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Kristen Cochran

Cedarville University, kristencochran@cedarville.edu

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The American Educational System: Inequitable and Unjust

Kristen Cochran

The end of African American slavery marked the beginning of immense challenges in African American education. Studies reveal African Americans remain remarkably less likely to hold higher education degrees than Caucasians. A study conducted by authors Naylor, Wyatt-Nichol, and Brown reveals, “13.7% of the Black population 25 years and older hold a baccalaureate degree; and 7.5% hold an advanced degree” (528). A study of the same age groups in the white population reveals the following: “22.5% a baccalaureate degree and 12.5% an advanced degree” (528). The difference is dramatically clear. Naylor, Wyatt-Nichol, and Brown’s article, “Inequality: Underrepresentation of African American Males in U.S. Higher Education”; Whaley and Noël’s article, “Sociocultural Theories, Academic Achievement, and African American Adolescents in a Multicultural Context: A Review of the Cultural Compatibility Perspective”; and Lynn’s article, “Race, Culture, and the Education of African Americans” reveal the considerable research detailing the challenges African Americans face to receive superb educations. While Naylor, Wyatt-Nichol and Brown; Whaley and Noël; and Lynn agree that poverty and the African American culture play an imperative role in African American achievement, each study proposes various solutions to remedy the current depressed state of African American education.

Each study acknowledges poverty’s detrimental role in African American education, but only Naylor, Wyatt-Nichol, and Brown offer potential solutions for poverty’s effects. The authors believe poverty directly relates to degree attainment. They provide a startling statistic: “Students from upper income families are nine times more likely to graduate from college than students from lower income families” (qtd. in Mortenson 245; Naylor, Wyatt-Nichol, and Brown 524).

First, Naylor, Wyatt-Nichol, and Brown suggest low-income

students do not often attend academically rigorous institutions. Some specifically prestigious institutions subtly discriminate against low-income families, predominantly accepting students from wealthy backgrounds (Naylor, Wyatt-Nichol, and Brown 530). This factor alone deters bright, high-achieving African American students from attending academically rigorous institutions. Naylor, Wyatt-Nichol, and Brown observe African Americans primarily attend community colleges because of lower tuition and less minority discrimination, in general, than prestigious universities (530). In addition, community colleges do not hold the same standards as prestigious and private universities. The authors also contribute low African American college graduation rates to a lack of family income, not intelligence (Naylor, Wyatt-Nichol, and Brown 524). Students lack the monetary resources to complete degrees; thus, African Americans hold fewer degrees than Caucasians. The authors also note that higher education levels increase employability. Theoretically, increased education promotes personal economic stability.

In addition, Naylor, Wyatt-Nichol, and Brown argue that improved education and socioeconomic status will challenge the public's faulty, stereotyped view of African Americans as impoverished. In the authors' opinion, if more African Americans attain college degrees, improved job opportunities and enhanced community socioeconomic standings would occur. Finally, the writers offer potential solutions to limit poverty's academic effects on African Americans. Naylor, Wyatt-Nichol, and Brown propose that Congress forbid discriminatory university practices against minority or low-income students. In addition, Congress must "regulate pricing practices", ensuring African-Americans do not adversely affect low-income minorities (Naylor, Wyatt-Nichol, and Brown 533). In doing so, greater access to higher education for African Americans will ensue.

On the other hand, Whaley and Noël do not make significant contributions regarding poverty's role in education; however, they suggest students from low-income families are less likely to attend college simply because of economic status. They also agree that higher levels of education directly improve employment rates. Likewise, Lynn also does not make significant remarks regarding the link between poverty and education. He does, however, disagree with Naylor, Wyatt-Nichol, and Brown because he does not believe

degree attainment or increased employment will positively impact the public's view of African Americans. He contends stereotypes of African Americans are too deeply entrenched in America to overcome simply by changing the curriculum (118-119).

In addition to poverty, all sources agree that African American culture is critical to academic achievement, but the authors differ on culture's positive or negative academic influence. Naylor, Wyatt-Nichol, and Brown do not believe African American culture significantly impacts academic achievement. They only suggest schools subtly discriminate against African American culture through "procedural rules and policies set up in areas of college access and admissions, affordability, and attainment..." that have detrimental effects on college attendance (525). Whaley and Noël, however, believe African American culture positively affects achievement because it provides African American students with a sense of community (33-34). They propose three possible solutions to continually promote positive cultural influence on educational performance. First, they call for increased community involvement among African Americans through service learning projects, strengthening ties with fellow African Americans (Whaley and Noël 34). Second, to challenge African American stereotypes, they recommend schools host minority college fairs and highlight "gifted" African American students who reside in low-income, segregated neighborhoods (Whaley and Noël 34). Finally, Whaley and Noël urge parental involvement, noting its positive link to higher academic achievement among African American students (34). Marvin Lynn, however, disagrees that African American culture positively affects students. He suggests minority groups believe every school is racist in some regard (Lynn 109). Lynn, the only author who believes necessary change is not only limited to curriculum, believes change must extend to society. (118). He remarks schools cannot simply implement curriculum changes without acknowledging society's role in racism, stereotypes, and discrimination in African American academic achievement (Lynn 118).

While all of the authors agree significant curriculum changes are necessary in the U.S. educational system, Naylor, Wyatt-Nichol, and Brown offer the least detailed solution of the authors. They call for school mentoring programs that mentor African American

students throughout their college decision-making process and college (Naylor, Wyatt-Nichol, and Brown 533). The improvement of Advanced Placement course availability to minority students is their only curriculum solution (Naylor, Wyatt-Nichol, and Brown 533). Whaley and Noël, however, further expound their solutions by urging for better teacher training detailing African American culture and recognizing racism's effects on African American students (35). They also call for cultural curriculum improvements promoting great achievements of African Americans, instead of slavery. Furthermore, they propose improved school policies involving the family and community, promoting academic achievement (Whaley and Noel 34).

Marvin Lynn offers the most in-depth solution, offering a different perspective. Lynn provides the most detailed exposition of curriculum changes. He disagrees with Whaley and Noël regarding the simple addition of cultural courses to school curriculum. Lynn believes the United States should implement the Critical Race Theory (CRT), a highly detailed curriculum discussing racism and discrimination's various forms. CRT defines racism as natural in a predominantly white society (qtd. in Calmore 25-82; Lynn 116). Lynn notes, "The educational system becomes one of the chief means through which the system of white supremacy regenerates and renews itself" (117). He contends the principal aim of American curriculum is the promotion of Euro-American culture and the negation of African-American culture. He also suggests that schools never desired true academic achievement among African American students and that the Critical Race Theory will potentially offset the white supremacy that is so prevalent in American schools (Lynn 117). Lynn also suggests that research conducted regarding curriculum changes should take into account African Americans heartbreaking history. He comments, "...research on African Americans that fails to take into account the impact of African Americans' history as a people forcibly ripped away from their native homeland and forced to endure centuries of socially sanctioned torture not only does an injustice to African Americans, but it also does an injustice to our society" (Lynn 119).

All three articles challenge the current method of African American education. The authors agree that change is indispensable to limit racism in schools. Schools must promote and encourage,

not hinder African American educational achievement. The authors' extensive research concludes that poverty and culture are critical factors in African American academic success, although there is some disagreement to the extent of its influence. While Marvin Lynn believes in the necessity of broader societal changes, the authors agree on crucial curriculum changes, necessary for African American educational equality in the United States.

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