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The Finxerunt Movement is a growing international student-led Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) founded on July 10th, 2017 on the basis of building a sustainable future, due to the several conceptual issues in our current global systems in economics, leadership, education, healthcare, human-rights and equality, and societal prioritization. Using a comprehensive, yet attainable Three-Step initiative, the organization proposes new ideas to tackle the roots of many modern issues in order to make the world a better place. Here at Finxerunt, we wish to push for equality and to highlight the intelligence and creativity of each individual. In doing so, the organization hopes to unite the minds of ordinary people to push towards advancement in our society. Uniting would end the many distractions of war and partisan politics, which would enable humans to expand in knowledge and do boundless things.

A long-term goal of this organization is to join hands with people in creating a better world for the environment and the people on it. The organization hopes to unite the minds of people in order to push towards advancement in our society. When people unite, they celebrate their differences, and by default, this eliminates the need for war and aggression. Instead, people are driven by a common goal for a better world, and the "I is replaced with the We". The ultimate purpose of this project is to highlight the infinite possibilities that can occur when people come together - whether it simply spreads awareness or leads to tangible change. By creating this initiative, we hope to reach people all over the world and to encourage them to develop an interest in fostering a greater society.

Every research paper here has been written by our summer interns from our summer program.

For more information please go to [Finxerunt.org](https://finxerunt.org)

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## A Cause and Effect Analysis: Looking at the effects of a lack of skill-based education in Schools

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### Abstract

Skill-based learning is where a student learns a specific skill, so the student will be able to retain and apply the skill more effectively. There has been a considerable lack of skill-based learning in school, which has affected schools and students vastly. We wanted to find the causes behind the issues and present possible solutions/remedies. For our research, we used a collection of research papers from various authors. We use data from other studies so we can understand the causes and effects of the lack of a skill-based education system. A lot of this data in the studies we use are observational and statistical. We analyze the results from such papers and provide more in-depth insight into these issues. Furthermore, we used the results from past studies to offer potential solutions. From those, we were able to explain why more schools should implement skill-based learning into their curriculum.

### Introduction

Lack of skill-based education has continuously proven to be one of the most significant concerns in the modern education system. This comes as the United States' academic results in all subject fields have been ranking significantly lower than other countries on the international chart for years. For reference, the US ranks 15 out of 28 countries in reading literacy, 19 in mathematical literacy, and 14 in scientific literacy. The effects of the under-managed system are not simply illustrated by academic comparisons, but also by the citizens. Due to the poor development and enforcement of soft skills(communication/people skills), people find extreme difficulty in communicating, leading, and interacting with others. These skills are considered essential, if not more important, by many students of all ages and backgrounds. Even with the rise of new resources, such as the introduction of new technological materials, students have not

seen an improved or enriched curriculum designed for their personal and professional development. Skill-based education plays a large factor in the future success for the current demographic, and it is noted from an early age—as young as preschool. Additionally, skill-based teaching and learning, or the lack thereof, reflects on the many flaws of the traditional education system that is still being implemented today and highlights the many different issues and problems that have been present since its existence in the US. This remains a grand-scale national concern. If schools do not prioritize skill-based teaching and learning, the US will continue remaining inferior to other countries in terms of subject or grade-level proficiency.

When students graduate and pursue higher education, they realize the importance of soft skills in the real world. Studies have recognized the impact of a lack of skill-based education on future jobs and what students think of it. Graduates and university students all thought that soft skills are important for jobs. This article's results are as follows: some students thought that soft skills were more important than professional knowledge. University students and graduates perceived communication skills and sensitivity in communication as the most important skills. The researchers believed that the university students and graduates weren't active in enhancing their skills. Rather, they (the students) hoped that the university would help them garner those skills. The employers agreed with the students and graduates that soft skills were important in the modern workplace. Employers also agreed with the students that the university curriculum is outdated and didn't fit the modern workplace's needs. Furthermore, most employers tend to say that life skills are valued more than soft skills. Life skills, they said, needed to be applied in the real world and future employers should have enough experience with them. Surprisingly, many employers argued that many students who have a "communications" degree from the university couldn't communicate with others correctly in real life. Thus, employers believed students lacked emphasis on real-life application and experience. So, one major effect on university graduates with a lack of skill-based education is that it hinders their ability to have real success in the contemporary workplace. Specifically, the real-world experience is what matters most to employers, and without experience, one cannot meet or exceed expectations of their jobs. It is clear that a lack of connection to the real world is a major cause of a lack of skill-based learning in the modern education system. Without experience, students cannot gain real skills and could have a biased view of what they expect the workplace to be like. This will lengthen the time new employees take to adjust to the workplace's system which will of course lower efficiency in the workplace. A potential solution to this problem is to have designated days where all the students intern for a specific job and find what they are good at. This will not only relieve pressure off the students but also strengthen their skills and learn new things. Furthermore, having experience

early on will make all graduates ready to tackle their jobs at ease, thus increasing workplace efficiency.

The need for both hard and soft skills is evident, as they play a crucial role in all career fields. Yet, the education system has always emphasized the importance of hard skills and neglected to cultivate and develop soft skills that students also need. The imbalance between the two takes a toll on a student's education and career paths. The failure to develop soft skills at a young age leads to students struggling to connect and navigate with the real world even before reaching adulthood. To learn more about the relationship between soft and hard skills, a group of researchers conducted an analysis by running skills listed in job advertisements through the Multivariable Hawkes Process model. The analysis showed that hard skills, such as technological programming skills, predict the rise in soft skills, such as communication and collaboration. It also proves that even with the rise of data analytic, AI-related skills, and other hard skills, people's need to communicate ideas, lead, and negotiate is undeniable and essential.

The aforementioned soft skills and real-world skills can be trained and developed from a young age, as early as preschool. However, the lack of skill-based education in preschool becomes a hindrance as well. Consistently, it has been proven that quality preschool results in better educated and well-prepared children. A 37-year longitudinal study revealed that students who participated in the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project in a forty-year range were more

likely to complete high school, have higher monthly earnings, and own property than their counterparts who did not attend preschool.(NCJRS) What deems High/Scope Perry Preschool Project a quality preschool is adhering to The National Association of Young Children's (NAEYC) standards, which calls for written statements of the program's goals and philosophy, supportive learning materials and equipment, reasonable staff-child ratios (one instructor per every six 2-year old children), and different staff qualifications (skill-based teaching) that enables immense support in every field to provide young children with necessary skills. Contrary to popular belief, quality preschools are great investments, as a 2004 study indicates. The Economic Policy Institute finds that if the nation provides quality early education for young low-income students starting in 2005, by 2050, the nation would have an enormous \$61 billion in revenue boost.

Though it has been shown that the US has neglected funding into quality preschools, total expenditures for public schools in 2015-2016 amounted to \$706 billion. By breaking this number now, one can see that about \$13,847 covers one public school student's enrollment. Stephen P. Heyneman, the author of a research paper called "The International Efficiency of American Education: The Bad and the Not-so-Bad News," provided a more in-depth look into these numbers by experimenting with examining factors and causes of inefficiency in the US. Education system. Heyneman also presents and analyzes different charts to compare results and

commissions from 17 different countries. Some critical information includes the US spending compared to other countries. For example, in Norway, about \$1,111 was spent per person for 46% above international 8th-grade mathematics. In the US., \$1,040 was spent per person for 45% above the international average. This indicates that the will need to spend around \$24 more

per person for a 1% increase. However, in Singapore and Japan, only \$7 per person would be required for the same 1% increase, and similarly in Thailand, around \$4 per person. In Romania, around \$2 to \$3 per person. A clear conclusion can be drawn from the data provided: the US. spends more for the same result. In addition, America's scores ranked 8th place out of 17 countries, but when looking at monetary efficiency, it drops down to 16 out of 17. As seen, the issue doesn't lie in the amount of money the country spends on education, but rather the way the current budget is being used. The money isn't efficiently used to the utmost ability to garner the necessary results. It leads one to wonder about the management of educational resources, whether that is funding towards the professionalization of education (skill-based teaching) or required learning equipment (skill-based tools).

When looking at the modern education system as a whole, one conclusion can be drawn—the 21st century is a digitalized era, without a doubt. From the 1990s to the present day, technology has made its way into classrooms, proving to be an efficient way of teaching and learning. Now, more than ever, communication has skyrocketed. Students can gain new insight and information simply from sitting at home, and teachers can compile large lessons and easily present new information through digital models. In this era, people worldwide are reliant on technology, so why is it that the US still suffers greatly from the Digital Divide? Due to a lack of proper investment, schools in lower-income districts do not have the means to provide more specialized equipment and technology that aids in a student's development. The same lack of correct investments is seen in teacher's salaries and the inability to fire less-than-qualified teachers, which continuously enables the lack of skill-based education that is so needed in this time and age. Digitalization continuously proves to be an asset in modern-day education, but nothing will replace the authenticity of traditional methods of teaching and specialization of teachers' skills.

Even with today's new technologies, Finland's education system continues to overshadow and garner better results from students than the United States. Finland's unique education system strategy states that a student who has fallen behind be granted additional teaching. A student who has difficulty learning has access to part-time special needs education. Although the US has passed the Individuals with Disabilities Act- that sought to provide free public education for



kids- local governments control the practices and implementation. In the US, there are two learning pathways for teachers: university-based and practice-based. The university-based requirements vary significantly from program to program, which doesn't guarantee the same skills and experience for every prospective teacher. However, in Finland, eight Finnish universities offer the structure of teacher education, all taking place in a research-based-university structure. Each university has a specific curriculum and strategies. After teachers get their five-year degree, they are required to take an exam that tests their knowledge of educational practices, take an interview, and have their resume looked over. America could take note of Finland's school system, as it teaches kids how to engage more with the real world.

Additionally, Finnish students are only required to take one standardized test during their entire primary/secondary schooling, a low stakes test that gauges how the Finland Educational system is doing. The National Matriculation exam has questions that don't shy away from real-world issues, which span across different subject areas. Some topics included socialist revolutions, ethics, popular music, violence, and evolution. In contrast, in the US, students are required to take two standardized tests annually from 3rd to 8th grade. The tests test basic knowledge in specific math/ELA skills, but certain strategies can help bolster the scores without students having to answer the questions authentically. Opponents have criticized this testing saying that students are only learning how to become better test-takers. In high school, there are plenty more standardized tests required/suggested to get into top tier colleges - the SAT/ACT, SAT subject tests, and AP exams. In Finland, tuition is free for any student accepted into a college or graduate program in Finland, including master and doctoral degrees. In contrast, the average student loan debt in American is \$35,397, with borrowings totaling to over \$1.64 trillion in total. If college was more accessible to everyone in the US, we would have a stronger workforce that has a vast span of skills. The US could modify its testing policies to allow for more students to learn skills and to get into higher education.

## Conclusion

After examining the aforementioned possible factors, such as the possibility of underfunding, the issues of inefficient spending, and the question of traditional limiting curriculums that do not develop the essential skills and knowledge students actually need, it is clear that major reforms are needed in the modern education system. To be specific, professionalization of education must be the goal that the US attempts to strive in order to develop educated and prepared citizens, who will create a brighter future of endless possibilities for the US. To support that goal, the US must look to other educational systems around the world that have demonstrated themselves to be useful and successful in providing an enriching and

fulfilling education for their students, and all the while reflect on their own broken system and consistently seek out for ways to ameliorate in the areas that are lacking. That is the reform needed in order to improve and create a challenging curriculum that encourages competition, boosts college readiness, and prepares for a successful future.

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## **Hurricane Maria's Impact on Puerto Rico: How a Corrupt Government and Debt-Ridden Island Created the Perfect Storm for Disaster**

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The scenic island of Puerto Rico is beautiful from coast to coast. However, when one takes a deeper dive into her political climate, government, and the state of her people, it won't take very long to realize the potentially irreparable harm being done. From seemingly unpayable debt, to a vicious cycle of corruption, and being hit by the most deadly hurricane since 2004, Puerto Rico's socioeconomic standing in the world is quickly plummeting. In order to understand the current state of this nation and why they are suffering so violently, it's important to understand that these issues are nothing new, rather they've simply been magnified.

Since its American colonization in 1898, Puerto Rico and her people have faced many trials and tribulations, but three consistent problems have plagued this commonwealth since its infancy: systemic corruption, fluctuating poverty, and a lack of representation in the United States. The island's first governor, Charles Allen, was appointed by President McKinley as a reward for political favors, campaign contributions, and to establish the American Sugar Refining Company. This transfer from a coffee-industry to a sugar-based economy resulted in mass-poverty which ravaged the entire island. Additionally, Puerto Ricans were recognized as citizens 19 years after American colonization, only so they could be deployed as troops in WW1. This resulted in 3,540 deaths from the commonwealth. Although this seems far beyond the reach of what affects Puerto Rico today, history is repeating itself, and these three issues have become motifs in Puerto Rican culture.

In order to fully comprehend why Hurricane Maria was so destructive, it's key to note that prior to this natural disaster, Puerto Ricans had been suffering immensely. This category five hurricane which occurred in September of 2017 was the tipping point for Puerto Rico's socioeconomic state. Primarily, Hurricane Maria cost Puerto Rico between \$95 billion- \$139 billion in damages. This range is so broad due to inaccurate estimates and an inadequate allocation of funds stemming from government corruption, unclear negotiations, and an increase in new damage findings. This \$139 billion dollars was fifteen times more the annual budget for the entire island. However, regardless of governmental fraud and dishonesty, when taken into perspective this amount was exactly what the island needed to get back to their pre-disaster state; that is \$71 billion in debt with half of its residents living below the poverty line. Hurricane Maria completely flattened the island's energy grid, it obliterated infrastructure, left more than 160,000



homes damaged or destroyed, destroyed the island's main water systems, and left many schools ruined. Although they had received congressional allocations, grants from the Department of Housing and Urban Development and private insurance companies. However, even with these funds, an additional \$70 billion was still needed. Soon after disaster had struck, a federal judge ruled that the Puerto Rican government themselves had no say over their finances, rather an oversight board created by the U.S. Congress would make final decisions for the island's recuperation. In order to even enter the beginning stages of recovery, the island was going to need considerable funding from the United States, to which President Trump stated he would be allocating \$91 billion to Puerto Rico. Although this gave the Puerto Rican government and people hope for recovery, this dream was quick fleeting as the three year anniversary is quickly approaching and Congress has only approved \$44 billion out of the initial promised amount. This already economically depleting island was in the face of catastrophe when Hurricane Maria struck, but her finances were just scratching the surface of this natural disaster's true effects.

Hurricane Maria was broadcasted to the world as an economic crisis, and rightfully so, but in its true essence this disaster was a humanitarian crisis above all else. The storm claimed 4,645 lives. More than 250,000 residents were left without a clean water source or access to proper food. Areas that have had their clean water restored are still not clean enough to drink straight. Even where water service has been restored, many communities still have a "boil water" advisory in place. Other areas are still purchasing bottled water to get the clean water they need. Additionally, having enough clean food for displaced citizens in need was extremely difficult for nearly a year and a half. It was a hassle to access groceries and fresh food. Many relied on meals provided by FEMA, the Red Cross, World Central Kitchen, and other entities. More than 1.4 million residents were powerless, and after 328 days electricity and cellular telephone reception was fully restored. 300,000 homes were damaged and an additional 70,000 were destroyed. All the while, FEMA has also admitted that "62 percent of Puerto Ricans' requests to repair their homes were rejected or are in process." It is appalling that time and time again, Puerto Rico and her people are forgotten and left to fend and fight for themselves.

Outside of the obvious human rights violations which occurred at the hands of the Puerto Rican and U.S. government, there was an issue which plagued the island after Maria hit and it wasn't discussed enough. The mental health of the citizens in Puerto Rico. Over 5,000 people with suicidal ideation called Línea PAS, a government helpline, from September to January. This was nearly triple the number of Puerto Ricans who had called in the previous year. In the five months which remained in 2017 post hurricane, 253 Puerto Ricans committed suicide and thousands have reported instances of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. This mental health crisis which occurred in Puerto Rico held a direct link to the human rights violations, and both should be considered a joint humanitarian crisis. Now, although Puerto Rico has made a remarkable

recovery since the hurricane struck only three years ago, there were many challenges which added weight to this Hurricane's magnitude. Potentially without them, the number of deaths, those left homeless and resourceless, and the general suffering which occurred could have been minimized.

Due to a lack of adequate distribution of resources and funds by FEMA, HUD, Congress, and most significantly a corrupt governing body, Puerto Rico and her people were left to fend for themselves. Mountainous debt, a plea for honest government officials, and a still-recovering island post disaster may sound like irreparable harm. But, although systemic corruption, fluctuating poverty, and a lack of representation in the United States has affected Puerto Rico since it's American colonization, resilience, strength, and perseverance amongst her people have had the greatest impact of all.

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## **A True Democracy and Its Effect On America's Social, Educational, and Economic Institutions**

*By Helena Baruch, Tasmia Afrin, Angelica Katcher, Michelle Seucan, & Rahib Taher*

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### **INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?**

The universal interpretation of a model democracy involves ideas that intend to promote equal voting rights for all, majority rule, and scrupulous elections. In fact, the very definition of a democracy is “a system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives.”<sup>1</sup> It should be implicit in this definition that such unified notions apply to all sectors of American society: educational, economical, political, and societal. Yet, judging from these factors, the U.S. has proven to be extremely deficient in the aspects of what a true democracy looks like and the benefits that ensue such governing. When examining America's overtly corrupt and capitalist economy, it is visible that the market is overwhelmed with private, self-aggrandizing businesses and owners. There is an utmost lack of collaboration, equity, and justice in the educational institutions and a similar situation in the workforce. This unrelenting imbalance in American society can be answered with one simple call to action: democracy.

Over the years, democracy has demonstrated to be a critical tool in fostering societal equality, fairness, and stability - when executed correctly. Democracy has played a fruitful role in reducing poverty and social injustices involving economical, educational, and labor institutions. Modernization theories have argued that “structural decreases in poverty during the development process typically lead to broader socio-cultural and political transformations that increase the likelihood of the emergence of stable democracies,” and effectively vice versa.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, according to *American Journal of Political Science*, by Michael Ross, “many studies claim to show that democracies do a better job than nondemocracies of improving the welfare of the poor.”<sup>3</sup> The studies have shown to be consistent with current models of democracy across the world where income redistribution, equality in the workforce, and general funding of services are systematically and intrinsically ingrained into the government. So why, when America claims to be a democracy, do we fail to see significant signs of democracy in educational, economical, and the workplace sectors of our society?

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<sup>1</sup> [definition of democracy](#)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13510347.2019.1575369>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.jstor.org/stable/4122920?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/4122920?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents)



It has been historically acknowledged the dismantlement and failure of a government is generally due to poor governance. The leaders are unable to accommodate a functioning society wherein they are fruitless in generating public goods, maintaining public transparency, and, most importantly, facilitating citizen participation. However, it has also been historically noted that not all democracies have been productive and successful in said governing endeavors. Yet, when the extent to a true democracy is effectively executed and fulfilled in all private and public sectors of society, it has the potential to do much good. Good governance calls for “free and fair elections for vertical accountability...independent and effective judicial systems to enforce basic constitutional principles and rights... [and] comprehensive systems of horizontal accountability, including courts, parliamentary oversight, audit agencies, ombudsman and human rights commissions,” according to the Applied Knowledge Services.<sup>4</sup> If this is what a model government ought to look like, then the implementation of a sustainable democracy accurately reflects such sentiments. And according to Nayef Al-Rodhan, author *Sustainable History and the Dignity of Man: A Philosophy of History and Civilisational Triumph*, there are eight fundamental aspects of good governing and societal function, a few being: “participation, equity, and inclusiveness...accountability...free, independent, and responsible media... [and] transparency.”<sup>5</sup> Being that democratic function directly mirrors these foundational principles, it is only logical to impose them into the educational, economical, and labor sectors of American society.

When examining the social and economical benefits of implementing a direct democracy into all divisions of American society, it is clear that this is an urgent - yet, politically underrepresented - issue. Applying democratic ideals into America’s larger institutions will effectively contribute to the elimination of social injustices, poverty, and systemic inequities. According to The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, Black Americans account for 13% of the workforce, Asian Americans account for 6%, Native Americans and Alaska Natives make up 1% of the workforce, people of two or more races make up 2% of the workforce, and Hispanics account for 17% of the workforce, however they may be of any race. The other 78% of the American labor force are made up of White Americans.<sup>6</sup> Regardless of profession, without the heavy implementation of democracy in the American workforce, employees who belong to a minority will continue to be undermined socioeconomically. In 14 states and in the District of

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<sup>4</sup> <https://gsdrc.org/document-library/moving-on-up-out-of-poverty-what-does-democracy-have-to-do-with-it/>

<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Good\\_governance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Good_governance)

<sup>6</sup> Center for Learning in Action, Williams. “What Is Workplace Democracy?” Center for Learning in Action, <https://learning-in-action.williams.edu/breaking-the-mold/what-is-workplace-democracy/>

Columbia, African American unemployment rates exceed white unemployment rates by a ratio of 2.0-to-1 or higher. This gap may be seemingly insignificant, but it amplified the flaws of the lack of a democratic workforce. Even if a field of labor is led by its employees, because of an imbalance in workers' race and economic situation, the company's leaders will not consider consumers who belong to minority groups and/or are people of color. A direct root of creating a democratic workplace is finding the balance of racial backgrounds in employees, or lack thereof. Once a racially balanced employee force has been constructed, there are a plethora of benefits when creating a democratic workforce.

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## **DEMOCRACY BENEFITS THE WORKPLACE**

Instilling democratic values at the core of every workplace across the United States will create a direct line from employer to employee. This chain of accessibility will allow for more members of minority groups to have the ability to work in positions which otherwise would've been deemed not feasible. An idea as minimal as allowing employees to vote on issues in the workplace rather than simply having those at the top decide upon the matter creates a positive work environment where the average employee's concerns can be heard. This leads to a chain of democratic ideas in the workplace including friendly debate and participatory decision-making systems. By having employees be so heavily involved with finalizing important decisions, it is guaranteed that the surrounding neighborhoods and even nation-wide consumers will benefit. When it comes to democratically deciding on issues which will directly affect the community, the employees are obviously going to have their community's best interest at heart, resulting in an influx of new families in neighborhoods which would be previously labeled as 'undesirable.' It is important to note that this is different from gentrification. As through this democratic system, minority families and potentially 'bottom-tier' economic citizens would have the ability to find new places of residence. Regardless of how positively influential implementing democracy in the workplace can be, many social justice issues cannot be solved merely through democratic labor practices. Inner city housing projects and the violence which surrounds them, adequate and responsible childcare services, and access to a highly challenging education are all issues which cannot be solved through a democratic workforce, but can be rooted into one.

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## **INCORPORATING DEMOCRACY INTO EDUCATION**

The purpose of education in a democratic society is to induce the values of collaboration, community and justice into the hearts of our students. These values are essential to improving a functioning democracy in any country. According to Dana Bennis, democratic education will implement the idea that every student is born unique and that our thinking process varies from

person to person. It is crucial that such a system will allow students to engage with the world around them to become positive, contributing members of society. Studies show that educational environments alluring young students as active participants in their own learning are linked with higher student attendance and achievement. Positive learning environments can lower a teacher turnover by 25%; teacher turnover results in increased costs in funding and poor student achievements. (Learning Liftoff). With this notion in mind, democratic education would expand the learning process for all students and make them aware of the real world. Students educated in conventional schools for the majority of their lives represent one of the biggest challenges in democratic education and that is being stuck in the cycle of following predetermined lessons and material (Caine, 2008).<sup>6</sup> Since soliciting student voice and choice in the classroom lies so far outside the educational norm in our society, democratic education practices may be met, initially, by considerable student resistance. In this cycle the problem is that students are used to being told what to do, how to do it, and why they should. Everything has been laid out for them, leaving little to no room for creativity or their own thinking (Heim, 2016).<sup>7</sup> It's almost as if the system wants to create puppets that must follow every order and movement they decide. The curriculum trains students to be docile and follow the course without objections.

Our schools should emphasize commitment to a democratic system in which every citizen is honored in a respectful and just community that values and “encourages a critical approach in the intellectual search for truth and meaning in each individual’s life” (Purpel 1989).<sup>8</sup> Democratic education provides a more meaningful learning experience and this is something many schools lack. Schools fall short when it comes to valuing a diverse curriculum and critical-thinking skills. One way to implement democracy into our education, is to institute more freedom-based practices within our educational system. If people have the choice and freedom to study what interests them, then they become more deeply engaged in, and thus less alienated from, their learning. A case study by Powell shows us that 68% of students who are learning about topics that interest them, result in higher grades and are more attentive to the subject.<sup>9</sup> Whereas only 41% of students who learn the basic subjects given in their curriculum result in higher grades. More engagement leads to better retention and better critical reflection and analysis. It also allows students to conceptualize the material and apply it to reality!

While it may take time to adjust to democratic education and there will be resistance from the students and staff, I strongly believe that once democratic education is practiced, the results will be extraordinary. Throughout the U.S history, Americans have swivelled between

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<sup>6</sup> Caine, R. N. et al (2008). *12 Brain/Mind learning principles in action: Developing executive functions of the human brain*. California: Corwin Press.

<sup>7</sup> Joe Heim, “Education Secretary says civics education should encourage activism,” Washington Post, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Purpel, D. (1989). *The Moral and Spiritual Crisis in Education*. New York: Bergin and Garvey

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whether the focus of public education should be to create skilled workers for the economy, or to educate young people for responsible citizenship. Democratic education can prevent social injustices and inequality in the schools. If we ever hope to have schools that are engaging and truly embody democracy, then the classes within them must provide opportunities for students to experience freedom, choice in what is studied, and justice for all.

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## THE UPSIDES OF A CAPITALIST ECONOMY

In a capitalistic economy, a Laissez - faire system allows private transactions between individuals to be exempt from intervention of the government. Essentially creating a free market wherein the worth of any commodity is dictated by the rules of supply and demand rather than a government approved standard. This system is responsible for the creation of private corporations that are to meet the needs of the consumer based on supply and demand. The plethora of large corporations that contribute greatly to the economy are responsible for the creation and management of the various commodities required by the public. Whether it be a technological advancement or rather essential resources such as oil and water, products of the living world. Regarding a public involvement in the development of the aforementioned corporate entities, there are many individuals involved in the success of the business. Firstly, there are those who are employed and are in service of the corporation, this includes a plethora of positions and workers that are all directly involved in the success of the business. There also exists the consumerbase, those that indulge in the product of the corporation and are a direct representation of the success of the company. Last and possibly the individuals that are held in the highest of regards in the current economic landscape are those that invest millions of their own dollars in the future of the corporations. These individuals contribute the most in the shortest time to the success of the company. The importance of these individuals can be reflected in the ways that they influence the corporations, more specifically in the decisions it makes regarding its future and the allocation of its assets.

In recent years, due to the importance of these shareholders to the corporations, corporations have allocated a large majority of their earnings to the shareholders, many reporting up to 93% of these earnings to the shareholder.<sup>10</sup> More importantly, 83% of the shareholder population is made up of the top 10% of the richest households in the United States. The relationship between the corporations and these rich individuals perpetuates a power system wherein power is directly tied to an individual's worth in assets and this power is juggled between the corporation and the individuals with greater asset values. It can be described as a pseudo symbiotic relationship where it is understood that both parties use their power measured

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<sup>10</sup> "Accountable Capitalism Act - Elizabeth Warren." [www.warren.senate.gov](http://www.warren.senate.gov)



in their asset value to make the other more powerful and gain more power as a result. In a country rooted in the values of democracy where those in places of power are elected by the people and for the people, in the economic world, it seems that the interests of the majority, represented by the workers and the consumerbase are not dealt with in a similar manner. Both the workers and consumer base are necessary for the success of the company, while shareholders are not necessarily as vital. It is because of the subservience perpetuated by the dynamics between the rich and the poor that the majority is at the moment quite powerless against the heads of the corporation and the shareholders. Considering that those employed to the business are the ones that are more directly involved in bringing about the changes concerning the company's future, it would make sense that a larger portion of a company's earnings would be distributed more evenly proportional to the work and contributions that they make for the company. It is true that contributions made by the shareholders provide a company with a plethora of resources that contribute to its growth, but when considering the power dynamics in the company and how both funds and power should be distributed amongst the parties involved, there should be a greater amount of resources contributed to the worker and the consumer.

A proposal to fix such inequality amongst the shareholders, workers and consumers can be taken through what is known as the public investment fund. This initiative seeks to balance the power that individuals in society have over these businesses by making the money invested in them come from every citizen so that money contributions cannot be held in higher regard to the company and the aforementioned benefits cannot be awarded to the private investor. The money itself can be collected via a national flat rate capital assets tax wherein each person contributes essentially the same amount, each region, in this case most likely each state or city would receive their per capita share of the national investment fund. This money can then be reinvested into the economy based on local and regional interests as well as the overall performance of each business.<sup>11</sup> This ensures that everyone has a fair input in the development of the economy and are able to make democratically selected choices about the allocation of the money and consequently the future of the various businesses. Additionally a system like this where performance of a business can determine the funding that it receives, which can be used to enrich the employees provides an incentive for workers to work harder so that greater funding can be secured. A move towards a democratic economy wherein the voices of every citizen regardless of their income or social standing is heard can have positive effects both on the large and small scale corporations that make up the economy as well as the lives of the average citizen.

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<sup>11</sup> David Schweikart, "Economic Democracy" *thenextsystem.org* 1 March 2016

## CONCLUSION: DEMOCRACY IS WORTH IT!

As one can see, a democratic environment encourages a more compelling society as it aids in the development of a comprehensive and constructive education, serves as a meaningful intellectual component of reality, and helps shape our global perspectives as citizens of this world. Let's face it, we live in a world that revolves around economic and capitalist progress, fueled by financial competition. Such a toxic mindset has seemingly pushed aside the morality of our practices, making way for unjust consumerist methodologies or human operations. All of these mass corporations then directly or indirectly perpetuate social injustices in most national socioeconomic areas. But democratic institutions have objectively established their success in fostering a comfortable setting for humans to flourish, both in the workplace, educationally, and economically. This political outlook has thoroughly addressed ethical obligations to manifest racial, social, and systematic inclusivity, along with carefully establishing a more equal setting overall. Democracy in every aspect of life has proven that such an implementation can heighten human creativity, understanding, and materialize the elimination of social injustices. In conclusion, there's no doubt that social injustice is a major problem all across the country, however if the government collectively learns to adapt democratic ideals and establish democracy all throughout, then the results will be highly effective, given the statistics presented and the critical information previously analyzed. Not only will it help us advance as a civilization, but as a whole ideology will promote a vast movement for social change, humanity, and equality.

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**An analysis of the relationship between the history of discrimination towards  
Black Americans and the current issue of Systemic Racism in the United  
States**

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## Introduction

Annually, on the second Monday in October, the United States celebrates Columbus Day. And every year our social institutions ignore the truth of the events that have transpired since Columbus' "discovery." Christopher Columbus was a white, racist male whose opinions still reflect the attitude of some Americans. The federal holiday raises controversy every year over continuing to honor Columbus as a heroic figure. There are three main reasons of controversy based on Columbus encounter with indigenous people on his journey to the Americas, which includes: the forced conversion of Christianity on natives, the use of violence, and the spread of diseases that would all have negative long-term effects on these native people ("Why Columbus Day Causes Controversy" 2019). Columbus and the other Europeans viewed indigenous people as racially inferior and ultimately the extreme social construct of racism can be traced back to this time period.

Since the origins of racism and discrimination, it has increasingly become more ingrained in our society through our government, criminal justice system, education, health care, and other institutions. Racism has influenced people's perceptions and decisions for centuries and remains a prevalent issue for racial groups such as Black Americans, which includes people from Africa and Caribbean. This group is highly discriminated against and faces issues such as: unemployment, mistreatment, poor health care, racial profiling, red lining, unequal availability of resources, and several more. The deep-rooted issues of these groups is a symptom of systemic racism. Systemic racism is defined as the inequalities or discrimination based on racism embedded in society and within social institutions that disadvantages Black Americans (Yancey-Bragg 2020). Systemic racism contributes to the power of white supremacy (2020). It leads to disparities; for example despite blacks consisting of only 13% of the entire United States population, blacks make up almost half of the homeless population (2020). There is not only inequality in housing, but inequality exists in every facet of life.

To understand systemic racism, the history of the suppression of black people must be examined. In between 1525 to 1866, millions of African Americans were enslaved and sailed off to the United States. Slavery embedded racist views and attitudes towards African Americans and was the start of institutional or systemic racism. The fight against slavery began with the Civil War (1861-1865). Most people consider the end of slavery to be after the Civil War, however the official end of slavery was said to be in 1942. After the Civil War, Southern States used the criminal justice system to reinforce racial control, passing Black Codes and Jim Crow laws. These laws contradicted the 13th Amendment, which is known for abolishing involuntary servitude and slavery, except for a punishment of a crime ("Racial Disparity" 2020). This created a loophole in which states exploited when passing the Black Codes ("Racial Disparity" 2020). By arresting African Americans and giving them unfair and long sentences, states set up new

economic and labor systems, sharecropping and peonage- forced labor and convict leasing (2020). In violation of a Black Code, offenders had to pay fines, those who were unable to pay were forced into labor until they worked off the money, however these offenders were never released (2020). It wasn't until the Civil Rights Movement until African Americans were able to gain freedom. It's been only a few decades since Black Americans gained equal rights, and although they have these rights Blacks face discrimination daily. Black Americans face racial profiling, generational poverty, high incarceration rights, and more. Blacks have been discriminated against for centuries and social institutions reinforce this racism. These systems are based on a foundation that is flawed and prejudiced. People are often misinformed about the history of Black culture and the truth of why murders like George Floyd happen today, but America's history can help shed light on events and statistics of today. The history of discrimination towards Black Americans is correlated to the issues this group struggles with in the 21st century, such as discrimination with the social institutions of health care, the criminal justice system, and education.

### **Manuscript Body**

The health care system in America may appear to be non-bias, but through the centuries Blacks have been mistreated and even today low income Black families suffer from lack of resources and treatment. It is common to think of medicine and health care to be neutral and driven solely by science, however medicine and the flawed health care system has continually discriminated against Black Americans. Take for instance, the Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male run by doctors from the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) in 1932, before slavery was completely abolished (Nix 2019). For this experiment, six hundred black men were recruited and promised free health care (Nix 2019). Most of these men were sharecroppers who have never gone to the doctor, which ultimately shows the unavailability of healthcare to these men. For the study 399 men served as the experimental group and were given syphilis, while the other 201 served as the control group and were syphilis free (Nix 2019). This experiment was supposed to last 6 months, but instead lasted 40 years. Furthermore, PHS researchers told physicians to leave participants untreated and in 1947 when penicillin became the recommended treatment for syphilis, the infected men were only given placebos (aspirin and minerals) (Nix 2019). No effective care was given, although men died, went insane or blind, or experienced severe health problems from the untreated sexually transmitted disease (STD) (Nix 2019). In the mid-1960s, a PHS investigator, Peter Buxton, found out about the study and reported it as unethical to his superiors and a committee was created by PHS officials in response to his concerns (Nix 2019). The committee decided to continue the study with the objective of waiting until all participants died for autopsies to be done and data to be analyzed (Nix 2019).

But, Buxton passed on the story to a reporter and news broke about the study in July 1972, and the study was met with outrage and was forced to shut down (Nix 2019). By July 28 men were already dead from syphilis, 100 others were dead from related complications, at least 40 others contracted the disease, and the disease was passed to 19 children at birth (Nix 2019). Participants were black sharecroppers and were given syphilis without their knowledge, this study clearly raised several ethical issues such as racism, unfair subject selection, and no consent. This is not the only study that has discriminated against African Americans and has treated them with maleficence. Due to the Tuskegee experiment and others, many African Americans developed a mistrust for public health officials (Nix 2019). The fact that researchers targeted black sharecroppers shows the immense racism that existed in the 1900s.

Thereby, researchers and medical professionals have discriminated against African Americans and these acts of prejudice eventually led to more permanent consequences, such as high premature mortality rates. These high mortality rates are not due to a genetic flaw, but rather as a result of systematic racism in the health care system that was designed to disproportionately discriminate against people of color (Raj 2020). High mortality rates can be linked to several complications from the slavery hypertension hypothesis (Raj 2020). This hypothesis is linked to why African Americans have higher blood pressure as this theory argues that Africans inherited genes, through evolution, that affects their sodium levels (2020). Health disparities between different racial groups come from racism. Racism exists in every field of medicine, for instance glomerular filtration rate (GRF) (2020). GRF is a measurement clinicians use to assess renal functions and takes sex, age, weight, and race into account when estimated through equations (2020). This is problematic because GFR is closer to normal for a black person than their white counterpart, creating a low disease severity, which means blacks are diagnosed with end-stage renal disease much later than a white person and this leads to high mortality rates (2020). Why is race a factor of GFR? Race is used in equations to account for muscle mass, although there is no solid reason for why race may be related to muscle mass (Raj 2020). Furthermore, the problem of systemic racism can be seen with the COVID-19 pandemic.

During April 2020, New York City (NYC) was the epicenter of COVID-19 and just as some states were hit harder than others, so were some neighborhoods- specifically those of low-income (Wilson 2020). Comparing income data by Zip codes, the wealthiest 25% represented lower than 10% of the COVID-19 cases, while the bottom 25% of the average incomes accounted for 36% of all the cases (Wilson 2020). There is a growing amount of evidence, including a CDC examination in 99 countries, that show low-income, black communities are disproportionately being affected by the virus (Wilson 2020). In Michigan, not including Detroit, African Americans account for a third of the cases and 40% of deaths, but make up 14% of the population (2020). A possible reason for why black communities are

disproportionately suffering besides incidents of COVID-19 just being higher is that the availability of testing for marginal cases is lower because they have less access to testing (Wilson 2020). This yet again shows how the availability of resources is unequal for Black Americans and how they are not given access to resources and are therefore disadvantaged, just as the same population of people were disadvantaged in the Tuskegee study. This bias and inequity has become embedded in society. The Tuskegee Syphilis study may have expressed bias intentionally, but now institutions have been “programmed” to let black populations experience the downsides. This system was created to disadvantage black people, which can also be seen in the criminal justice system.

The criminal justice system today is based on the flawed system that was never changed after the Civil Rights Movement and Black Americans were granted their rights. It is a system that is made to benefit white people. For example take for instance the incarceration rates of Black Americans. Of the general population of America Black men comprise about 13% and 35% of those men are incarcerated (“Racial Disparity” 2020). Black women also make up 13% of the female U.S. population and comprise 44% of incarcerated women (“Racial Disparity” 2020). Additionally, looking at the stories of hundreds of young black lives, it appears that their fate is decided from the moment they are born. For example, PBS Frontline in 2001 filmed a documentary of four kids who faced the possibility of being tried as an adult at 17. Marquese was one of the young men in the film, he was 17 and was charged with 8 felonies (“Four Kids, Four Crimes” 2001). All these felonies were non-violent crimes and were ones dealing with property. Marquese was labeled a career criminal because he would rob people's homes and sometimes sell what he would find because he needed the money. These crimes are serious, however looking at his background, Marquese wasn't a completely troubled young man- he was misguided and can be rehabilitated. He was taught how to steal by his mother and his father was not in his life (“Four Kids, Four Crimes” 2001). His mom not only taught him to steal, but was constantly high on drugs, in and out of jail, as well as rehab facilities (“Four Kids, Four Crimes” 2001). He was sent to live with his aunt who owned a crack house and also served jail time (“Four Kids, Four Crimes” 2001). Marquese did not receive a formal education and did what his mother taught him how to do- steal (2001). He was charged with felonies, but how can he take full account of these crimes and be charged as an adult when the systems put into place failed him? Marquese ended up being sent to California Youth Authority (CYA) to serve out his sentence (2001). In the film there was also another young man, but he was white and grew up in an affluent community and attempted to murder his father (2001). It is clear he is a sociopath and there is no logical reason why he would attempt to kill his father, but the court allowed him to serve a very short sentence at county jail and while there he was able to attend college classes with a leg monitor, in which his parents paid for the classes (2001). This can all be connected

back to Black Codes and Jim Crow laws. This system clearly benefits white people. White landowners used to pay judges to give blacks high sentences, but today there is no need to pay them, the system inherently discriminates against blacks without intervention. Also, policies and laws that are passed only work to contribute to the problems. Take for instance, the violent crime control and law enforcement act of 1994, this implemented provisions that put more black people behind bars for longer periods of time (“Racial Disparity” 2020). It established three-strike laws, which means for an individual that already has 2 convictions for certain felonies, their third strike leads to automatic life sentences (“Racial Disparity” 2020). States that adopted this law saw an expansion in incarceration rates (“Racial Disparity” 2020). In 2019, 28 states still had this law (2020). Even in states who don't have this law, prosecutors and judges are able to recommend sentences based on the defendant's criminal history (2020). The result is that communities that are subject to harsher policing and prosecution receive more severe sentences (2020). Black communities suffer from the highest incarceration rates and worst sentences, which shows the inequality in the criminal justice system, but the problem runs deeper. There is something people in these communities are often missing- education.

The absence of education in the United States often leads not only to unemployment, but to the prosecution of drop-outs or those who were not given the opportunity to attend a high school. The education system is not only linked to the justice system, but is inherently biased and fails students the moment they walk in. Systemic racism in education is a root cause to a lot of the inequities people of color face. Furthermore, in the United States, students are taught about W.E.B Du Bois, Martin Luther King, Barack Obama, maybe Booker T. Washington, and they are often taught history through the white man's perspective. The accomplishments of black communities or simple exchanges often go unrecognized or ignored, however the gift of the Statue of Liberty from France is taught. The books that are read in school typically are written by white male authors with a few exceptions. There is a large misrepresentation and underrepresentation of Black history and culture, while white people are often given the credit, which displays the implicit bias of school curriculums.

The inequality present in the education system can be traced back to slavery, segregation of schools, the Supreme Court case Brown vs Board of Education, and the Little Rock Nine. Back when owning slaves was a social norm blacks were not given the right to education and were illiterate. After slavery was over and segregation was instilled in society blacks were still not given complete access to education. Schools were separated and were given less resources, poor facilities, and an unequal amount of funds. After the Supreme court case Brown v.s. The Board of Education in 1954 it was declared that was unconstitutional to establish racial segregation in the public school system. Since that decision there has been progress made in the



school system allowing more equality, but the problem of inequality was not erased. There are still several flaws in school districts such as inequitable funding and policing of students.

The funding system of the United States is severely unequal, disproportionately affecting low-income black communities. White, affluent school districts receive on average \$23 billion more than nonwhite school districts (Chatterji 2020). The lack of money impacts the quality of education students receive and hinders their future success (Partelow, Shapiro, McDaniels, & Brown 2018). The quality of a student's kindergarten to high school education affects their chances of dropping out, the university they attend, getting a job, and the amount of money they make (Partelow, Shapiro, McDaniels, & Brown 2018). Money in education matters, the more school districts spend the better students perform and the higher the graduation rates (Partelow, Shapiro, McDaniels, & Brown 2018). If a student does not have their high school diploma or GED, then it is hard to find a well-paying job to sustain themselves, as only 36% of jobs include people with a high diploma or less (Partelow, Shapiro, McDaniels, & Brown 2018). Also, those who have a college degree earn one million more, over a lifetime, than those who just have a high school degree (2018). Moreover, more funding and resources can reduce future crime rates and thereby allow less money to be needed towards the criminal justice system. Deviant behavior and how a person decides to behave beyond their family and peer groups, starts with school. Through increased funding, students can be provided with a means of success and different opportunities, as well as their needs met to accommodate their circumstances (Chatterji 2020). Additionally, examining the relationship between education and crime more closely a large factor is poverty. Those who often commit crimes are those living in poverty. If money spent per pupil annually increased 10% for public schooling, then it is predicted the annual incidence of adult poverty will drop 3.2% (Partelow, Shapiro, McDaniels, & Brown 2018). If more money in education leads to less poverty, then that may lead to a decrease in crime. The lack of funding for black communities is a pre-existing issue, as schools that accommodated people of color have been poorly funded since blacks started attending school in the late 1800s and were segregated. The inequality of the previous centuries continues to take root in several issues with social institutions today.

Another way schools have inherently affected black communities is through excessive policing and surveillance. After the 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Florida, twenty six states upgraded security and police officers that are on school campuses using about \$960 million to upgrade (Chatterji 2020). Although gun violence is a very important issue, there is no evidence to suggest that the threat of gun violence will effectively be addressed through increasing surveillance or policing (2020). The presence of police can also make students, more specifically Black students, feel less safe as they more likely will not be protected, but rather policed (2020). Data shows that 1.7 millions students attend schools with no counselors, 3 million with no

nurses, 6 million with no psychologists, and 10 million with no social workers, but these students go to school with police officers (2020). Predominantly black schools have a higher concentration of law enforcement officers than mental health staff (2020). This shows that not only are schools in black communities underfunded, but their funding is placed towards the ideology that black students need to be policed and monitored. According to the U.S. The Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, not only are these students more policed and are subject to more contraband sweeps, arrests, integrations, but face higher rates of school disciplinary consequences like suspension and expulsion (Chatterji 2020). This data only reinforces that the progress that has been made since the Supreme Court case Brown vs Board of Education is insufficient and the present education system reflects the inequity of resources that have been provided to black communities since the late 1800s.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, events and issues that have recently transcribed or are currently affecting Black Americans is a result of the long history of racism. The mistreatment and inequality of Black Americans in the 1600s are still present today, but disguised as systemic racism instead of outright slavery. Inequities exist in healthcare, the criminal justice system, and in education, as described in this paper and is clearly connected to the history of discrimination. The repercussions of mistreatment of Black Americans in the Tuskegee study, the loophole found in the 13th amendment that allowed white landowners to create sharecropping and convict lease, the segregation of Blacks in the schooling system all contribute to the accumulation of injustice that sets the foundation of several institutions in the United States. Consider this question: if a white male was asked how his life would be like if he switched lives with his black counterpart, would his answer be positive or negative? The answer to that question is not only based on the facts of systemic racism, but the way individuals were raised. Personal perceptions are influenced by the opinions of those around that person and how they are socialized. Every individual was socialized differently, but everyone was taught about racism, except through different lenses. The 21st century is in need of a new lens.

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## **Diversifying the American School System: The Evidence Paints a Clear Picture**

*By Ray Nobuhara, Helena Baruch, Angelica Katcher, Rahib Taher, & Michelle Seucan*

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The Eurocentric curriculum of the American school system has been a staple element in the education of its youth. For centuries, schools have incessantly utilized the teachings and themes of white savior narratives while consequently gaslighting the historical portrayals of people of color. Fairly recently, in 2018, The College Board announced a drastic makeover in their placement exam: they would narrow the scope of the AP World History Test to prioritize European expansion and imperialism. While the board had not explicitly made this their incentive, they argued that the curriculum was simply “too broad” and encompassed too many topics.<sup>12</sup> Educational institutions have frequently propelled these similar past iterations; they have praised the historical feats of white figures and pacified the depiction of the few-taught Black historical figures in order to accommodate the white agenda and curriculum. The history books meant to educate the American youth are those that have played a direct role in redirecting educational focus to taper the academic gaze to solely see the white male authority figure. Lack of diversity has been a huge factor in hindering the developmental growth of students - and especially students of color - when encountering situations having to do with prejudice, knowledge, confidence, and confrontation in diverse environments. It has been proven that with an ample exposure to inclusive curricula, students have excelled in classes and overall performance, as well as feeling more empowered.<sup>13</sup>

When evaluating the historical significance of the few Black individuals introduced to American students, what is taught pales in comparison to the actual sum of these individuals’ actions and importance. The narrowed array of Black portrayals present in the education system have been heavily manipulated, pacified, and deformed in the eyes of historical accuracy. Leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King Junior, who had been a public enemy to the government, has been consistently - and not to mention, incorrectly - taught as a leader of peace and non-violence. In alignment to the aforementioned agenda, schools have frequently presented the harsh and gaslit dichotomy of Dr. Martin Luther King Junior and Civil Rights Leader, Malcolm X; peace versus violence; right versus wrong. This is only a fraction of the detrimental effects of a school system that is deficient in diversity and complicit in the oversimplification of Black

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<sup>12</sup> Washington, Samanthal. “Diversity in Schools Must Include Curriculum.” *The Century Foundation*, 17 Sept. 2018, [tcf.org/content/commentary/diversity-schools-must-include-curriculum/?session=1](https://www.tcf.org/content/commentary/diversity-schools-must-include-curriculum/?session=1).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid



history. The educational infractions have garnered much public attention, yet little has been done to effectively address the issue at hand. With exposure to a diversified and accurate curriculum, schools could effectively improve the wellbeing of students and expand academic knowledge to a much greater extent. If effective measures were taken to create a more diverse and accurate curriculum, it could also play a large part in the empowerment of students of color, greater academic success, and the enhancement of diverse social interactions. There is overwhelming evidence that paints a clear picture of the importance of a diverse curriculum. Tackling these issues are urgent, and the implementation of a reform in diversity and inclusivity is easy, undemanding, and effective.

A lack of cultural diversification in the American schooling system creates a national student body which lacks exposure to the fundamental importance and awareness of global issues, past or present. This specifically can be seen through the reading selection which is offered to American students. In the past 24 years, multicultural content, according to book publisher Lee & Low, represents only 13% of children's literature, and only 7% of said multicultural content have been written by authors of color.<sup>14</sup> This absence of prominent figures of color from a young age can lead to an innate bias or supremacy towards non-people of color, a stunt in mental growth and development, a suppression of skills in certain subject areas, and a difficulty in communication with other students who are culturally different from them. This can also lead to minority students resenting their own culture. Additionally, through this mass racial and ethnic segregation of literature, there are a plethora of negative psychological effects which directly impact students of color.

Oftentimes, the only cultural content students of color can resonate with are stories of suffering. Why should Black students only be introduced to black history and literature when in the context of the Civil War, abolishing slavery, and fighting for equality? The education system needs to inform young minds of the positive and beneficial strides people of color have contributed to society. The white savior complex concept is reiterated in nearly every year of schooling, creating two groups of students and eventual global citizens: the saviors and those who need to be saved. This narrative perpetuates the notion that Westernized cultures and people are inherently more innovative, powerful, and intelligent. These include a significant lack of confidence, drive, and motivation which predominantly affect students of color. By failing to acknowledge historical variance in racial, ethnic, and linguistic differences in the classroom, students suffer psychologically and mentally outside of the classroom. This travesty in the education system is specifically amplified through a narrow reading curriculum and educating elementary students with a lack of colored representation in visual aids, dolls, and toys. This

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<sup>14</sup> Jalissa. "The Diversity Gap in Children's Book Publishing, 2018." Lee & Low Blog, 11 May 2018, [blog.leeandlow.com/2018/05/10/the-diversity-gap-in-childrens-book-publishing-2018/](http://blog.leeandlow.com/2018/05/10/the-diversity-gap-in-childrens-book-publishing-2018/).

allows for a white child to grow under the influence that they are supreme, while children of color develop a complex of being “less than.” While this notion is obviously fallacious, an introduction to this societal hierarchy at such a young age negatively affects both groups of students.

Children are our future. They are the ones that will dictate the state of our society for generations to come, and so, in order for them to foster an inclusive environment, both socioeconomically and politically, it is imperative that we properly educate them about the reality of human history. History is not as heteronormative and white as the textbooks paint it out to be; it is vast and diverse and multilayered. Why should only white leaders be highlighted when learning about the world? “This is understanding the audience that you’re teaching to and making sure everybody thrives in the environment,” says the chancellor of UCLA, Gene Block.<sup>15</sup> “There are large classes and students with very diverse experiences.” With Block’s words in mind, more and more schools should model their lesson plans to champion diversity in the classroom. Interdisciplinary lessons must incorporate a more inclusive outlook on our world’s timeline, such as mentioning POC leaders, POC authors, the impact the LGBTQ+ community had on our history, covering the female presence in milestone moments, and just stop over-representing the white male persona since it is not healthy for children to grow up thinking that you must be white and male to be relevant, as was the case with North Carolina State University educator, Thomas Easley. Easley’s college years as a young black student in the late ‘90s were not welcoming or academically pleasant for him at all. As stated in an article written for *The Atlantic*, he describes those years as lonely, saying he “didn’t feel like he belonged or saw himself reflected in his classes.” He then elaborates by saying, “Our black students are sitting in class wondering how they’re being perceived by their professors. Those thoughts impact how students perform.” Therefore, it is important for curriculums to be honest in their teachings and abolish the white-washed nature of American education systems. Not only must there be a diverse curriculum, but a diverse hiring and retention of teachers, faculty, families, and students.

As we transcend into an increasingly evolving global civilization, the ability to analyze international concepts and ideas through a culturally-diverse academic lens is integral to the intellectual development and mental health of our youth. According to a study conducted by Celestial Zaldana of Claremont McKenna University, the establishment of a multicultural education has proven to greatly benefit students of color in terms of emanating social and

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<sup>15</sup> DeRuy, Emily. “Can Cross-Cultural Understanding Be Taught?” *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 9 Aug. 2016, [www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/07/the-complicated-process-of-adding-diversity-to-the-college-syllabus/493643/](http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/07/the-complicated-process-of-adding-diversity-to-the-college-syllabus/493643/).

emotional positivity.<sup>16</sup> This research has demonstrated that “reading texts written by members of the ethnic groups that are underrepresented in school curricula improves the self esteem of students of that ethnic group, and causes all students to have a greater appreciation for cultural difference.” Additionally, in a report put forth by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, students who receive a comprehensive social studies education end up becoming statistically more engaged citizens.<sup>17</sup> Studies have shown that they are four times more likely to volunteer for community issues, more likely to vote, and are generally more confident in voicing their political opinion and communicating with government representatives. After all, this is no surprise, especially after coming across the notable observations of professor Amy Nathan Wright, who teaches core diversity-focused courses at St. Edward’s University (as a part of the school’s growing cross-cultural curriculum).<sup>18</sup> She notices that the students “leave with a very different sense of history and it prepares them for looking at contemporary issues,” which is proof that diversity in a lesson plan can produce massive benefits.

Thus, based on the information presented above, wholly eliminating biased educational methodologies and integrating diversity initiatives in school curricula would be logically effective. However, some school boards still have trouble understanding how to materialize this proposal. According to Easley, most school administrators often neglect or aren’t well-versed in how to implement a cross-cultural lesson plan into the curriculum, even those who are “generally supportive of incorporating conversations about diversity into their teachings.” But sometimes, it is also a matter of socioeconomic power imbalances within the schools themselves. For example, in his numerous visits to various universities, Easley has noted that many diversity offices usually don’t hold hiring power or fall short of having their own hiring budget, and are often restricted in these areas by more powerful administrators. Not to mention, other schools see diversity course requirements as an additional stress to the student body’s workload, claiming that they want to limit debt for students and help them graduate on time. But this fear of theirs (that extra mandatory diversity courses will possibly hold students back) cannot be further from the truth! Stanford University researchers looked at data from a pilot program in San Francisco where students considered at high risk for dropping out were enrolled in one of the state’s ethnic studies programs. The results were striking: attendance rose by 21 percentage points, while grade-point averages rose by 1.4 points. Students enrolled in ethnic-studies courses earned 23

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<sup>16</sup> Washington, Samanthal. “Diversity in Schools Must Include Curriculum.” *The Century Foundation*, 17 Sept. 2018, [tcf.org/content/commentary/diversity-schools-must-include-curriculum/?session=1](http://tcf.org/content/commentary/diversity-schools-must-include-curriculum/?session=1).

<sup>17</sup> Wong, Alia. “Why So Many U.S. Students Are Learning Lies About America's Racial Past.” *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 5 Oct. 2016, [www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/10/the-history-class-dilemma/411601/](http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/10/the-history-class-dilemma/411601/).

<sup>18</sup> DeRuy, Emily. “Can Cross-Cultural Understanding Be Taught?” *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 9 Aug. 2016, [www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/07/the-complicated-process-of-adding-diversity-to-the-college-syllabus/493643/](http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/07/the-complicated-process-of-adding-diversity-to-the-college-syllabus/493643/).

more credits toward graduation, on average, than those who did not.<sup>19</sup> The largest improvements in test scores were found among Hispanic students in math and science. As you can see, introducing diversity-gearred lesson plans are not only emotionally effective, but effective in terms of academic completion and long-term success.

While many advocates have stressed the need for a diversified structured curriculum, some argue that there is already diversity in classrooms. Many schools have already scheduled arbitrary days to discuss diversity and inclusivity. Some say that diversity is already inherent in our society, meaning that it would simply be a superfluous topic to teach in school. The overarching vindication of educational pundits who choose to neglect diversified curriculum is merely that this type of curriculum would place too much of a burden and workload on students' shoulders. However, these educational adversaries are misguided. Take for example the AP History Exam 2018 ordeal wherein the constituency of the College Board announced their abated history subjects in which there were many fundamental drawbacks. Foremost, students' education would be dominated by solely white male figures. AP World History teacher, William Conway, criticized this drastic reform, saying that "If we start the story at 1450, we lose so much of the richness of that story. [People of color] are still there in these periods. But the role they play is secondary. It's colonized. ... It's the story of what Europeans do to them."<sup>20</sup> Neglecting this issue would exacerbate and damage the learning experience and accomplishments of students all over America.

The fact of the matter is that schools provide extremely inadequate exposure to diversity and inclusivity. It is worthwhile to consider some of these questions in order to grasp the problem at hand in its entirety: How many Black teachers has a student had? How many Black authors' books has a student read? How many Black historical figures has a student learned about compared to the expanse of white representatives? And were these figures even taught accurately? Curriculum based solely on the prominence of the achievements of white historical figures, and the absences of teachers trained in navigating the worlds of Black figures that are currently lacking from the curriculum, can lead to the alienation of students of color. The plethora of white-centered curricula not only contributes to the common detachment of students of color, but it similarly engenders academic and social challenges. When considering the addition of a diverse curriculum, schools should not be considering the over encumbrance that broadened studies may have on the students. Rather, schools should be focusing on the impact that said curricula would have on every student present in the classroom.

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<sup>19</sup> Anderson, Melinda D. "The Academic Benefits of Ethnic Studies." *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 8 Mar. 2016, [www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/03/the-ongoing-battle-over-ethnic-studies/472422/](http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/03/the-ongoing-battle-over-ethnic-studies/472422/).

<sup>20</sup> Washington, Samanthal. "Diversity in Schools Must Include Curriculum." *The Century Foundation*, 17 Sept. 2018, [tcf.org/content/commentary/diversity-schools-must-include-curriculum/?session=1](http://tcf.org/content/commentary/diversity-schools-must-include-curriculum/?session=1).

The American school system has been bound to a European-centered curriculum for centuries. Schools have consistently promoted a curriculum that fosters unhealthy mindsets and perpetuates white savior complexes from a young age. It is imperative that schools, families, teachers, and students take acute action to eliminate these inevitably damaging transgressions. It is no longer an option to sit idle. We have seen the visible consequences that spawn from a monochromatic curriculum. We have witnessed a stark hierarchical imbalance in the workforce, where people of color are rarely represented in dominant positions. We have acknowledged the fact that 91% of people living under the poverty line in the United States are people of color.<sup>21</sup> Yet, we refuse to address the root of this issue; the root that is kindled in the American school system; the root that discourages students of color and disrupts their academic growth disproportionately. Ultimately, the lack of skill conveyed by American students does not derive from any other issue as prominently as it does from racial and social inequality in the curriculum.

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<sup>21</sup> "Poverty Rate by Race/Ethnicity." *KFF*, 4 Dec. 2019, [www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/poverty-rate-by-raceethnicity/?currentTimeframe=0](http://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/poverty-rate-by-raceethnicity/?currentTimeframe=0).



# A Cause and Effect analysis: Looking at the effects of lack of funding for schools on US students

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## **Abstract**

The underfunding of schools in the United States (US) is a federal issue that affects schools and its students vastly. It is a given that the importance of schools and the resources and education it provides, through its funds, is a fundamental part of a student's internal and external development. We investigate the problem of the lack of funding for US schools and how it internally affects a student and their mental health. We also analyze how this issue may affect students' futures in terms of their employment, earnings, and delinquent behavior in external society. From that, we were able to explain why various departments of education should improve funding to better the country's students' futures.

## **Introduction**

School is a mandatory activity for all American citizens between the ages of five and sixteen (depending on state laws). It is an important facet of a child's developing years and helps young children form the habit of learning new material promptly. In the modern world, students may view school as a monotonous mandate, and as the centuries passed and education changed students, teachers, and parents alike noticed the faults in the American education system and its funding. Since the 1970s, dozens of lawsuits based on school funding have been filed. In these lawsuits, students and parents have drawn insight into the large gap of funding at high-income schools versus low-income schools, as well as how the education system receives low funding in general. The differences in average state per-pupil spending range from around \$5,700 to \$17,000 (Center for American Progress, 2020). The severe lack of money in schools in

lower-income neighborhoods impacts a teacher's teaching quality, schools' curriculum, and additional extracurricular activities (Center for American Progress, 2020). Funding is a crucial aspect in providing a quality education, and without it, the system cannot continue to improve itself. This deeply rooted issue not only hinders the successful from improving, but also majorly affects low-income communities (Center for American Progress, 2020).

Although funding in the nation's department of education can help benefit the economy, the country's worldwide education rankings, and knowledge as a whole, the core focus of funding should be on the students. The school system was built for the students and they will be the ones experiencing schooling. Students spend at least seven hours a day at school and those in afterschool activities spend even more time in the building.

Elementary and middle schools are important places for kids to learn the building blocks of the English language, mathematics, and science. Their teachers are the most important adult figures in students' lives because they are the authoritative figures that help shape their thinking. Without qualified educators and proper teaching supplies, students will not be able to learn effectively, create respectful relationships with other students and adults, or be motivated to attend school in the first place. If schools were funded more across the US, the effects that those extra dollars might have on a student's future are staggering. The question is, to what extent do these seemingly innocent funding dollars affect an American students' mental health, job success, income, and criminal record once they are out of school? Money can have several effects on a student from a young age, such as their future success, future mental health, future criminal behavior, and many others. These effects on a student may be subtle, but it does impact them on a long-term basis. It is clear that the lack of funding of schools in the United States impacts students' futures, negatively affecting their mental health, job success, income, and criminal record.

### **Manuscript Body**

One of the strongest effects of increased funding for schools is how it might impact students and their mental well-being and cognitive ability during their time in school. Children with mental health and learning disorders often face failure at school and discipline. However, this is due to the fact students are not accommodated for. With funding, schools cover the basic costs, but the money should also be used to accommodate students by hiring and paying support staff. When classrooms don't have regular access to a psychologist or psychiatrist, expulsions in pre-kindergarten are twice as common (Child Mind Institute, 2020). Additionally, students not receiving proper care to their needs and at high risk for mental health problems in 1st grade leads to a 5% drop in academic performance in two years (Child Mind Institute, 2020). Moreover, mental

health and learning disorders are related to higher dropout rates. The dropout rate for all students is 7% (2020). The dropout rate for students served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is 21.1%, and those who serve under IDEA with emotional disturbance have a dropout rate of 38.7% (2020).

Even though we identified major discrepancies in accommodation for all students, it is not easy to address mental health when several schools don't have the proper budget.

There are only a few mental health programs advised for educational institutions.

However districts all over the country have cut, or never had in the first place, the approved school psychologists and learning programs (Walker, 2018). School districts have undermined schools' ability to address mental health. According to ACMH, 1 in 5 children have a diagnosable condition, and for 1 in 10 children, their mental health disorder is severe enough that it affects how they function. Furthermore, only 40% of students with mental health disorders graduate and 50% of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities drop out of high school, while nationally, 76% of students graduate. It is highly important that mental health is addressed. Without these advances, youth's performance in school can be extremely egregious.

Mental health disorders affect classrooms and how students interact with one another. If funding is provided and the appropriate services are established in schools, it will maximize success and reduce the negative impacts. Mental health affects each student differently and may not appear the same way for all students. Thus, teachers should receive training in how to help students and require special instruction, as well as provide the teacher with the tools to help students manage their anxiety and other mental health issues. Depression is linked to low grade point averages and can result in students dropping out of school (Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 2020). Pressure in school can be overwhelming and without acknowledging mental health, there can be long term consequences affecting overall health, future employment, and income.

Not only does increasing funding for schools benefit current students in the system, but it also affects students' futures as a working adult, specifically their jobs and earnings. In the US, schools have been primarily funded with revenues from local sources such as taxes. In an attempt to equalize expenditure and guarantee equal opportunities to all children, over the past four decades, certain US states have reformed their school finance schemes through changes in their funding formulas (Nber.org, 2020). These school finance equalization reforms are among many causes that lead to increased funding in schools and spending on students in the form of expenditures. The increase in expenditures affects a student's learning experience and income when they leave their well-funded school. This notion holds true, as a 10% increase in per-pupil spending each

year for all 12 years of public school leads to 0.31 more completed years of education and about 7% higher wages (Nber.org, 2020). A student's quality of schooling definitely affects a student's chances of getting into a highly qualified university, affecting their chances of graduating, getting a high paying job, and job satisfaction. This notion is evident when one sees that only 36 percent of all jobs will require a high school diploma or less. During the recent economic recovery, 95 percent of the jobs created went to workers with postsecondary education or training (Center for American Progress, 2020). Those who graduate from college earn about \$1 million more, on average and over a lifetime, than those who only graduate from high school. When school districts spend money wisely, they have better outcomes, including higher test scores, increased graduation rates, and other improved indicators of student achievement (Center for American Progress, 2020). In fact, the study found that spending increases improved high school graduation rates among low-income students and increased their adulthood earnings by 10 percent (Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project, 2020). The relationship between funding and post-graduate success is evident: the greater the funds the better the chances that students have to gain more knowledge, earn their bachelor's and graduate's degrees, and earn more money in their jobs.

Another part of a student's future aside from their economic productivity is their societal productivity, their future behaviors in society, and if they are a delinquent threat to the people around them. Through increased funding, the US fuels more resources and funding into educational programs. This can encourage people to focus more on educating themselves and becoming productive and contributing members of society rather than delinquents (Yousefi, S., 2020). Many fail to realize that putting more funding and resources into early childhood education programs, and education programs can both reduce future crime rates and save money, contributing to society as a whole (Yousefi, S., 2020). Poverty is a leading factor in causing people to commit crimes (Yousefi, S., 2020). A 10% increase in per pupil spending each year for all 12 years of public school leads to a 3.2 percentage-point reduction in the annual incidence of adult poverty (Nber.org, 2020), hence, since more funding for education decreases poverty, a leading cause of crime, it does lead to a decrease in crime. Let's take the example of Finland; in Finland there is no lack of funding in schools, and the murder rate in Finland is also surprisingly just 0.0014%. Now let's compare it with the US. The schools in the US have a lot of funding issues, and the murder rate in the US is also 0.005%. These statistics clearly say that lack of funding can indirectly encourage the growth of criminal activity (THORNBERRY, T., MOORE, M. and CHRISTENSON, R., 1985).

### **Conclusion**

It is clear that improving the funding of US schools is necessary to improve the mental health of students when they are in school, and to help students become successful, productive, and well-behaved when out of school. The root cause of the issues arising from the underfunding of US schools is budgeting expenditures at the local level. The government should improve funding by equalizing these expenditures to guarantee equal opportunities and effects for students across many localities. Thus, equalizing expenditures can result in better student well-beings and a better economic and social future once they leave school. Further research can be done when funding and education budgets are increased in the US to see if these effects and virtues hold true over time.

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# The socioeconomic causes and effects of the gentrified thrifting experience

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## ABSTRACT

Thrifting is going shopping at a thrift store, garage sale, or flea market where one will find gently used items at discounted prices ("What Does It Mean To Go Thrifting?"). It is widely regarded as an environmentally sustainable way to buy clothing, as clothes in thrift stores are resale items. Historically stigmatized as being for the poor, thrifting has recently changed in meaning and became a gentrified consumer practice done by many affluent consumers. There are many causes to this shift in the thrifting consumer base and demand, and it poses as a problem for the future of thrifting. This study analyzes how recent economic recessions, younger consumer bases, climate change, upscale shopping, and social media have lured affluent customers to thrift. This has affected the low-income communities thrift stores were historically meant to serve, who need clothing at affordable prices for having a basic living standard and not a cute social media post. The overall thrifting experience, thrift stores, and the neighborhoods around thrift stores have all changed and became gentrified as fashion shifts to fit the demands of an affluent younger class. This study uncovers how the socioeconomic values of thrifting have changed, why they changed, and how it affects the social and economical fabric of thrift store shoppers.

## INTRODUCTION

Kim Velsey once wrote of thrifting in the Observer Online as, "Frugality [in thrifting] no longer connotes paying \$10 for a winter coat, but finding a gently-used designer one for \$150" (Velsey). Simply, thrifting is going shopping at a thrift store, garage sale, or flea market where one will find gently used items at discounted prices ("What Does It Mean To Go Thrifting?"). Historically, thrift stores rose during the 19th century industrial revolution, as manufacturing and consumption became cheaper, creating highly populated urban centers that produced large amounts of waste in a limited space. Therefore, central waste management systems were implemented by governments to deal with increasingly consumerist lifestyles and to improve

sanitation and health. As waste disposal systems developed in the United States in the late 1800s, second-hand clothing stores and pawnshops began to appear in response to textile wastes. Despite hygiene concerns and racial stigmas which discouraged buying second-hand, these resale stores were well established by the 1920s and continued to grow with immigrant populations, whose main business involved peddling, after tailoring. This was in part thanks to the efforts of charity stores run by Christian organisations such as the Salvation Army, which helped further destigmatize the practice of buying second-hand. Since then, “thrift stores,” as they have come to be known, have had a stable role in American society (Poor?).

However, the stigma around thrifting and buying second-hand clothing was still present in the early 2000s within the United States. When children were surveyed for a 2008 study in the *Journal of Educational Studies*, 39 percent of the responses of why people were bullied related to not looking like everyone else, including wearing clothing that wasn’t in fashion and wearing clothing that was old due to being bought second hand (“Thrifting Is Trendy, But It Hasn’t Always Been”). Although, around the same time the survey was taken, experts started to see growth in the resale industry due in part to a change in attitudes towards buying used during the Great Recession that started in 2008. During this time period, many people were forced to adopt measures of frugality, which may have helped frame thrift shopping as sensible rather than desperate, lessening any stigma attached to it (“Thrifting: It’s More Than Just Clothes - Planet Aid, Inc.”).

Another trend among thrifting was that instead of being looked down upon, used-goods stores in particular were starting to get almost fetishized. Many connote this change with the release of American rapper Macklemore’s 2012 song “Thrift Shop,” which romanticizes the act of wearing hand-me-downs and paying less money for alternative and hip looks. Recently, more and more upper-middle class and wealthy shoppers are turning to thrift shops in order to brag about the deals they got, or to vie for the moral superiority that comes with paying less for used instead of new clothes (Bither). In addition, consumers are more aware now than ever of the ethical and environmental impacts associated with their purchased goods and services. According to *thredUP*, 77 percent of millennials [people born from 1980-1994 (“Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, And Gen Z Explained”)] prefer to buy from environmentally-conscious brands. Since eco-fashion is often out of millennial’s budgets, the next best thing is to use those handy thrifting skills. Thrift shopping complements larger social trends, as well. For those who want to lead eco-friendly lifestyles, buying secondhand is the most straightforward means of applying the virtues of reuse and recycling to fashion (“Thrifting: It’s More Than Just Clothes - Planet Aid, Inc.”).

Although thrift stores have many benefits, as these websites claim, there seems to be a lack of online literature about the potential harms caused by thrift shopping. These blogs

encourage and elicit moral superiority through purchasing power without regarding the negative impact that thrifting has on the nearby communities. For example, Goodwill Industries and The Salvation Army both employ community members and help surrounding communities by using funds to support individuals and communities economically, allowing the two thrift chains to both employ and serve surrounding communities. However, their rise in popularity as well as the radical shift in their image has prompted them to cater to a more elite range of clients. In order to appeal to younger buyers, thrift stores around the country have started to upgrade their outposts into fancy boutique stores with high-end merchandise and more expensive brand clothing (Bither).

In a way, thrift stores are being gentrified, or being made more refined, polite, or respectable in order to cater to a wealthier consumer base. Gentrification involves the displacement of working class populations, a phenomena most obviously manifest in the transformation of residential landscapes. But this is also palpable in the changes visible on many shopping streets, with locally-oriented stores serving poorer populations and ethnic minorities being replaced by “hipster” stores such as these vintage and refined second-hand clothing stores (Hubbard). Unfortunately though, the gentrification of thrifting and its stores is starting to shed light on the socioeconomic issues surrounding thrifting. It is starting to show an issue of how second-hand shopping and being sustainable in fashion is a privilege for the affluent class given how it is getting harder for an average working class citizen to thrift. Considering thrift stores were historically meant to serve the less fortunate or working class, the gentrification of thrift stores and newer expensive pricing is also causing an economic burden on the intended customers for a typical thrift store. There is no denying that thrifting has recently acquired a refined reputation, becoming a gentrified practice and harming the socioeconomic fabric of thrift stores and the neighborhoods around them.

#### **MANUSCRIPT BODY**

The key methods stimulating the rise of thrifting amongst the younger generation is linked with the social idea that leading a sustainable lifestyle is a privilege. One can understand the privilege linked to thrifting by seeing how the affluent flaunt their thrifting purchases in social media. One example is looking at the social media platform, YouTube, where many people on YouTube are spending hours scouring thrift store racks for the best finds, touting the environmental benefits of shopping secondhand ("Is Thrifting Becoming A Form Of White Environmentalism?"). Sustainable life and style blogger Megan McSherry writes, “Don’t get me wrong — it’s exciting to see people having a larger conversation about the waste created by (and promoted by) the fashion industry. By now we’ve all heard that shopping secondhand extends clothes’ useful life, reduces textile waste, and is a simple, cost-effective way to shop more consciously and sustainably. But among the hordes of Adidas tees and Levi’s jeans being

emptied from thrift stores, I feel like there's something missing from the conversation. Is thrift shopping in the name of the environment becoming a form of white environmentalism?" ("Is Thrifting Becoming A Form Of White Environmentalism?").

"White environmentalism" is a form of environmentalism that has been attributed to a sign of privilege, and as McSherry explained, thrifting is becoming a form of that. White environmentalism does not recognize that populations of color and low-income populations are drastically more impacted by pollution and climate change is not really environmentalism at all. The goal of the environmental movement is about conserving and preserving the environment so that future generations are able to thrive, but focusing on activities that only benefit white and wealthy populations is not working toward a better future for everyone ("Is Thrifting Becoming A Form Of White Environmentalism?").

McSherry continues on the notion that thrifting is a privilege, writing, "I have a problem with people promoting thrifting in the name of the environment without recognizing that it's a much more complex issue. We need to recognize that whether one choose[s] to thrift to save money or to save the environment, it's a privilege to be able to *choose* to shop at a thrift store. We also need to recognize that thrift shopping isn't a be all and end all solution to climate change. Exploiting thrift stores [which are meant for low-income communities (who are disproportionately impacted by climate change and pollution)] in the name of the environment is missing the point of the environmental justice factor in the environmental movement" ("Is Thrifting Becoming A Form Of White Environmentalism?").

Moreover, social media is pushing influencers and other privileged people to thrift out of keeping up socially. For many, thrifting presents an opportunity for self-expression and keeping up with the latest fashion trends as purported by savvy Instagram influencers. Today's modern consumer can mix and match new fashion with high-end and second-hand to create their own individual style (Solanki and Anjee). It is especially incriminating knowing there are less fortunate people for whom it is necessary to buy from a historically stigmatized thrift store, while there are others exploiting a thrift store for social media.

Genevieve Finn of "Tough to Tame" writes, "That said, there still is something troubling about affluent young people fetishizing a low-income lifestyle for the sake of fashion. When we make trends out of styles we once mocked, does it do more harm than good for the people who originally utilized thrift shops out of need rather than for mere style?" ("Should We Be More Wary Of Our Thrifting Habits? — Tough To Tame").

Hence, the general thrift store is changing and becoming more gentrified due to the demand for modern thrifting experiences. Thrift-shop chains are now trying to capitalize on their shabby-chic reputation by embracing a more upscale look. They're investing in creating intimate, high-end shopping experiences where hand-picked merchandise lures younger shoppers who no

longer have time to weed through the bins (Velsey). Thrift chain Goodwill is a prime example of the recent gentrification, as the chain hopes to replicate that convenience for in-person shoppers by making the assortment at its 13 city locations more selective ("Boom Times Are Bad Times For Thrift Stores"). Another example is at select stores throughout the New York City (NYC), New York (NY) metropolitan region in the United States (US), where specially trained internal stylists and featured fashion influencers stock the shops with the season's most on-trend, cool and fashion-forward secondhand pieces. Stores that feature Curated Shops within classic Goodwill stores, including Downtown Brooklyn and Chelsea in NY, and Paramus, NJ, have seen an increase in foot traffic. The notion of social media driving the gentrifying thrifting experience is confirmed given the fact that these curated shoppers from the NYC metropolitan area proudly boast that they are "consciously clothed" and "aware of the wear," two curated taglines that are circulating on Instagram (Solanki and Anjee).

The influx of demand by more economically-advantaged people has resulted in many thrift stores raising their prices, exacerbating income inequality and effectively marginalizing the population that depend on thrifting clothing the most. To add to that, many thrift chain stores are upgrading to a more upscale look and selling expensive clothes in many neighborhoods. In the more expensive neighborhoods where Goodwill and the Salvation Army remain, they have moved toward higher-end "boutiques" in the Housing Works model, where the comparatively prosperous can be found hunting for designer cast-offs that easily exceed \$100 (Velsey).

Several discussion boards across the internet also share price increases in their local thrift stores and speculate the cause. In one instance, Reddit user u/Megan\_nicole\_93 found a pair of jeans at her local thrift store that were originally from Kohl's, with the tags still on, on clearance for \$12. Her local thrift store priced them at \$15. "What is this thrift store smoking?... At least scratch the clearance tag off!" she said in a Reddit post. Many believe the high volume of new "thrifiers" drives prices up in chain thrift stores such as Goodwill. In a 2010 donation valuation guide, Goodwill Industries estimated flat prices based on the item. But, in 2020, the valuation guide includes a range of prices. The difference in the two reveals that prices are increasingly focused on the maximum a customer would pay for a good, or how it's priced in retail or other resale markets ("The Thrift Economy"). It can be speculated that the "maximum a customer would pay for a good" may be based on the rise in demand driven by wealthier customers, and how much money these recent affluent customers are willing to spend for their thrifted goods.

Going back to the method about sustainable thrift shopping being a privilege, according to a 2010 Pennsylvania State University study by Spencer James, a researcher at Brigham Young University, lower-income families see secondhand shopping as a necessity, whereas higher-income shoppers view it as a commodity. "The upper class essentially sees it as a toy store. Something to find stuff that's fun, like a kind of playground," James said. "Yet we have a



lower class that sees that as one of the last few places where they can afford to buy the goods that they need to maintain their standard of living.” James and his colleagues conducted the study after a major employer in their county shut down, leaving many families in financial distress. The study measured families’ participation in thrift economies and found that both thrift stores and yard sales provided many of the necessities families needed to survive. Lower- and middle-income households typically participated in thrift economies at a higher rate than higher-income households. The results also noted that those in the lower-and middle-income brackets shopped for furniture and clothing while higher-income families typically bought antiques or trinkets. Though James conducted the study a decade ago, he feels the results have only become more relevant, especially as thrift stores become a more prominent shopping alternative. “This can have the deleterious effect of rising prices and thereby pricing the poor out of yet another place where they could potentially access the commodities that they need to maintain their standard of living,” James said ("The Thrift Economy"). Needless to say, thrift stores are becoming less affordable for the less fortunate and putting their socioeconomic standards of living at risk.

The opening of gentrified thrift stores and demand for new chic fashion also changes the demographics of the neighborhoods around them, creating gentrified neighborhoods. This can be seen in the US major city of Los Angeles (LA), California (CA), where neighborhoods are gentrifying due to the opening of gentrified thrift stores and other related amenities. The Silver Lake neighborhood in LA has seen the Goodwill on Hollywood Boulevard and Out of the Closet on Sunset Boulevard rival with chic new stores like Flounce Vintage. All over LA’s Eastside, which has seen several areas gentrify this century, vintage stores and specialty thrift stores have sprung up, with more than a half dozen in hip neighborhoods like Highland Park and Echo Park. The demographics of these gentrified neighborhoods such as Silver Lake have changed due to these newer fashion amenities ("Are Vintage Stores A Sign Of Gentrification?"). Younger hipsters have been linked to gentrification because they often move into urban enclaves from the outskirts of cities. Many enjoy the modern fashion amenities that cities offer, driving the demand for gentrified thrift stores and shopping experiences. Because they are young, hipsters aren’t usually rich but tend to be upwardly mobile, with jobs that place them on stronger financial footing than the longtime residents of gentrified areas, meaning they have more disposable income to use on existing thrift stores than the residents the thrift stores were meant to serve. These high-demand expensive thrift stores can be proven to change the urban demographic in neighborhoods as seen in the case of LA ("Are Vintage Stores A Sign Of Gentrification?").

## **CONCLUSION**

It is evident and can be concluded that the gentrification of thrifting goes beyond the thrifting experience or the physical thrift store. It shows the changes in the socioeconomic fabrics present in who and where these thrift stores are meant to serve. The changes in the thrifting experience is evidence that consumers demand a higher-end thrifting experience as thrifting and sustainable shopping gets popular. Although thrifting is done for the right environmental cause, it is hard to deny that the popularity of thrifting amongst affluent people is harming the low-income residents for whom the thrift store was intended for. Many thrift in the name of environmental sustainability, but it is important to understand that one should become conscious about their impact on the environment, but also become conscious about whether their decisions are only helping certain populations, or are collectively serving the low-income people who are disproportionately impacted by climate change and pollution. When one decides to purchase a thrifted item, they should consider if it is truly necessary in their life, or if it is better if the item serves someone in need. This is even more important as thrifting gentrifies and becomes a more expensive practice, and it becomes harder for lower income individuals to thrift. The gentrified thrifting experience does bring harmful effects for the low-income communities who use the thrift store for their basic needs and livelihoods. It changes the demographics of the neighborhoods that once had general thrift stores and low income residents. Overall, thrifting is done with good intentions, however it is changing to become a gentrified and exploited practice, and affluent consumers of thrift stores should understand their privilege and be more considerate for those who truly need to purchase from a thrift store.

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## **American Democracy That Fails Us**

*By Ray Nobuhara, Shreya Pandit, and Ria Anandjee*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

America isn't the democracy it promises to be. As Americans, our whole lives have been rooted around the idea that this country is the epitome of a true liberal democratic state that ensures the civil and personal rights of all. Whether America fulfills this fundamental promise is a whole other topic to be debated. Some say that democracy is fulfilled and there should not be any change to the government system of now, and others state that democracy is not fulfilled. However, the very evident income inequalities we see in the nation reflect the poor quality of what America has labelled a democracy, with liberty for all. As the economy has grown more capitalistic, it has allowed the rich to get richer while stagnating economic growth for the middle and lower classes. The system now is unfair, as the bigger companies are granted more sponsorships and it is hard to start a company afresh. Even if a company starts out, it will not foster and thrive as much as the bigger companies because there is not much sponsorship. The positive ways in which democracy affects the economy will be discussed. Democracy allows companies, big and small, to flourish and prosper. Stockholders sponsor companies of their choice with the capital, or money companies need to develop further, and the companies pay back these sponsors overtime. This process repeats itself for up to several generations leading to wealth on both sides. Democracy has longer-lasting effects, than even dictatorships, on the economy by aiding its growth.

### **DEMOCRACY VS. DICTATORSHIP AND AUTHORITARIAN GOVERNMENT**

Democracy, at first glance, can be seen as having the same effects as dictatorship. For example, there are various effects that democracy can cause depending on the nation. In seventeen studies, there were five different results that were seen from implementing

democracy to a dictatorship nation: no effect, negative impact, positive impact, somewhat negative impact, and somewhat positive impact.<sup>22</sup> Since there was such a variation of results seen, concluding that there is always a positive effect is wrong. In addition, the tool to measure the effects of democracy may change the effects that can be seen. David Leblang, who is affiliated with University of Virginia and now researches mostly in political sciences, used to say that he found data on negative effects of democracy, but when using the cross-section-time-series approach, he found that there are slightly beneficial effects when implementing democracy.<sup>23</sup> This means that the effects seen of democracy can be dependent to some extent on what perspective and tool the effects are measured in. Furthermore, in some nations, democracy is not said to have such beneficial effects. Although the four East Asian Tigers can see a massive beneficial effect of democracy from being in dictatorship, the other parts of the world may not see as much profit.<sup>24</sup> The East Asian Tigers saw the benefits and some other parts of the world saw the benefits, so implementing democracy is not a negative thing. Democracy can be implemented and tested out later to see whether or not democracy is right for the nation.

On the other hand, some of the statements in the above paragraph are misguided. For example, although the effects of democracy can be neutral, the effects of democracy on GDP per capita is massively advantageous. There is a polity index of greater than or equal to six for GDP per capita, in five years.<sup>25</sup> This is a much higher GDP per capita compared to dictatorship. There is no data to prove this finding wrong, so this is very reliable. Even if democracy is overall neutral, if there is an advantage in GDP per capita, then democracy is beneficial to the economy. Second, the seventeen studies with various results were conducted earlier in history. Thus, modern technology was not used at the time. Using modern technology, scientists are sure that there is rarely a negative effect by

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<sup>22</sup> Knutsen, Carl H. *Democracy and Economic Growth: A Survey of Arguments and Results*. [citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.1029.9433&rep=rep1&type=pdf](http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.1029.9433&rep=rep1&type=pdf).

<sup>23</sup> Knutsen, Carl H. *Democracy and Economic Growth: A Survey of Arguments and Results*. [citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.1029.9433&rep=rep1&type=pdf](http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.1029.9433&rep=rep1&type=pdf).

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implementing democracy.<sup>26</sup> Thus, democracy should be taken in place for trial and error purposes at the very least because democracy has the chance of aiding the economy. Even if democracy fails to aid the American economy, the economy will stay as is. There will be very little, if not no, drawbacks. There is another reason why democracy has a greater net benefit than dictatorship. That is human capital accumulation.<sup>27</sup> Democracy allows for freedom and stability in politics. Thus, democracy is beneficial compared to dictatorship. Democracy has a much higher growth rate than dictatorship, allowing for democracy to help massively in economics.

### **DEMOCRACY AIDS THE ECONOMY WITH LONG-LASTING EFFECTS**

If we want to see our economy grow to its highest potential, democracy is necessary. This can be traced back to the fact that democracy is closely tied with various economic sources of growth such as healthcare and education, and they ultimately invest in people. According to a study conducted by economists at MIT, countries switching to democratic rule experience a 20 percent increase in GDP over a 25-year period. The root of this is at the core of democracy- reforms. There are many channels that allow for democracy to yield economic growth, but it is commonly agreed that the size and capacity of government and a reduction of social conflict truly allow for it to happen. Time and time again, history has seen that prioritizing civil liberties allows for prosperity, and it is no different in this case. Restricted civil liberties and a lack of freedom of speech in authoritarian governments aimed to reduce threats is detrimental to the economy. This is because a diffusion of thoughts and productive ideas will also be stopped, even if the regime wants to see economic growth, because it is nearly impossible to sort out policy to stop politically dangerous information and allow economically productive information.

The evidence can also be seen in the numbers. In a study conducted by the Political Science Department at the University of Oslo, Norway, it is shown that Under democracy, an economic growth of -7% (decrease of 7%) was increased to 20%.<sup>28</sup> In

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<sup>26</sup> Knutsen, Carl H. *Democracy and Economic Growth: A Survey of Arguments and Results*. [citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.1029.9433&rep=rep1&type=pdf](https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.1029.9433&rep=rep1&type=pdf).

<sup>27</sup> Knutsen, Carl H. *Democracy and Economic Growth: A Survey of Arguments and Results*. [citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.1029.9433&rep=rep1&type=pdf](https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.1029.9433&rep=rep1&type=pdf).

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addition, it has been shown that the economy can grow up to 30% in around 50 years.<sup>29</sup> There is a small growth in 10 to 15 years, and the growth will again happen in 25 years, and later around the 50th year. This increased growth, when compared to the economic growth under authoritarian governments, reveals a stark difference. Simply put, numbers do not lie. Of course, the growth does not happen all of the sudden. At first, society would have to adapt to this style of government, beginning with the people's education of the system under which they live. The economy during the times of adaptation, which will last from ten to fifteen years, may be stable, but is often worse than before. However, that is not to worry because economic growth will soon happen. Economic growth is not made to fit authoritarian regimes. In these regimes, there is an absence of independent unions, wages are lower, and rich capital owners take a larger share of total income. Democracies allow for greater dispersions of authority, and promote ideas allowing for change, because democracies get things done.

## CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, there is no doubt that increasing democracy in our increasingly capitalistic economy is something that will ultimately benefit not only the underrepresented and lower wage earners but also the economy as a whole. Studies have pointed to economic growth, and economic growth gives way to a multitude of other socioeconomic issues that our country now faces. By improving public participation in the economy, we also increase political stability and economic freedom. We decrease inflation and move towards bridging the income gap between the rich and the poor. To assess the matter from the macro perspective, economic stability increases access to education with each successive generation, giving people the opportunity to climb up the social ladder. While democracy obviously has a lot of support, and many have deemed the quality of democracy in our nation to not be beneficial for all people, it is important to consider the logistics and time frame of any future changes to the economy. A lot of political power is concentrated in the hands of the wealthy and large corporates. Going forward, understanding patterns in democratic development will allow the government to make educated decisions about how to better incorporate it into our economy.

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<sup>29</sup> Dizikes, Peter. *Study: Democracy Fosters Economic Growth*. MIT News Office, [news.mit.edu/2019/study-democracy-fosters-economic-growth-acemoglu-0307](https://news.mit.edu/2019/study-democracy-fosters-economic-growth-acemoglu-0307).

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