenting their family’s poverty, the rate is doubtless higher. At the other extreme, 52 percent of U.S. schools have 0 to 20% minority students and only one-seventh of those schools are dealing with concentrated poverty, which is related to many negative factors from poor prenatal development, poor childcare and preschool experiences, untreated health problems, instability from frequent involuntary moves, exposure to neighborhood violence, schools with less trained and experienced teachers, and

many more sources of inequality.

**Table 14**  
**Relationship between Segregation by Race and Poverty, 2003-04**

Percent Minority Students in Schools										
% Poor	0-10%	10-20%	20-30%	30-40%	40-50%	50-60%	60-70%	70-80%	80-90%	90-100%
in Schools										
0-10%	32	25	15	13	11	9	12	10	13	17
10-25%	23	25	23	14	8	4	3	2	1	1
25-50%	31	33	37	39	34	27	18	10	7	6
50-100%	15	17	25	35	48	60	67	77	78	76
% of Schools (Column Totals)	40	12	8	6	6	5	4	4	4	10

Source: Common Core of Data, 1991 and 2003

### What Can Be Done?

*If growing segregation threatens the American future and denies important opportunities to children of all races, the logical question is--what can be done?*

It is often said that the trends are deeply unfortunate but that there is little or nothing that can be done about them, given the force of the demographic changes or the current leadership of the judiciary and the elected branches of government. This is wrong.

Substantial progress can be made and some communities are successfully defending desegregation or seeking new ways to achieve it. Most of our school districts and communities are doing very little to work on this issue or even to discuss it, and some are taking steps that are clearly negative. The floodtide of data about racial differences and school level achievement scores produced by No Child Left Behind and state reforms and recent dropout research show the persisting educational inequalities in segregated schools. In fact, the little discussed reality is that no one has a program shown to equalize segregated schools on scale; and, as the Supreme Court recognized in the recent college affirmative action case, there are lessons very important to living and working in a multiracial society that cannot, in their nature, be learned in segregated schools.

It is true that demography changes the issues. In a country with only 58% white students and two of its major regions without a white majority, there is no way that all minority students could attend majority white schools. If that were considered the only reasonable achievement of desegregation, it would become less feasible every year. The right way to begin to think about this is to adopt a few basic principles and then consider a variety of decisions and practices in light of how they may assist or undermine the goals.

The first principle is that segregation by race and ethnicity is almost always related to seriously unequal opportunities for all races, including whites, and it should be minimized. The second is that, to the extent that we can increase the access of students from historically excluded to stronger middle class schools without jeopardizing those schools and their students, that is a very desirable goal for

many reasons relating not only to the students' own destinies but also to the realization of the broad goals of creating a successful and stable multiracial society. The third is that successful models for lowering segregation have been demonstrated for decades in various districts and programs.

The first principle that is needed is recognition of the problem and the opportunity and creation of a goal of successfully integrated schools at the level of the school, the district, the state, and the nation. There are important things that can be done at each level. The recent decisions of three high federal courts that affirm the right of communities to take race-conscious action to create or retain integrated schools clearly lend support to community efforts and to state policies supporting integration. State constitutions and laws can also provide support for integrationist policies. The following are important dimensions for policy on this issue:

- 1) Communities and community groups considering moves to terminate desegregation orders should be made fully aware of the fact that unitary status rulings eliminate the rights and judicial protection for minority students that grew out of the history of local discrimination. A court order provides protection against local political decisions which create segregated and unequal education for minority children and protects the rights of local educators to pursue voluntary magnet school and other educational approaches without fear of judicial challenge.
- 2) Communities should carefully examine the relationship between segregation and the success of schools in meeting state standards and NCLB requirements as well as a good graduation rate for students and the availability of college-oriented courses in high school. If there is a systematic relationship and the local reform plans have failed to resolve it, civil rights and educational organizations should ask for a plan to lessen segregation by race and poverty.
- 3) In areas of increasing school segregation and racial transition in sectors of suburbia, federal, state and local civil rights enforcement agencies and private fair housing groups should continually monitor housing market discrimination and steering, including inappropriate use of test score data to steer homebuyers away from integrated communities.
- 4) Successful magnet school programs that produce integrated student bodies within school districts should be expanded, and regional magnets drawing students together for special programs across school district boundary lines should be created.
- 5) Charter schools should have specific integration goals and policies, including policies on recruitment and transportation to school.
- 6) Transfer policies that foster integration should be continued and transfers that increase segregation or undermine integrated communities discontinued. The transfers provided under NCLB should follow that rule and should open opportunities to transfer from segregated high poverty failing schools to better, more integrated schools in other districts.
- 7) State civil rights and legal officials should support efforts of communities to retain and expand school integration and should encourage regional cooperation among suburbs as suburban resegregation spreads.
- 8) Private foundations, university centers, and federal research agencies should sponsor basic and applied research on the spread of multiracial schools, their impact on learning and degree attainment, and preparation for functioning in multiracial communities and on the development of techniques and curricula to improve outcomes in these schools.



To view the **COMPLETE REPORT** and study conducted by The Civil Rights Project go to:

<http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/deseg/deseg06.php>

[Racial Transformation and the Changing Nature of Segregation](#) (in PDF Format)