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# Income Integration at School

*by **Amy L. Wax***

An unwise policy of social engineering

James Ryan, a prominent and learned law professor at the University of Virginia (and a former colleague of mine there), has produced a scholarly, well-written, and exhaustively researched book on education policy, *Five Miles Away, A World Apart* (Oxford). The narrative is polished, lucid, informative, and revealing. The style comes across as impartial and evenhanded. Ryan's vision for school reform has immediate appeal. The entire impression is one of sweet reason. Yet this book is fatally flawed. The problem, quite simply, is that Ryan ignores reality. A clearer example of "educational romanticism" — to use Charles Murray's evocative phrase — would be hard to imagine.

Ryan asserts that "the continued separation of urban and suburban students has been the most dominant and important theme in education law and policy for the last fifty years." Because demography tracks geography, that division translates into schools stratified by income, class, and race. Ryan sees this pattern as a formula for inequality. His goal is income integration: to educate "rich and poor students alike, equally and together in the same schools." Because racial minorities — and especially blacks — are disproportionately low-income, income integration will increase racial diversity as well. For Ryan, this is devoutly to be wished.

Ryan's "tale of two schools" provides a vivid trope for his central theme and an occasion to review the long, fascinating history of school reform efforts on many fronts. Freeman High, in suburban Henrico County near Richmond, Virginia, is predominantly white and largely middle class. Test scores exceed the state average, and the school has a full complement of honors and AP classes. It is orderly and serene, with few disciplinary problems. Most students graduate on time and go to college. Thomas Jefferson High School, or "Teejay," located in the city of Richmond, is demographically "nearly the mirror opposite" of Freeman, with blacks comprising 82 percent of its student body. The atmosphere is tense, with metal detectors at the door and police in the halls. Students skirmish frequently and fights are not uncommon. Although most students score "proficient" on the (admittedly undemanding) statewide tests, fewer than half take the SAT and only 15 percent are enrolled in Advanced Placement courses. Fewer still receive top scores on the exams. Dropout rates are higher and college attendance rates far lower than at Freeman.

> *Class mixing has been championed by reformers for some time as a rearguard action against the failure of racial integration.*

Although these schools are five miles apart as the crow flies, they represent for Ryan two contrasting educational worlds that have defeated every effort to unite them. What accounts for this separation and what maintains it? Here Ryan is at his best, weaving the complex threads of legal, social, and cultural trends into the picture we see today. A large part of the story — and an oft-told one — involves race. The push for racial integration in the wake of the landmark 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* met staunch resistance and accelerated "white flight" to the suburbs and private academies. As the legal barriers to integration crumbled, residential separation — fueled by self-selection, discrimination, neighborhood school assignment, and local control — impeded racial mixing in schools. Attempts to integrate through busing foundered on political opposition and collapsed in the wake of the Supreme Court's decision in *Milliken v. Bradley* — perhaps the most important since *Brown* itself — which sharply limited judges' power to order remedial busing across school district lines. Increasing suburbanization, stoked by rising affluence, the desire to escape urban disorder, and the sheer mobility of American life, meant that too few whites remained in urban districts to achieve anything like meaningful integration. A dramatic push then ensued for "school quality": More money, new programs and curricula, better teachers, upgraded facilities, and school finance reform would solve the problems of minority students. Integration became a sideshow pursued through the carrot rather

than the stick: Choice programs, vouchers, charter and magnet schools were proposed and occasionally tried. Some school districts — Seattle, and Louisville, Kentucky, for example — adopted racial balancing plans. The Supreme Court clipped their wings, too, by ruling in the Seattle and Louisville school cases that, except as a remedy for prior discrimination, school districts could not mandate racially diverse schools through race-based school assignments. A few districts, such as Wake County, North Carolina, adopted plans to integrate schools by income, with mixed success. Such programs remain limited in scope, and some have been shut down.

*It is critical to Ryan's plan that all schools should remain predominantly middle class.*

These efforts have made little headway against the polarization of schools by race and class. And none has closed or even narrowed the yawning gaps in achievement that are currently observed. It is these divisions that Ryan seeks to address through more aggressive integration of schools by income. Ryan's goal does not originate with him, as class mixing has been championed by reformers for some time as a rearguard action against the failure of racial integration. What do these advocates hope to achieve? Although Ryan claims that integrating schools by income will "prepare students to be better citizens," he devotes far more attention to a more pragmatic goal: improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged children by placing them among more affluent peers. In schools, as in other communities, most participants tend to "conform to the dominant culture." And in well-off suburban schools, Ryan claims, the culture is often one of rigor, order, and achievement. Because "the school environment is contagious," placement in these schools will tend to "raise the aspirations and motivation of poor students." But Ryan doesn't rest solely on the improvements expected from school culture. Middle-income parents are vocal and politically influential. As a result of their "clout," suburban schools have better facilities, teachers, and offerings and are managed more effectively. Less privileged students will benefit from being placed in these superior institutions.

It is critical to Ryan's plan that all schools should remain predominantly middle class. The key is a school that embraces high expectations. Beyond that, Ryan's proposal rests on four key elements. First, he believes that schools dominated by middle-income children are more likely to be "quality" schools, whereas those with mostly poor students are destined to be deficient; second, he acknowledges the existence of average differences by race and class in achievement, attitudes, and behavior; third, he advances a peculiar theory of "social contagion" by immersion, which assumes that placing disadvantaged students into a mainstream environment will yield more uplift and improvement than rival school reforms; and, finally, he is convinced that well-off suburbanites have an obligation to diversify their schools, but also that having poor classmates won't compromise their children's education.

Ryan's most important task is to convince us that the enormous disruption entailed by widespread income integration, assuming it could be implemented at all, will yield enough benefits to justify the scheme. Will this really improve the prospects of disadvantaged children — and more so than possible alternatives? Unfortunately, Ryan fails to persuade on these critical counts. He states that "all students benefit from attending majority middle-income schools, and that poor students in particular benefit from doing so." These are sweeping claims. But they rest on the thin reed of a handful of social science studies, which are summarized in about a page and a half in this 383-page book. Only one of the papers he refers to specifically examines the results of balancing schools by socioeconomic status. The rest report on small and relatively short-lived initiatives that placed minority urban students into mostly white suburban schools. This evidence is deficient in quality and quantity and lacking in critical detail. No one will be persuaded who is not already a true believer. In addition, as with too many reform proposals, there is no serious cost-benefit analysis, no attention to the magnitude of observed effects, and no systematic comparisons to alternatives like more rigorous school curricula, novel teaching methods, longer school days or school years, upgrades in teacher quality, reductions in class size, or intensive and comprehensive initiatives, such as the Knowledge is Power Program ( KIPP) Academies, that seek actively to inculcate middle-class mores and behaviors.

*Does the disruption entailed by widespread income integration yield enough benefits to justify the scheme?*

Ryan's back-of-the-hand treatment of the downsides of income integration is even shallower than his analysis of the benefits. What are the costs to well-off suburbanites of attending schools with a significant number of urban, minority, or disadvantaged students? Ryan asserts confidently that income integration doesn't hurt the achievement of better-off students unless poor children predominate. But the evidence is threadbare at best. Astonishingly, he devotes even less attention — precisely one paragraph in a 383-page book — to the data on potential costs than to the evidence on benefits. The research he refers to is either dated (including the James Coleman study of 1966), of only tangential relevance (in examining the influence of neighborhood, not school, composition), or was done abroad (Scotland). All the studies involve very small samples, fail to control for selection, focus mostly on race rather than economic status, and rely on minimal measures of academic competence rather than on the full spectrum of achievement. In short, his authorities fall far short of supporting his confident reassurance that changes in a school's demography should not worry suburban parents. A careful and lengthy dissection of the social science data on the potential negative effects of income integration, rather than a boilerplate paragraph followed by a string of "see

generally" citations, should be the centerpiece of a proposal for such a radical and intrusive change. That Ryan does not provide this renders his case fatally weak.

Although Ryan does not call wary suburban parents racist, elitist, or just plain selfish, he dismisses resistance to system-wide integration as irrational and unfounded. The innuendo of base motives is present at every turn, expressed by the clipped phrase with which he summarizes the theme of decades of school reform politics: "Save the Cities, Spare the Suburbs." In maneuvering to "spare" themselves by avoiding the diversification of their schools, affluent suburbanites are somehow getting away with something. Yet the issue of how demographic jiggering will affect well-functioning schools is absolutely central to the merits and the realpolitik of his proposal, and well-off suburbanites' fear of compromising their children's education is clearly a pivotal impediment to his proposal's adoption. His cavalier treatment of this urgent topic is by far the weakest part of this book.

## WHAT PARENTS WANT

The real failure, however, is that Ryan's focus on academic consequences is far too narrow, and disingenuously so. Although suburban parents care about learning, they also care about milieu. They demand order, safety, and decorum, and they know that these aspects of school climate are critical to learning. But there is more at stake than academic achievement. The main reason educated middle-income parents avoid schools with lots of poor and minority students is the fear of those children's antisocial attitudes and disruptive behaviors.

Ryan is virtually oblivious to this concern. Although he admits to gaps by race and class in outlook and socialization, his approach to these differences is riddled with blind spots, denials, and internal contradictions. In minimizing the importance of these cultural divisions, he pays no attention to the broader social developments that have fueled academic and behavioral disparities by race and class. The differences are pronounced, and are growing. Urban minorities and, increasingly, less-educated whites suffer from chaotic families and dislocations occasioned by low achievement, high unemployment, and poor socialization. As Brad Wilcox and Don Peck have recently noted, even the white middle class has fractured into segments defined by education. An alarming fault line has emerged between white college graduates and those without a degree, with the latter increasingly resembling high school dropouts in their rising rates of financial distress, family disintegration, single parenting, partner conflict, and behaviorally troubled children. Well-off, better-educated suburbanites, despite embracing the ethos of tolerance and diversity, mostly stick to the 1950s script. Their lives are characterized by family stability, low rates of criminality, and a devotion to work and schooling. Despite the depredations of popular culture, their standards of decorum remain relatively strict and they do a good job of socializing their children.

In the end, Ryan cannot avoid confronting the fact that, as developmental psychologist Richard Nisbett states in *Intelligence and How to Get It*, "lower SES [socioeconomic status] children are more likely to have behavior problems, which are disruptive to one degree or another for all who have to deal with such children." And indeed Ryan does concede, albeit skittishly, that disadvantaged students are more likely to hold dysfunctional attitudes or display disruptive behaviors. He refers, for example, to black adolescents' "opposition to conventional middle class white values," and to the problems of dealing with "loud, obnoxious, poorly behaved, low income African American students." But Ryan knows that frank talk of such behavioral deficits indulges stereotypes and fits uneasily with the liberal zeitgeist. Not surprisingly, his approach to the topic is riddled with mea culpas, disclaimers, contradictions, and evasions. He simultaneously deplores the "prejudice" against urban schools as expressed in "stereotypical assumptions about urban minorities" and relies on those very stereotypes — and the functional superiority of the bourgeois folkways that characterize predominantly white suburban schools — to justify his income integration project. On how schools should actually deal with gaps between poor and middle-income students, Ryan takes refuge in banal bromides or deploys the weasel word "challenging" — but he never says how the challenges presented by disorderly conduct and dysfunctional norms should be met. Instead, he repeatedly denies that he is "blaming the victim." Indeed, he devotes more attention to establishing his bien pensant bona fides than to confronting the inevitable disruptions that arise from bringing students together across wide social divides. One would never know from this book that addressing these difficulties is crucial to the success of his vision. Nor does he acknowledge the role these concerns might play in suburban parents' trepidation about sending their children to socially or racially integrated schools, let alone hint that their reluctance might be justified.

*Ryan does concede, albeit skittishly, that disadvantaged students are more likely to hold dysfunctional attitudes.*

Ryan's dismissal of parents' fears contains an important proviso: There is nothing to worry about "provided that the school culture remains one of high expectations." That condition is the crux of the matter. He repeatedly assures us that high expectations will persist as long as the number of poor students is kept down. But he waffles on how many poor children is too many. With a nod to the social science of "tipping" (the rapid change that occurs when rival norms or demographics become a significant presence) he suggests an upper limit of 25 to 40 percent — a number that will strike many suburban parents as alarmingly high. But common sense observation reveals that significant

dislocations can occur far short of that, and that a few “bad apples” can damage the interests of everyone. A handful of disorderly, disrespectful, or seriously deficient students can paralyze a classroom, drain teacher attention and energy, and distract students who want to learn. One or two violent incidents can destroy school order and serenity, gum up the works with expensive security measures, and make everyone feel unsafe. Dealing with even a few serious and recidivist troublemakers diverts time and resources away from academics, enrichment, and extracurricular pursuits. Above all, disruptive and poorly socialized students threaten teachers’ authority, which is central to the respectable climate that Ryan so depends on and values. An obscenity hurled at a teacher can change everything — and, unless dealt with decisively, can drive superior teachers away. To be sure, there are “bad apples” (and good kids) from every race and class. But the key question is how many. By resisting an influx of children lower down on the class scale, middle-income suburban parents are just playing the odds.

Ryan is also naive about the fragility of middle-class mores and the dynamics of contagion. He relies heavily on improving disadvantaged students by exposing them to better-off youths — on uplift by osmosis, if you will — but he barely mentions the prospect of reverse contagion. He assumes that the less fortunate will adopt the values of the privileged, but never considers that students from rough backgrounds can pull others down. Unfortunately, children, and especially teenagers, are an impressionable lot, are easily tempted to take risks, and are swayed in unpredictable ways by the company they keep. Having classmates born outside of wedlock or with close relatives in prison may lead children to accept those conditions or find them less objectionable. A few influential adolescents can draw others into bad habits and anti-social behaviors — including petty crime, profane language, contempt for authority, early sexual promiscuity, violence and academic indifference. If the ecology of bourgeois mores is less robust than Ryan assumes, bringing in classmates who don’t accept those norms could well backfire. The propinquity designed to impart middle-class standards may end up by placing those very standards under assault.

## THE SELF-DEFEATING CULT OF DIVERSITY

Perhaps the greatest flaw of this book lies in Ryan’s refusal to confront strong cultural currents that, whether or not he endorses them (and he seems to accede to some), threaten to subvert his plan’s effectiveness. The largest threat by far is from an ethos of diversity that frowns on distinctions based on “background,” sees all cultures as equivalently valuable, and hesitates to condemn even dysfunctional lifestyles. Proper bourgeois parents once refused to apologize for protecting their children from “bad influences.” Their advice towards troubled classmates was “stay away from them.” Now, the very notion of respectability is suspect and misplaced tolerance reigns. Parents hesitate to inveigh against the dangers of rough company, especially if class and race differences are involved. Yet conscientious parents remain preoccupied with their offspring’s conduct and values. Reverse contagion dare not speak its name, so it’s far easier just to keep poor and minority students away.

The dogma of diversity also threatens school order and academic integrity. Although Ryan disclaims class mixing as a panacea and asserts that his project is merely meliorist, he forgets that magical thinking takes over on the ground. The attitude that differences must be denied or eliminated transforms the quest for equal opportunity into a demand for equal results. Once students from divergent backgrounds come together, the idea that no gaps in achievement, discipline, or anything else can be tolerated threatens to take over. The attack on rigor and ranking, heavily larded with progressive ed-school cant, generates regular calls to eliminate tracking, dismantle honors classes, dumb down or “diversify” the curriculum, revise and water down the grading system, implement trendy teaching methods, and shoehorn marginal students into honors and Advanced Placement classes. Strict discipline and exacting standards are suspect. If poor or minority students more often make trouble, proper behavior must be redefined and discipline rethought in line with progressive thinking about differing “cultural styles.” High expectations are recast as noxious forms of cultural hegemony imposed by an arrogant ruling class.

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Examples of this phenomenon abound. Affluent Fairfax County, Virginia, one of the country’s best school districts, has hatched plans to eliminate high school honors classes because too few minority students enroll and because, oddly, those classes seem to discourage black students from signing up for Advanced Placement courses. A September 2010 speech by Thomas E. Perez, head of the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department, called for drastic action to eliminate racial disparities in student discipline. A *New York Times* editorial published in June echoed that call, and disparaged arguments that suspending black youths at higher rates was justified by worse behavior. Reports have appeared nationwide deploring racial disparities in rates of school suspensions and expulsions in Oregon, Texas, and New York, with indignant vows to “reform” the system to equalize penalties for blacks and whites. These developments, although completely in keeping with the zeitgeist, are perverse. Not only do they threaten to undermine the very school culture needed to accomplish Ryan’s uplift project, but they also drive away middle-income families that are essential to maintaining a desirable milieu.

That less-well-off students more often behave badly is a fact conveniently forgotten in the haze of misplaced

tolerance. Behavioral disparities, like gaps in academic achievement, are seen as primarily a failure of the school, which must make those gaps go away. And school officials (and parents) are simply too cowed, befuddled, and conflicted to resist the muddled edicts of these trendy ideas. Emblematic of the failure of cultural confidence is the explanation offered in a *New York Times Magazine* article by a newly minted Bronx middle school teacher, fresh out of Brown, for his inability to control his class. “Who am I,” he asks, “this 24-year-old white kid from the Upper West Side, to tell a bunch of kids from a very different background how they’re supposed to behave and act?” Who, indeed? With friends like this, Ryan’s proposal doesn’t need enemies. If the well-educated son of the Upper West Side hesitates to “tell kids from a different background how to act,” how will an average teacher, with less cultural capital and academic acumen, manage to do so? Can middle-class mores really be effectively transmitted by teachers and administrators who don’t believe in them and are unwilling to defend them? In the face of such dithering, it’s not surprising that parents do not trust school authorities to deal firmly and decisively with the disruptions entailed by a significant influx of the disadvantaged. And everyone knows that pushing against the received wisdom risks accusations of racism, class prejudice, and nefarious motives. Why, then, would sensible parents vote to enter the Orwellian world of denial and doublespeak that inevitably accompanies “diversity?”

*The KIPP model is less hobbled by political correctness in tackling the stubborn realities of cultural dysfunction.*

The passage that most tellingly reveals the fatal tension between improvement and “inclusiveness” is one in which Ryan compares his income integration proposal to the Knowledge is Power Program Academies, where disadvantaged children are actively socialized to middle-class norms and comprehensively scripted in all aspects of behavior. While praising the >KIPP model and acknowledging its effectiveness, Ryan baldly disavows KIPP as a template for the economically integrated schools he envisions. Why? In predominantly middle-class schools, disadvantaged students would resent “being picked out of the crowd” for criticism or correction. In other words, active socialization is off limits, because any implication that poor students are deficient and need improvement demeans them. Yet the whole reason to embark on the grand experiment of system-wide income integration is to reform the habits, attitudes, and behaviors of less privileged children. Nonetheless, Ryan implies that, in the name of “inclusiveness” and avoiding bad feelings, any direct pursuit of this goal is forbidden. We might well wonder how well the uplift program can be expected to work under these restrictive conditions. At the very least, Ryan’s odd disclaimer should make us reject income integration in favor of the KIPP model, which is less hobbled by political correctness in tackling the stubborn realities of cultural dysfunction.

That intensive socialization is not part of his scheme is no problem for Ryan, however, because class mixing is premised on the belief that uplift will occur automatically. In fleshing out his project, Ryan stresses the structural and institutional over the culturally prescriptive sources of remediation. Once low-income and minority students are put in the right schools, surrounded by ample resources, pushy and influential parents, high-quality teachers, and good values, they will just spontaneously adopt the folkways of the educated, suburban class. Poor habits and attitudes will fade, profanity, insolence, and disruptive behavior will decline, learning will improve, and scores will magically rise. Firm discipline, explicit censure, public correction, low grades, punishments, and suspensions will prove unnecessary. The belief in uplift by immersion allows Ryan to avoid the judgmentalism inherent in openly endorsing a clear set of values. And it obviates the need for teachers and administrators confident enough to defend and impose those values even in the teeth of stubborn differences in outcome by race and class.

*The belief in uplift by immersion allows Ryan to avoid the judgmentalism of openly endorsing a clear set of values.*

But what if improvement by osmosis doesn’t work? If Ryan is wrong and KIPP is right — if disadvantaged children must be taught explicitly how to act and think, and relentlessly instructed in proper behavior — then income integration will fail. If laggards can’t be brought up, the only option is defining deviancy down. But not before we create an elaborate menu of expensive new services and programs which, notwithstanding Ryan’s insistence that no one gets hurt, inevitably means less money for middle-income children’s enrichment. Suburban parents know that scarcity exists and that resources are limited. What’s spent on the elusive, and ultimately futile, quest for strict equality of results won’t be spent on what they want for their children and, in many cases, have worked hard to give them. In the end, Ryan’s disregard of the cultural contradictions inherent in his plan, and his anxious deference to a code of political correctness, virtually guarantee that his project will neither sell nor succeed.

Ryan’s ambivalence extends even to a central proviso of his scheme: Most children in most schools must be relatively well off. But insisting on this demographic balance risks giving offense. Poor and minority parents do not want to be told that their access must be limited or that a school’s quality depends on their children being kept out. Ryan’s account of Richmond’s public magnet Governor’s School illustrates this dilemma. With a mostly white and heavily Asian student body carefully controlled to draw in middle-class children from nearby districts, the school was

resented by Richmond's black families, including those enrolled in a public school housed in the same building, who felt excluded from its academically intensive programs. Ryan is at pains to sympathize with the public school parents by noting the comparatively "unequal status" of their nonmagnet schools. But there is not a word about how school districts should handle these complaints as they struggle to preserve the predominantly white and middle-class demographic that Ryan touts as the key to success. If poor and minority parents object to limits on their numbers, resisting their demands could prove awkward and politically costly. But if they are allowed to veto balancing plans, how can Ryan's project ever get off the ground? Unless someone is willing to push back and make it stick — and Ryan leaves doubt about whether he himself would be — his vision of income integration is untenable. Ryan's failure to face this thorny issue forthrightly makes his proposal virtually useless to the hapless parents and schools who must grapple with reality and make it all work.

*Experiments in income integration that have been voluntarily adopted have ultimately foundered.*

So how is the optimal student body to be maintained? In the wake of the failure of judicially mandated racial integration, the question looms as to whether class mixing can be accomplished in just the right balance, and how stability can be achieved in the face of parental prerogatives and volatile demographics. Here Ryan pulls his punches yet again. Inexplicably, he touts the expansion of school choice and vouchers as an aid in income integration. Yet he freely admits that middle-income parents game the system and relentlessly gravitate to people just like themselves. The only way to square this circle is to limit school choice. So school choice isn't really school choice after all. The fact is that it's almost impossible for school districts to maintain the necessary student profile without ironclad, centralized control and constant tinkering with school composition. This often requires telling parents they can't send their children to the schools they want, or that their children must switch schools. The few experiments in income integration that have been voluntarily adopted — most notably, in Wake County, North Carolina — have ultimately foundered on the constant upheavals and reassignments needed to keep the schools in balance. Even Ryan concedes that educated, middle-class parents won't put up with this. If there is one thing they staunchly resist, it is their children being moved around like pieces on a chess board in the service of some grand scheme. They know that constant mobility erodes the stable bonds, enduring ties, and continuity that are essential to quality schools. And they reserve the right to judge their own children's individual needs, and to give those needs priority over societal imperatives.

In light of these prerogatives, Ryan's failure to address how income integration would be accomplished system-wide is a major shortcoming. He focuses almost exclusively on moving poor children into high-functioning suburban schools while barely discussing the far more intractable task of luring middle-class children into subpar institutions in dangerous and decrepit neighborhoods. Yet the project of income integration cannot be accomplished just by shifts from inner city to suburbs. Movement in the opposite direction will, of course, never happen. The notion that suburban families will flock to the city's core on anything like the scale necessary is, quite simply, a fantasy. It is certainly a no-go in Philadelphia, where I live, and where the specter of flash mobs, mean streets, rampant school violence, faked tests results, and gross mismanagement have suburban parents shaking their heads in dismay. And shake them they should. All conscientious parents strive to do what's best for their children. For most suburbanites, this is defined as shielding them from troubled city schools and neighborhoods. As Ryan quotes one suburban parent, the whole point of moving to the suburbs was to "get away from the problems of urban systems." The very parental vigilance Ryan hopes to harness for his approved purposes is bound to scuttle his grand scheme.

*The notion that suburban families will flock to the city's core on anything like the scale necessary is, quite simply, a fantasy.*

Finally, Ryan ignores a fertile source of opposition to forced integration of any kind, whether by race or class — which is that well-off families' choice of schools is a notorious bastion of hypocrisy, replete with rules for thee but not for me. The privileged elites somehow manage to opt out of the educational schemes they confidently, and arrogantly, foist on others. President Obama sends his children to Sidwell Friends, one of the toniest private schools in Washington, where students are hand-picked, diversity carefully managed, and rule-breakers ejected. The story of school integration in this country is that of the rank and file citizens and minorities left to fight it out, while the people in charge remain safely ensconced on the sidelines, far removed from the battle zone. This is a fertile source of political resentment and of continuing opposition to proposals like Ryan's.

But what of children stuck in inadequate urban schools? Don't we care about them, and shouldn't they have a chance to escape? Although Ryan's main tactic is to deny his proposal has any downsides, his ace in the hole is a claim of justice. In disparaging the dominant mantra of "Save the City, Spare the Suburbs," he contrasts "the natural desire of individuals to do the best they can for their own children," to "what's good for everyone." The implication is clear. Suburban reluctance shows a selfish disregard for the compelling claims of others. Thus, even if equal

opportunity requires some sacrifice, resistance deserves no quarter.

Here, once again, Ryan makes life easy for himself. He assumes without argument that suburban parents' desire to maintain the status quo must give way, and that their duty is to welcome everyone, including those who might disrupt their schools. But it's far from clear where that obligation comes from. Ryan admits that the sustained efforts of caring, dedicated, vigilant parents, and the proper socialization of children, are essential to school success. He concedes that the values of students and parents go a long way towards making schools what they are and keeping them that way. But what is the source of those attributes and how are they maintained? Here Ryan waffles as it serves his purposes. He repeatedly asserts that norms and attitudes are key, and resources and money secondary. But he also talks as if school quality flows from above, and that an atmosphere conducive to learning is somehow conferred by government and propped up by undue favoritism and political "clout." The implication is that middle-income suburbanites enjoy privileges that are unearned and even illegitimate. Because they don't entirely deserve their pleasant communities or well-functioning schools, they have no right to keep them to themselves. It follows that they are obliged to "share." And that obligation extends even to people who don't hold the same priorities and who threaten to compromise them.

It should come as no surprise that not everyone embraces this point of view. Ryan's effort to paint "good values" as a "resource" that present holders owe to all comers slights an important insight. Orderly neighborhoods and excellent schools are built and maintained from the bottom up, through the hard work, restraint, planning, prudence, and rectitude of ordinary citizens. Good schools depend on strong norms, which do not operate in isolation. They feed off the efforts of like-minded people who support one another in a common endeavor. But mutual cooperation is always provisional and never assured. Because those who come together to create excellent institutions are always on sufferance with one another, inclusion can never be an entitlement and must be continuously earned. Ryan implicitly writes off the "ladder" view of neighborhoods and communities, whereby access to higher rungs is achieved through striving, sacrifice, and playing by the rules, and where people who don't show they honor those rules are unwelcome. On this view, although well-off suburbanites might support and be willing to help pay for improving education for the disadvantaged, they don't see themselves as obliged to open their untroubled, well-functioning schools to students who might disrupt them. And they don't see themselves as owing entry to children whose parents don't care as much as they do or don't do as good a job. Even if the cities should be "saved," the suburbs should be "spared."

## WITHOUT VOICE, THERE'S ALWAYS EXIT

Ultimately, Ryan's project founders on the fact that people cannot be forced to live and go to school with those who threaten or undermine their values — at least not in the country we currently occupy. The very vigilant and self-protective attitudes on which Ryan depends for his project's success lead well-heeled parents to remove their kids from schools that, in their opinion, don't work. And, for better or worse, the schools that work best are filled with people like them. Parents may lose their voice in the din of multicultural orthodoxy, but they always have exit. When it comes to their children, they will exercise it if they can. Although residential choice has been relentlessly tarred as "white flight," it also is an enforcer of standards and the last bastion of freedom. And there's always private school. Whatever ill-conceived schemes educrats devise, determined parents will find a way around them. They will find a way to vote with their feet.

The bottom line is that income integration is more zero-sum than win-win. For less-advantaged children in malfunctioning schools, or with parents who just don't care, the only viable option is to reduce the need to escape. Far better to improve education where it's happening than to lean on strengths found elsewhere. If parents and community leaders want good schools, they have no choice but to create them. Unfortunately, it is not enough to will the ends. They also have to will the means. School quality depends on children who behave well, work hard, and want to learn — and who are prepared to do so. Schools cannot create good students. Only parents can. There is no substitute for building them from the bottom up.

The end of Ryan's book is upbeat, if oddly deflationary. While admitting that middle-class parents' desire for control has so far stymied income integration on anything like the scale he desires, he insists that diverse schools are the wave of the future. Rising numbers of immigrants and minorities, as well as complex shifts in urban and suburban populations, will chip away at monolithic schools. Demography is destiny. To which one can only respond: Bring it on. But give it time. Here patient gradualism is preferable to utopian zeal. Although it's tempting to force things, we should resist. When it comes to diversity, heavy-handed social engineering is the enemy of progress. How much better to just let it happen.

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