



“Challenging People to Shape
a Better Future Now”

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Schools More Segregated Now

As we approach May 17, the 60th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* landmark decision outlawing “separate but equal” schools, several studies show that our schools are more segregated now than they were three decades ago. And there are no indications that things are likely to change for the better in the foreseeable future.

A report by the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) titled, “*Brown v. Board at 60*,” concluded, “Today, things are getting worse. The typical black student now attends a school where only 29 percent of his or her fellow students are white, down from 36 percent in 1980.”

Actually there were two *Brown* decisions. The first, in 1954, outlawed racially segregated public schools, which had been defended as “separate but equal.” Faced with foot-dragging by intransigent school officials in the Deep South, the Supreme Court issued a second ruling in 1955, sometimes called *Brown II*, declaring that the schools had to be desegregated “with all deliberate speed.”

But speed was nowhere to be found. Two years after the court ruling, no Black child attended schools with a White student in eight of the 11 former Confederate states, including Alabama.

The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR), a coalition of nearly 200 organizations, noted, “It took ten years after *Brown*, but beginning with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the nation committed to desegregation and it worked.



THE CURRY REPORT

George E. Curry

Courts and executive agencies consistently supported desegregation plans and from 1968 to 1988, as more schools integrated, academic achievement increased for African American students.”

However, that progress stalled. “...The legal and political tide turned against integration during

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the 1980s,” LCCR observed. “Courts stopped ordering desegregation plans and began dismantling existing plans – both court-ordered and voluntary. Federal agencies stopped aggressive enforcement and by 1989 schools were beginning to resegregate, reversing many of the academic gains of the previous 20 years.”

Upon entering office in 1981, President Ronald Reagan set the political climate for retrenchment. And so did an increasingly conservative Supreme Court. But some

African-American leaders also played a role in dismantling desegregation.

An investigation of resegregation in the South, conducted by ProPublica, focused on Tuscaloosa, Ala., my hometown. The city had been under a federal desegregation decree since 1979. In 1993, with Tuscaloosa vying for a new Mercedes-Benz plant, business leaders decided it was time for them to make a move.

“Publicly, the city’s movers and shakers said the lack of neighborhood schools made the district unattractive ... Behind closed doors, they argued that if they did not create some schools where white students made up the major-

munity,” ProPublica reported. “It included some of the city’s most influential black leaders, including a city councilman, a state senator, and Judge John England, Jr...Rumors spread within the community that England’s and others’ support had been part of a secret arrangement with white leaders.”

A person with direct knowledge of the arrangement confirmed to me that a deal was indeed made whereby a new Black school would be constructed on the predominantly West Side of town in exchange for supporting an end of the court-ordered desegregation. However, after extracting what they wanted from Black officials, Whites reneged on the deal and no new school was erected.

Another reason schools are being resegregated is that segregated housing patterns have remained intact.

“Schools remain segregated because neighborhoods in which they are located are segregated,” said the EPI report. “Raising achievement of low-income black children requires residential integration, from which school integration can flow.”

Without dismantling segregated residential housing patterns and getting federal courts or the Justice Department to retain some jurisdiction over court-ordered desegregation plans, public schools are on a path to return to their pre-*Brown* status of being separate and unequal.

Read the rest online at
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Mental Illness is Our Dirty Little Secret

I’m tired, my sisterfriend says. I don’t know how much longer I can hold on. As I hear her I have a couple of choices. One is to tell her to get with her pastor and pray; the other is to tell her to get real with her illness. Running her to her pastor takes her to a familiar place. Pushing her to help takes her out of her comfort zone. When my beloved brothers and sisters share that they are stymied in the way they live their lives, I don’t mind praying and encouraging spiritual counsel, but I do mind ignoring the medicinal help that could assist my sisterfriend.

Mental health is our nation’s dirty little secret, and if it is whispered in the nation at large, it is a silent scream in the African American community. We are afraid, ashamed, frightened to own up to it, using our own lingo (s’kerd, shamed) to wrap ourselves around the fear that goes with “coming out” on mental illness.

So we are silent, even when we lose a warrior. Karyn Washington was a 22-year-old Morgan State University sister who committed suicide, last week. This young and brilliant one turned her pain into power when she created a website, “for brown girls” (www.forbrown-girls.com) that lifted up and affirmed our brown skin girls. Karyn was a colored girl whose mental issues were apparently so severe that she chose to take her own life while affirming those of



BENNETT COLLEGE

Julianne Malveaux

others. From all accounts Karyn experienced depression. How many feel it and don’t say it? How many nod and just don’t mean it? How many exhale, inhale and really reach out to a brother or a sister to listen, have a cup of tea, take a

They walk like they hold the world in their hands; sway like they are hearing drums from another continent, yet cry behind closed doors

walk, or just reach out and touch?

The poet Paul Laurence Dunbar wrote, “We wear the mask that grins and lies that hides our cheeks and shades our eyes.” Many in our nation, especially African Americans, wear the mask. When we peek/speak/tweet from behind the mask we realize, yet if we were real, we would have to acknowledge in the words of Paul Lawrence Dunbar that to make a poet Black and bid her sing is to challenge her and her two realities. In the words of Sister Maya, “I

know why the caged bird sings.”

I chose to focus on this because in one scant week I have spoken to African American women who have experienced depression or feel shackled by other mental health issues. They walk like they hold the world in their hands; sway like they are hearing drums from another continent, yet cry behind closed doors, like they have the weight of the world on their shoulders. They are sad, ground down, depressed, and we play off their pain, trivialize it, instead of responding to it. We are losing too much genius when we

our nation, we have been expected to show up, with amazing dignity, ignoring the massacre of our sons or daughters with well-modulated emotion. Too many of us fear or fail to speak our pain. Poverty and mental health are correlated, yet the poorest of us see our pain as “par for the course” and we don’t speak about it. Whether African Americans are wealthy or financially challenged, mental health is elusive for some. And faith without works is dead, which means fall on those knees if it comforts you, then run to the doctor who may help you with medication and therapy.

Baby girl Karyn Washington inspired this column, and as I thought of her, others kept reminding me of their own pain and the ways it has been ignored. If you don’t get it, read from Terrie Williams’ “Black Pain.” And if you get it/read it, remind folks that this is not a sympathy issue, this is a public policy issue. So weep sister soldier, brother warrior. Those who bear the scars of mental illness have often fought longer, harder, and with the chemical imbalance that makes them feel it all so much more intensely. Mental health is not an embarrassment; it is a national health issue. It is a silent killer that we have yet to acknowledge.

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