The Issue of Ebonics and the Constructed National View of the Black American

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ABSTRACT

Historical and contemporary perceptions of the African American child are based on his or her relationship to his family in general and to his or her mother in particular. This article critically reviews flawed premises constructed by outsiders looking into the African American family. These premises have shaped the education and social place African American urban children have occupied prior to and after schools were desegregated. Distributing opportunity in an equitable fashion is suggested as a proven strategy to removing educational gaps
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A Flawed View of the African American Child and Family

In 1963, Glazer and Moynihan stated, "The Negro is only an American and nothing else. He has no values and culture to guard and protect" (Glazer & Moynihan, 1963, p. 53). Lewis (1966) characterized the experiences of American minorities as the "culture of poverty" (pp. 68-69). This was offered as an explanation for the poor remaining poor (Lewis, 1970). Moynihan (1965) further characterized the Black family as engaged in a "tangle of pathology" that was seen as "the principal source of the aberrant, inadequate, or antisocial behavior that…serves to perpetuate the cycle of poverty and deprivation" (Moynihand, 1965). Moynihan further suggested that a "national effort towards the problem of Negro Americans must be directed toward the question of family structure…to enable it to raise and support its members as do other

families" (p. 93). It was rationalized that because of Negro family dynamics, the Black child was viewed as having low intellectual and defective achievement levels. The Moynihan report revealed a framework that focused not only on deficient intellect, but infused a perspective from psychologists who suggested interventions in the home and family (Klaus & Gray, 1968). In effect, they suggested that the major problem of the Black family was that of the family dynamics, specifically, the mother-child relationship that did not encourage sufficient higher order thinking skills (Glazer & Moynihan, 1963). This defective interaction was thought to be compounded with notions that part of the mother-child relationship was impaired because of language in general, and the language of Black people in particular. Stated another way, the language of Blacks in America, or their dialect was purported by the psychological establishment as a barrier to American communication. The issue of language deficit was renounced (Shuy, 1967), but not before the development of intervention programs to encourage appropriate language production (Bereiter & Englemann, 1966).

Out of the condemnation of the language and communication styles of African Americans emerged Black scholars who explained the cognitive and language development of African American children. A major Black American scholar, Robert L. Williams, stated that he had "grown sick and tired" of his language being described as "substandard," "restrictive," "deviant," "deficient," "non-standard," "Black English" (Robert L. Williams, 1997; R. L. Williams & Rivers, 1973). Through his research, Williams coined the term "Ebonics" to describe the combining of ebony (Black) and phonics (speech sounds). He further described Ebonics as the "language children bring to school as a bridge to teaching new language systems…" (Robert L. Williams, 1997). Williams defines Ebonics as being supported by (a) the pidgin/Creole theory and (b) the African retention theory.

The pidgin/Creole theory explained that the multiple languages Africans brought to America from their countries of origin were combined to form pidgin. Williams stressed that pidgin did not have an African country of origin. Rather, the language of Creole evolved from pidgin (spoken by adult slaves) and was the first language the children of slaves learned.

From Creole, the next stage was "Englishization" for the slaves. As this stage occurred, Ebonics evolved in which the "speaker maintains the original communication style, some lexical items, and the ability to code switch" (Williams, 1997, p. 211). Ebonics continued to develop toward (though never becoming) Standard English (Asante, 1996).

The African retention theory was based on the premise that Ebonics was an effort by American slaves to maintain the integrity of some West African languages. Some examples of African retentions include:

(a) the absence of the double consonant (e.g., *wess* for *west*, *bess* for *best*, and *hole* for *hold*);

(b) the lack of possessives (e.g., Daddy car, Bob house);

(c) the lack of pluralization (e.g., Two boy, three girl);

(d) The zero copula or the absence of the verb (e.g., "We busy," " Why you leave me at church like that?");

(e) Double and triple negatives (e.g., "I ain't never going nowhere with you no more.")

(f) Absent "d" and "ed" (e.g., "He like my car." and "It rain last night." (Williams, 1997, pp. 211-212)

     Researchers (Simpkins *et al.*, 1974; Robert L. Williams, 1997; R. L. Williams & Rivers, 1973) conducted studies that demonstrated the utility of Ebonics in the achievement and increased learning by African American children. Information in Table 1 list the study cited, a description of the study conducted, the study method and the study results. The information in Table 1 is adapted from Williams (1997). Other researchers continued to validate the research of earlier scholars. Specifically, Geneva Smitherman (1986) demonstrated in her first work, *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America,* the value of Ebonics to the development of students from social, cultural and educational perspectives. Smitherman (1993) further explained the tangible importance of Ebonics that provides African American students, through the expressive language experience, an understanding of their cultural past. Smitherman and Cunningham (1997) further show that students who know about their past are motivated to learn.

Table 1: Studies of the Benefits of Ebonics

Study	Description	Method	Results
The effects of language on the test performance of Black children (Williams, R. L., & Rivers, L. W. (1973)	Psychologist translated (code switched) test items contained in the Boehm Test of Basic Concepts from Standard English to Ebonics or into language that was familiar to students.	Standard and nonstandard (Ebonics) versions were administered to 990 students in K – 2 grades *Examples:* Standard English: "Mark the toy that is behind the sofa. Ebonics: Mark the toy that is in back of the couch.	Students score significantly higher on the Ebonics version than on the standard version.
Black language: A moderator variable of intelligence (National Institute of Mental Health Grant #5RO1MH24454-03) (Rivers, L. W. (1973)	Psychologist translated the Peabody Picture Vocabulary test from the standard version to Ebonics.	Instead of asking the student to identify a "crib" as the test item required, the child was asked to identify the "baby bed." The researcher explained that "crib" to many African American children meant an apartment.	With the code switching, the children's IQs increased significantly. The researcher reported the standard version contained "blocking agents" or "noise." The researcher found the Standard English version did not activate the African American child's linguistic conceptual system. The blocking agents or noise interfered with understanding the question; not that the child lacked the capacity to process standard language. Instead, the child's intake gates were not activated by the stimulus properties of Standard English. The child must be taught to code switch – to move from Ebonics to Standard English.
Bridge: A cross-culture reading program. Experimental condition (Simpkins, G., Holt, G., Simpkins, C. (1974)	Researchers developed an associative reading program. The program placed primary emphasis on initially using language skills already in the child's repertoire.	Students process from familiar (Ebonics) language to the less familiar (Standard English). Method used the axiom "start where the child is." The Bridge used three readers to present the same story, first written 100% in Ebonics; second, 50% in Ebonics and 50% in Standard English; and third, 100% in Standard English. Two groups (a bridge and a non-Bridge group) were exposed to two reading program over a 4-month period). At the end of the training period, they were given the Iowa Test of Basic Skills.	The Bridge group showed 6.2 months increase in their reading scores. The non-Bridge group showed 1.6 months increase in their reading scores. Teachers who were initially opposed to the Bridge program changed their views after using the program.

Adapted from "The Ebonics Controversy," by Robert L. Williams, 1997, *Journal of Black Psychology, 23* (3), pp. 208-2

Historical Consideration

In 1954, the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) abolished the legality of school segregation for Black children and White children. In addition to focusing the country on the ills of segregating children from different ethnic groups, it set the stage for concerns about segregated education for students with disabilities. Prior to 1954 and through 1964, not only were different ethnic groups segregated, students who were called "handicapped" were housed in separated classes and in separate schools because special education embraced a segregated model. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 placed an emphasis on social equity. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 focused us on the child who was called "deprived." In its concern for the deprived child, a certain amount of concern was placed on the child who was called "handicapped." The Handicapped Children's Easy Education Assistance Act of 1968 made central its focus on the handicapped child. What was important during this period was that we began to recognize the exclusion of certain students from the mainstream classroom. This concern continued into the 1970's as the 91st Congress amended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1970 and passed the Developmental Disabilities Services and Construction Act of 1970. The most notable legislation was, however, Public Law 94-142, known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. Legislation continued during the 1980's with the Handicapped Children's Protection Act of 1986.

In addition to highlighting concerns about a segregated education system among races, the Brown decision stirred concerns about the education of disabled students in separate settings. Despite this concern, rigid physical separation occurred with the delivery of special education services in separate classes and separate schools. In the 1970's the practices of the 1960's revealed customs that were "discriminating, racially biased, instructionally ineffective, socially damaging, psychologically damaging, and compromising to a school's ability to provide equality or educational opportunity to all students" (Schattman & Beney, 1992). In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, (P.L. 94-142, renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) attempted to remedy the ill for both the 1960's and the 1970's with the mandate of the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and the philosophy of mainstreaming. The LRE mandate set guidelines for removing students from the regular education milieu. The philosophy of mainstreaming and the spirit of the law suggested a focus on academics with an emphasis on the student "earning" his or her right to participate in the mainstream through a demonstration of the ability to "keep-up" with classroom assignments and at the level established by other students (Rogers, 1993). The 1980's and the 1990's revisited the old problem of integrating with hopeful advances and the promise of inclusion. However, America's unresolved problems with racial integration (Braddock, 1985; Levin, 1975; Markus & Barash, 1982) threatened efforts to bring inclusion to fruition.

Separate Programs and their Impact on Students of Color

Until this point in history, separate classes served the purpose of managing diverse European groups. With compulsory attendance laws, the freeing of slaves, and

the Brown decision, however, special day classes for the retarded became a major component of public education. Dunn (1968) estimated that between 1967-1968, one-third (32,000) of all special education teachers taught children who had been classified as retarded and who presented with "low status background." This type of background referred to Afro-Americans, American Indians, Mexican Americans, Puerto Rican Americans and poor Anglo American children. These students represented 60 to 80 percent of students taught in special classes. The question at this point is, 'Was the purpose of this segregation still for the management of the influx of diverse children who entered public school?' Maybe, but probably not. It appears, however, that while it was successful in assimilating massive European immigrants to the point of established Americans, it clearly separated established Americans from low status Americans. And, in the process, it constructed a condition called 'mental retardation' to separate and to ameliorate the children who did not "fit" the definition of the "established" American (Biklen & Duchan, 1994). Special education took on new meaning and was reflected in the prevailing school of thought and the sociopolitical atmosphere of this era. Much of the thought in the education community centered on compensating for the "cycle of poverty" and for the "disadvantaged" life children of color and the poor experienced (Hoyles, 1977). Moynihan with the help of the psychological establishment helped to create the image held by the education establishment of children who were believe to be deprived because of their culture (Banks, 1994; J. Hale-Benson, 1990). It is important to note that these beliefs are consistent with the beliefs held about early minority immigrants; that is, their culture impaired their ability to succeed unless they were properly schooled (Sarason & Doris, 1979). With its new meaning, special education embraced the gene intelligence theory (Jensen, 1969, 1977)) and pejoratively applied it to African American children. Hence, the intelligence quotient (IQ) became a major determining factor in the education of children. Jensen's intelligence theory fueled a twist in education that served to maintain students in a low status position in education. The question then became, "Had this separate schooling become a permanent position for the children who were served?" The answer is found in the high percentage of low status students referred and placed in special education and their tenure in the program.

How African American Children Survive in the Classroom

In his book, *Why Black People Tend to Shout,* Ralph Wiley (1992), describes how African Americans children function under pressure. He especially points out the treatment African American children face in American society in a story he tells. In his story, Wiley describes two young girls walking along the American-Canadian boarder. One girl was Black and the other was White. Both girls fall into the freezing water. Several men working in the area and immediately rescue the White girl. After ensuring that she is on safe ground, they turn their attention to the Black girl. Wiley further describes that the men took personal precautions they previously did not take as they saved the other girl. They engaged in a discussion about how to best accomplish extracting the young girl. All the while, the young girl was slowly succumbing to the elements. As the men decided on a course of action, they stretched out in the "classic ice-saving technique" (p. 6) one of them extended a tree limb. When the little Black girl

did not grab the tree limb, the man began to yell obscenities to her and blaming her for her predicament. The Black girl pulled herself out of the freezing water and to safety.

Wiley points out that while one girl has been rescued, the other had survived. The men took credit for saving both children. The truth was something the children would not discus, as each had a different reality. While the main character in the story is a little Black girl, her survival is analogous to that of African American boys. Wiley's story highlights a reality faced by many African American boys. Wiley's story highlights a reality faced by many African American boys in the American classroom today. Too often, individuals positioned as heroes, are antagonist in the education of African American boys. Whether they are aware of the trauma (Norris *et al.*, 1992) that befalls their students before they reach the schoolhouse is unclear. What is clear is the trauma they inflict in isolated classrooms on students (Ross & Jackson, 1991). Also clear is the fact that these students know that their teachers do not value their intellectual gifts (Marcus *et al.*, 1991). Researchers have documented the driving force of low expectations (Gadsden, 1995; Grant, 1985; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Ross & Jackson, 1991). Interestingly, many of these teachers refuse to individualize instruction, but spend countless hours of instruction time constructing and perfecting an individualized "self-fulfilling prophecy" for specific students and then characterizing these students as "pathological" (Palakow, 1993; Swadener & Lubeck, 1995).

Overview of Factors Encountered by African American Boys and Adolescents

Deficit model proponents (e.g., Moynihan, 1965) historically cite pathologies to explain the experiences or 'problems' experienced by African American children. Quite often, however, the problems cited are universal to all people. More important, but less often reported, are the successes of African American children and their families that should receive focus (for a review of these see (D. T. Slaughter-DeFoe *et al.*, 1990; Swadener & Lubeck, 1995).

Before examining the construction of these pathologies, it is necessary to gain a better understanding of the picture that is framed about the trauma the African American male student brings to the classroom. Belief in pathology is perpetuated by reporting that African American children face the risk of poverty and other related stressful challenges like mental illness (Parker *et al.*, 1988), low birth rate, infant mortality, neurodevelopmental disorder, and other developmental disabilities (Institute of Medicine, 1985). Children who experience these problems may also face the risk of demonstrating behavioral problems as adolescents (Dryfoos, 1990). Researchers suggest that African America children are more at-risk for being raised in poor, single parent households than children of other races and ethnic groups (Johnson *et al.*, 1991). In 1991, 45.9 % of African American children were poor compared to 16.1 % of White children (US Bureau of Census, 1992). In this same year, researchers reported that single mothers were raising 54 % of African American children, while a single mother was raising 16.5 percent of White children. The impact of domestic violence, abuse, substance abuse, and neglect contribute to the deleterious development of these youth (Resnick *et al.*, 1992). The above realities are universal in nature for all children, but have a disparate impact for

those marginalized by society. Unfortunately, the realities of marginalized people create a stereotype that is reinforced through interventions.

In the often-reported and stereotypical pathology of African American children, pictures are drawn of the role models for African American boys in poverty as delinquent, sexually promiscuous, substance abusers and sellers, and gang members. The picture is further contextualized with a significant number of these individuals as being caregivers, relatives, or neighbors who entice African American boys to join them in the drug culture as lookouts or carriers (Bing, 1991). To make matters worse, these boys usually become involved in criminal activity due to idle time, resulting from a lack of youth activities or employment options (McFate, 1989). Without experience and knowledge that contradicts the above, teachers of African American boys (or girls) accept such dogma, thereby perpetuating a stereotype, resulting in low expectations (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). These carefully constructed pathologies have been cited as early as kindergarten (Diana T. Slaughter-Defoe & Richards, 1995). Specifically, Black boys are treated without regard to their emotional needs in "unreceptive schools" (p. 137). On the other hand, White boys are "gentled into the system" (p. 137). Specifically, acceptable behaviors and learning preferences encouraged in the home culture are not tolerated and acknowledged in the school culture. While White boys are treated as "people," Black boys are treated as objects. This is reminiscent of the little Black girl's experience in Wiley's story.

The emotional, social, and academic experiences of the African American child during the early years are manifest in adolescence and adulthood (Jackson, 1995). A body of research describes the stress reaction to many of the negative experiences as "differential negative feedback" throughout school in which students "disidentify" with academic success. In its place, adolescents place value in peer identity (Entwisle *et al.*, 1987; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Hare & Castenell, 1985). These researchers further suggest that self-esteem is unrelated to academic success, but to social networks where individual worth is linked to the worth of the social group. This network is also the place where many boys find role models, often adolescents themselves. An important question at this point might be, 'Is the disidentification with academic success a manifestation of margainization?'

While African American males usually see and have access to some high school and college graduates, too many of these are underemployed or unemployed (J. L. White & Parham, 1990). The U.S. Department of Labor (1988) indicated that 51 % of African Americans could not find work and of those, 45 % think that jobs are not available. These young males rarely see, nor have access to African American adult males who are successful in employment or in other realms of life (J. L. White & Parham, 1990).

The impact of domestic violence, abuse, substance abuse and neglect adds an additional dimension to the deleterious development of youth (Resnick et al., 1992). While these issues exist in all groups, they compound the risk of failure in Black families in poverty (Ards, 1989).

Many adolescent role models are active in their developmental culture and, from where they acquire their mode of dress, language, demeanor and interpersonal skills. Important to note is that while these behaviors are offensive and not tolerated by teachers, school administrators, and employers, they reflect survival skills for many Black boys. (E. Anderson, 1993; Majors & Billson, 1992). This incompatibility contributes to

academic shutdown, poor grades, grade retention, dropout, and disciplinary problems (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). In the long run, this behavior, which contributes to low skills in reading, writing, and math, translates into joblessness and low wages (Kirshenman & Neckerman, 1991). This cycle is further exacerbated when these youth arrive at the conclusion that they are of little worth and take on an "I have nothing to lose" frame of mind. The danger of this mindset is risk created for everyone. While economics pose a significant risk for Black males, the risk by the education system is also great.

The education system, particularly, classroom instruction, has a profound influence on the risk African American boys experience. As early as 1968, educational researchers ("Brown v. Board of education", 1954; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968), reported the effects of low teacher expectations and support on classroom learning. This success variable is further weakened by the incompatibilities between school and home. Acceptable behaviors and learning preferences encouraged in the home culture are not tolerated and acknowledged in the school culture (J. E. Hale-Benson, 1986). Hale, (1986), in her study of variables that contribute to the success of African American students focused on learning styles, emotional expressions, orientation toward people rather than objects, interpersonal relationships, and language (which is mostly nonverbal) to the compartmentalized teaching styles and behavior expectations of the school culture. The results of this study served to highlight the great dissonance between the goals of the home and the school. Failure to consider this dissonance contributes to the misconceptions and misperceptions that teachers and society construct about the African American child. Furthermore, the misalignment of cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions in the school setting exacerbate negative academic achievement and future success for African American youth (Cohen, 1996; Ward, 1973).

The classroom is a formidable barrier to the success of African American boys. The amount of exposure teachers have to people of different cultures has an impact on their level of tolerance (L. Delpit, 1995; Howell, 1998). An important factor in understanding students of cultures is the interactions a teacher engages in with students (Foster, 1986). Teachers are intolerant of "those loud Black girls," students playing the dozens, and the "cool pose" of urban Black boys (Majors & Billson, 1992). African American boys may be at greater risk because of misperceptions and/or lower expectations. These students are often judged as less competent than their counterparts (P. C Chinn & McCormic, 1986). Teachers' frames of reference are different from those they are charged to teach. Specifically, White teachers represent over 90% of the teaching force (Association, 1987). Wilson (1987) predicted that one-third to one-half of public school students were expected to be comprised of people of color, the minority group (Wilson, 1987). The make-up in special education was projected to reflect an alarming 60% to 80% of students of color (Almanza & Mosely, 1980). The latest data reported that 74% of elementary and secondary school teachers are female and that 87% are White (American Association of Colleges of Teachers Education, 1999). Snyder (1999) suggested that the percentage of White teachers was as high as 90 percent in 1999 (Snyder, 1999).

The question is whether the teaching individuals will recognize the needs and diversity of their students. Another question is whether the teachers will be well-adjusted, well-trained and caring individuals. Teachers, both male and female, must understand and be tolerant of the fact that an African American boy's attempt to explain

his behavior or ask for clarification is not talking back. This type of understanding occurs when the teacher develops a relationship with students of other cultures. Teachers of diverse students must take the time first to understand their students, then to be understood by their students (Covey, 1989).

In other words, overcoming and/or reducing risk requires fostering resistance to risk factors and providing protection to young boys (Jessor, 1992). This is best accomplished by engaging African American boys in activities that promote personal development through community social and academic enterprises (Hill, 1992).

Specific Issues Affecting the Education of African Americans

Observers and researchers (J. D. Anderson, 1988; DuBois, 1935; Gordon, 1971; Howell, 1998; Middlekauff, 1961; Woodson, 1919) chronicle the public schooling experiences of the African slave and the early Negro as clandestine, denied and marginal. Researchers further detail the schooling experiences of Colored and Black children as separate and burdened with bias in assessment (Cleary *et al.*, 1975; Duffey *et al.*, 1981; Hobbs, 1978; Jensen, 1980), in placement and in instruction (Cleary et al., 1975; Dotts, 1978; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968).

Class inequities (Bowels & Gintis, 1976; Sizemore, 1978; Taylor, 1976; Walberg & Rasher, 1979), low socioeconomic status (Levine & Meyer, 1979), tracking issues (Becker, 1952; Chaikin *et al.*, 1974; Dotts, 1978; Harvey, 1980; Jones *et al.*, 1972; Oaks, 1982; Rist, 1970; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Weinstein, 1983) and discriminatory disciplinary polices (Balch & Kelly, 1974; Leacock, 1969) resulted in resegregating many Colored and Black children. The effects of these factors have resulted in an overrepresentation (Harry & Anderson, 1994) of African American students in special education programs in general and specifically in a disproportion of African American students across programs (G. R. Anderson & Anderson, 1983; Argulewicz, 1983; Educational Testing Service, 1980; Ford *et al.*, 1982; Pink, 1982; Polloway & Smith, 1983; Ysseldyke *et al.*, 1982). Consequently, Newman (Newman, 1981) and White (R. White, 1980) cite feelings expressed by African American students as alienation, powerlessness, a sense of low control, feelings of meaninglessness, cultural estrangement (Seeman, 1975), feelings of futility (DeLone, 1979) and resignation to mediocrity (Havinghurst, 1981; Steel, 1992). Appendix I provide a sample literature review of the educational experiences of the Negro, Colored, Black, Afro, and African American (NCBAA) student.

Separate education, the practice of educating certain students away from other students, is tradition in the United States. Specifically, children of color and those who are poor are over-represented (Harry & Anderson, 1994), "mis-represented," in special education (Grossman, 1998). Specifically, African American children experience the greatest over-representation in special education programs and are under enrolled and underrepresented in gifted and talented programs (Grossman, 1998). Patton (1998) suggests that the ineffectiveness of special education lies in its focus on testing for the purpose of "classification…rather than diagnostic or prescriptive reasons" (p. 26). Harry (1994) reports a disproportionate number of African American children in special education programs that exceeds their school population representation (see P. C. Chinn

& Hughes, 1987 for a definition of disproportion). Harry further reports an additional finding of "disproportionality" as African Americans are underrepresented in gifted and talented programs. Patton (1998) provides a historical report of this disproportionality. In 1975, he reports that Black students represented 15% of the over all school population. Black students classified as mentally disabled, however, represented 38% of the population. Harry (1998) reports that in 1991 African Americans represented 16% of the nation's school population, but 35% of the identified special education population. Special education thus remains a convenient placement for children especially African American children who learn differently.

The literature is replete with research on the Negro, Colored, Black and African American (NCBAA) child and his or her family. Some of this research reflects a sense of understanding these experiences and some does not reflect this understanding. Many of these researchers provide theoretical frameworks (Banks, 1994; Clark & Clark, 1939; J. Hale-Benson, 1990; Hilliard, 1976), which help to explain how children of African descent learn and experience the public school setting.

In desegregating schools for Black and White children, a link was made to mental capacity (Dunn, 1968; Gould, 1981; Hilliard, 1991). This link was unprecedented in American educational history. Jensen (Jensen, 1969) was one of the strongest proponents of Black students' inferior genetic capability or "intelligence" that prevented "qualitative educational performance" (Ogbu, 1995, p. 84). This link resulted in special education being redefined as an institutional (L. D. Delpit, 1993) structure (McCarthy, 1993; Sleeter, 1995) in which to hold students of color, thereby separating Black and White children in the educational milieu. This practice has resulted in more than a century of low expectations for African American children. Grossman (1998) contends that the majority of special education programs are not designed for the needs of African American students. He reports that African American students in special education receive lower grades and score lower on standardized tests. They are further less likely to exit the special education program, graduate from high school and engage in meaningful employment (Grossman, 1998).

Issues that legally separated children, primarily African American children in separate classrooms and schools before *Brown vs. Board of Education* (Brown, 1954) continue to separate these children because they have not been redressed despite the implementation of legal remedies. Ultimately, unless these issues are exposed, African American children will continue to be denied equal and fair access to an appropriate education.

This period also focused the country on concerns on the education of students with disabilities. The 1990's focused us on the individual and resulted in people first language with the Passage of The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, and the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1990. This legislation moved us from referring to children as handicapped to referring to them as individuals who experienced a disability. In doing this we began to focus on the individual needs of students and not on the perceived limits of a disability. In 1997, the 105th Congress passed the Individuals with Disabilities Act Amendments.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 requires the participation of children with disabilities in state and district wide assessments; mandates parental participation in decisions about eligibility, IEP content and placement. IDEA

allows parents greater access to their child's records: provides for the participation of a regular education teacher on the IEP. It focuses on allowing schools to discipline disabled students in the same manner as other students if their behavior is not a manifestation of their disability. IDEA challenges us to look closely at the identification of signification disproportions of minority children identified for services.

African American Schooling Redux

The twenty-first century seems to have taken on twentieth century issues.   In 1994, Arthur Jensen's 1969 conclusions that Black students were intellectually inferior to White students was reignited by Charles Murray and Richard Hernstein in their book, *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). Also, in both cases, respected geneticists and biologists disputed these findings (Nisbett, 1998). Nonetheless, historical research has linked certain physical characteristics (e.g., skin, eye color, hair texture, shape of head, nose, lips) to lower mental ability and thus to lower test scores (Brigham, 1923; Burt, 1972a, 1972b; Jensen, 1967, 1969; Terman, 1916). Social scientist and geneticist have disproved this position with evidence that differences in test scores of racial groups is more of a reflection of the context in which certain racial groups are educated and the treatment they receive in their respective context (Bond, 1924a, 1924b, 1934; Crummell, 1969; DuBois, 1914; Gould, 1981; Grubb, 1992; Hilliard, 1992; Kamin, 1973; Long, 1923; Price, 1934; Thomas, 1982; Thompson, 1934). In both cases, discussions were widely held in the popular press, at many academic levels, and in policy circles. The general public received this information as a reinforcement of what many already believed (Franklin, 1991). Yet, despite the dismantling of racist ideology (Bowswer & Hunt, 1981; Jordan, 1968), explanations for the achievement gap continue to be along racial lines.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, Lawrence Lezotte (1997) suggests that student achievement in the 21st century must move from "compulsory schooling" to "compulsory learning" (Lezotte, 1997, p. 4). He suggest that the existing "social/educational contract" (p. 3) is that students are required by their respective state laws to attend school, but not to learn.   He admonishes twenty-first century educators not to confuse the lack of opportunity to learn with a lack of ability to learn. Lazotte in particular expresses concern about poor and disadvantaged students in addressing opportunity to learn because it relates directly to the high stakes student testing and accountability. He further states, "Intentionally or not, schools often discriminate in how they distribute opportunities to learn" (p. 27). The results are most obvious in the achievement gap between students based on race.

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