SPRING-SUMMER 2021 WINNER

Angélique Charles-Davis

INSTRUCTOR'S FOREWORD

In my PWR 1 class, Writing about Education, students write their final research-based argument essays as feature articles. The class explores feature articles throughout the quarter—rhetorically analyzing an acclaimed article by Nikole Hannah-Jones, contemporary articles written by students in *The Stanford Daily,* and even former Boothe Prize essays—so writing one feels like coming full circle. I believe the feature article framing affords students several unique opportunities. It requires students to identify an intended audience, importantly readers outside of our class, and their beliefs about the topic. It encourages students to take rhetorical risks in the structure, evidence, tone, and voice of the essay. Lastly, it challenges students to avoid simplistic arguments and facile conclusions. After all, feature articles often prioritize helping readers see a problem in a new way over concrete solutions.

In America's Broken Promise: Examining Black Racial Identity in the School Choice Binary, Angelique embraces the challenge of crafting a feature article. She writes to black parents about choosing schools in an endemically racist educational system. Her purpose is not to confront or criticize Black parents for their choices. Instead, she grapples with a series of questions that likely resonate with her readers: Why do Black parents pick primarily white schools? What do Black students loose in this environment? What do they gain? How do primarily white schools affect Black students' racial identity formation? How can parents counteract the negative messages Black students receive about their racial identity? How does achievement ideology shape this identity? To understand these questions, Angelique dives into the complex, uncomfortable, and frequently contradictory education and psychology scholarship. She synthesizes this research with her own experience attending selective public and private schools in New York City and with the experiences of two Black boys at an elite private school. In doing so, she develops an original argument that reveals a deeply felt complexity. I believe that this essay will help students who feel lost in their research see a new way to approach a research-based argument.

—Lisa Swan

America's Broken Promise

Examining Black Racial Identity in the School Choice Binary

Angélique Charles-Davis

When Michèle Stephenson and Joe Brewster elected to send their black son, Idris, to one of New York City's most elite private schools, they did so because they wanted him to have the best education possible. To Joe, The Dalton School was "an Ivy League education in a brownstone" where the opportunities for Idris would be boundless. To Michèle, Dalton represented what she couldn't have as a child. Raised by immigrant Haitian and Panamanian parents, Michèle constantly felt that she was alone in wanting to achieve more than her classmates did. Idris attended Dalton with his best friend Seun, who is also black, and Michèle and Joe documented the two boys' experiences in what would become a feature documentary spanning thirteen years entitled *American Promise* (Brewster & Stephenson, 2013b, 0:55).*

Like Idris and Seun, I grew up black in New York City. I chose to transfer from my international school to a predominantly white, private K-12 school after fourth grade because of the academic opportunities it offered. In high school, I transferred to a public, predominantly Asian school for the same reason. Watching Seun and Idris navigate Dalton reminded me of my own educational experiences and caused me to consider more deeply the consequences of my family's school choices.

American Promise was not the film's original title, but it seems to resonate with the parents' hopes for their sons' education. Throughout Idris' and Seun's experience, their parents maintained that this school would equip them academically, prepare them for discrimination, make them comfortable around white people, and allow

* Note: Some names in this essay have been changed to protect privacy.

them "to compete against privilege" (Brewster & Stephenson, 2013b, 0:30). That's a tall order for any school, and the parents' high standards for Dalton mirror the growing expectation that schools should not only educate, but also emotionally and socially shape children. Schools certainly do teach these lessons, but often in ways not listed in the curriculum. As Idris' and Seun's educational journey progressed, these lessons manifested themselves as remarks made by Idris and Seun about their race, intelligence, and how they viewed the demographics of their school, remarks that revealed a process of racial identity formation shaped by school-based racism, parental messaging and the stress inherent to being one of the only black kids in any room (Brewster & Stephenson, 2013a). These observations then beg the questions: When we make the decision to send black kids into these kinds of primarily white schools, what do we lose, in terms of prioritizing healthy black racial identity formation and relationships to school? What might we, in turn, gain?

In a country whose schools remain deeply racially segregated, the decision of where to send a black child to school remains a complex one, and one that is often marked by a stark binary: enrollment in a predominantly black/Latino school or a predominantly white/Asian one. Due to the intersection of race and poverty, predominantly black schools tend to perform worse academically (García, 2020). Black parents with means or who are deft at navigating the school system often elect to send their children to predominantly white schools in the hopes that their child will be exposed to the same quality of education that white students are afforded.

These reasons are well taken, but it is also true that black students in predominantly white schools are often discouraged from taking AP and honors classes, graded more harshly, and punished with far more severity than their white counterparts, all of which detract from whatever academic gains we might reap (Butler-Barnes et al., 2012). Equally as important to consider is the development of a healthy black racial identity.

In second grade, Seun's mother found him trying to brush away the purple in his gums because his were "ugly" and he wanted them to be pink (Brewster & Stephenson, 2013a). Some viewers of the film may dismiss this as a silly comment made by a confused child. To others, it will reflect what happens to a child's conception of their blackness when they are sent into unsupportive environments, like a school with so few black students that the number can be counted on one hand. Developing a positive black racial identity formation becomes more complicated in white environments, and the research suggests that there are a variety of reactive coping strategies that vary greatly in how healthy they are (Swanson et al., 2009). Researchers also suggest that black identities form a variety of relationships

with the schooling complex, which reflect distinct ways that students interpret the place of school in their racial identities (Mehan et al., 1994). In this article, I will examine and challenge the concerns of black parents in regards to racial identity formation in order to argue that while white schools widely reject blackness, with certain parental and school practices, they can have a positive or neutral effect on racial identity formation. However, achievement ideology in black children can be negatively affected in these spaces.

WHAT IS AT STAKE?

According to Janet Helms, "[r]acial identity refers to a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group. Racial identity development theory concerns the belief systems that evolve in reaction to perceived differential racial-group membership" (qtd. in Tatum, 2004a, p. 9). Many contradictory theories of how and why black racial identity develops have been put forth. Each of them implicates school as a setting that is crucial to racial identity formation (Swanson et al., 2009).

Children who find themselves ill-prepared for experiences of racial bias tend to adopt maladaptive coping strategies for navigating racism. In the classroom, these can manifest as acting out in class and academic disengagement. On a larger scale, drug and tobacco use can be traced back to developmental setbacks in middle childhood, especially setbacks related to racial identity development. When these children who experience developmental setbacks are compared to children who enter adolescence with a solid identity base from growing up in supportive contexts, the gap in adulthood outcomes is significant. Children with strong, positive black identity develop important buffers against racism and report higher self-esteem (Swanson et al., 2009).

What happens to black children at school has lasting, profound effects on their psyches. We must take seriously any suspicions that a school environment may be harmful to racial identity formation.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

Black students in predominantly white schools face challenges that can take a toll on their early notions of what it means to be black at school. A 1990 study found that black male elementary students were more vulnerable to teacher ratings of low academic performance and conduct problems than any other demographic, while also being the group to receive the most nonverbal criticism from teachers. Teachers have also been proven to have lower expectations of black students (Irvine, 1990). Black students are more frequently excluded from social activities and are

subject to more verbal or physical abuse from peers (Butler-Barnes et al., 2019). This issue that exists across school systems mushrooms when there is a scarcity of black children in the classroom, with these students reporting feelings of isolation and alienation (Andrews, 2012). In a system where teachers have more influence over child outcomes than parents do, this can have an impact not only on academic outcomes, but also on self-esteem (Irvine, 1990). When we review the experiences of a handful of black students who attended predominantly white schools, we can see the way these biases have manifested.

Janice, a black student from an almost entirely white neighborhood, was one of two black people in her advanced classes. In high school, she found herself socially isolated, although simultaneously unable to put into words why her white friends' acceptance of her was limited. In college, these issues only magnified themselves, with Janice reporting that she continued to feel a "constant reinforcement of something's not quite right" from her peers (Tatum, 2004b, p. 122).

Jonathan, like Janice, was high-achieving, but also realized early into his middle school years that opportunities tended to accumulate around his white classmates, and accordingly chose to "de-emphasize the fact that he [was] black" (Tatum, 2004b, p. 128). He felt the need to try to disprove negative stereotypes about being black by excelling academically and avoiding stereotypical black activities, like basketball. His college transition was subsequently plagued by doubt and uncertainty as he learned to navigate organizations like the school's Black Student Union (Tatum, 2004b).

Early into his Dalton experience, Idris recalled being asked repeatedly by his classmates if he were "rich or poor" (Brewster & Stephenson, 2013b, 3:20). In fourth grade he was suspended for two days for hitting a boy. When he insisted that he hadn't, the school added a day as punishment for lying. Reflecting on his school experience as a senior, he noted a clear divide between his life as a black person and his life as a Dalton student (Brewster & Stephenson, 2013a).

It is important to note the role that age plays in these challenges. While adolescence is a crucial period for identity development, and in cases like Janice's, the most pointed period of internalized racial dissonance, children shed the egocentrism that shields them from racism directly after early childhood. They begin to internalize and understand the discrimination they face. They notice that their teachers criticize them more and that they are treated differently by society, beyond simply being told this is the case (Swanson et al., 2009). Likewise, gender is a major influence on how black children experience school. Boys experience more school-based racism and are more frequently stereotyped as threatening and anti-intellectual (Butler-Barnes et al., 2019).

HOW DO WHITE SCHOOLS AFFECT BLACK IDENTITY FORMATION?

Knowing the above, I set about researching black racial identity formation in white schools with an expectation of what I would find: that black students' racial identity formation suffers as a result of racism, and that this phenomenon is especially heightened in schools that are predominantly white. What I discovered, however, is that black racial identity is something far more inscrutable, and that it can develop healthily, albeit differently, in white schools.

A large motivating factor in the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision were the findings of a 1947 study conducted by Kenneth and Mamie Clark, in which preschool-age white and black children were shown black and white dolls and asked which one they felt was the nicest, the meanest, which one they would play with, *et cetera*. According to researchers, black students showed a consistent preference towards white dolls, providing the psychological exigence required for integrating classrooms (Irvine, 1990). In a 2004 interview with Oprah, Barack Obama urged black students to stop thinking of doing well in school as "acting white" (Zirkel & Johnson, 2016). This "acting white" theory was presented in 1986 as evidence that black families simply do not value education (Spencer et al., 2001). Evidently, it still holds sway in both black and white audiences.

The binary in the canonical research is clear. Black youth will either find themselves developing a negative black racial identity and end up self-hating, frustrated, and filled with internalized racism, or they will develop a strong, positive black identity but must then harbor negative associations with education, professional success, and personal wellbeing. I've never actually met a black person who thought that doing well in school meant acting white. So it didn't surprise me to learn that in reality, this kind of literature reveals more about what researchers consider to be white than what actual black people consider to be white. In 2001, Spencer et al. found a clear correlation between high Eurocentric values in black students and low achievement, and vice versa. In 2019, Butler-Barnes et al. found that experiences of school-based discrimination held no correlation with private regard (how one sees themselves in relation to their blackness). Modern critics of the Clark studies have remarked that the studies were initially interpreted as black youth being more open to other races than white children, with political agendas driving the shift to a narrative of pervasive black self-hatred. Critics of the 1986 Fordham and Ogbu study that led to the development of the "acting white" theory note that the study only focused on eight students (Zirkel & Johnson, 2016). These findings alert us to the suspicious nature of "damage theories" such as the Clark and Ogbu ones.

Theories that paint black psyches as damaged as a result of racism and discrimination were developed by and for white people, wielded by those on the left to enact policies deemed beneficial to black psyches and by those on the right to confirm assumptions of weakness and deficiency (Zirkel & Johnson, 2016). They also have served as a means of explaining the achievement gap, although no similar theories exist to explain White-Asian American or White-Jewish American achievement gaps (Spencer et al., 2001). We are right to concern ourselves with conceptions of racial identity formation in black populations given the historical persistence of racism in this country, and it is important to acknowledge that unhealthy development does occur, but we should avoid over-emphasizing damage theories that pathologize black identities, theories that don't consider context or developmental status.

While black parents may not give much credence to damage theories, it is important to acknowledge their existence and stake in the education community, especially when considering the school settings students will be sent into. Many educators work from the assumption that integration with white peers is key to school success in black youth, or that strong, positive black identity is a marker of academic disinterest (Zirkel & Johnson, 2016). These teacher perceptions only magnify whatever academic challenges a student may face.

According to Joe, the gist of one of Idris' elementary school report cards was that he was a "hard to manage guy" (Brewster & Stephenson, 2013a, 0:20:21). As he sat with Michèle in the car and pored through pages of criticisms of Idris' behavior, he voiced his suspicions, saying that: "He's not a problem at home. He's not a problem in the community. But he's a problem at Dalton" (Brewster & Stephenson, 2013a, 0:20:55). The friction between black families and teachers becomes clear here, highlighting the importance of parental support for children in institutions where blackness is systematically rejected.

Parental racial socialization is the process by which parents teach their children what it means to be a member of their race. For parents of black children, this task is highly charged and especially crucial (Butler-Barnes et al., 2019). Butler-Barnes et al. used an integrative model of the developmental competencies of minority children to examine the power of parental messaging as a mediator for racial school experiences. Positive messaging was found to be positively related to private regard. This kind of messaging includes statements that are egalitarian about race, demonstrate racial pride, and emphasize the importance of black history. Examples of negative messages are that learning about black history is not that important, that it is best to act white, or that being black is nothing to be proud of (2019). Messages

like these undermine the racial realities of black children, especially those at white schools. Parents who don't make efforts to promote positive black identity in their children were described as "race-neutral" or "race-avoidant" by Beverly Tatum in her survey of black students who attended white high schools (2004b, p. 133). These parents have many of the same intentions: shielding their children from racial barriers by deemphasizing the role that race plays in their lives. As a result, however, their children reported feeling "stranded" and frustrated with home life, while those with "race-conscious" parents found they were able to internalize a positive black identity that carried them through difficult experiences at school, an identity that encouraged them to resist (2004b, p. 133).

Jonathan, whom we visited earlier, left his basketball team out of fear of being perceived as too black (Tatum, 2004b). Idris, on the other hand, was the only freshman on Dalton's varsity team (Brewster & Stephenson, 2013a). I made my school's varsity track team in eighth grade (but it's not a competition) and was acutely aware of the stereotype I was fulfilling by being Jamaican and obsessed with track. But I did it anyway. I was also always aware that my teachers clearly preferred my quiet, five-foot-tall presence to that of my much louder, larger friend Deja. Deja didn't change, but she eventually chose to leave the school. The degrees to which we choose to resist, knowingly or unknowingly, the Eurocentricity of the spaces we occupy are varied, and represent a balancing act between what we want to gain and what we are afraid to lose to white society. This is hard.

What we can conclude from this research is that positive black racial identity formation is something that does exist, but that is stifled in predominantly white schools by Eurocentric standards held by teachers and peers. Many scholars believe that the existence of positive black identity seems to be predicated on the idea that black people's public regard (how one believes society sees black people) and private regard can be distinct, allowing for high self-esteem in conjunction with a deep understanding of the realities of racial discrimination (Zirkel & Johnson, 2016). Studies have also found that public regard is higher for black students at predominantly white schools, which can be attributed to students being more comfortable around white people after spending more time with them (Barnes et al., 2019). This is something that black parents like Idris' seem to understand. In addition to academic reasons, they often have racial reasons for sending their kids to white schools. There is a belief that through racial experiences, their kids will learn to navigate racism and white environments while keeping their identities intact.

The research corroborates that positive black identity is heavily tied to resilience, the creative ways black people respond to and resist experiences of

racism (Zirkel & Johnson, 2016). According to educational scholar Janie Ward, resilience is a muscle strengthened through resistance (Andrews, 2012). Her words hew closely to the philosophy of Idris' parents, who maintained that what Idris faced at Dalton would be "the same thing he would encounter for the rest of his life" (Brewster & Stephenson, 2013b, 9:22). By this metric, Dalton was practice. A 2009 observational study found that black students at a predominantly white public school were able to develop a stronger sense of racial self through experiences of racism, while yet another study found that discrimination and racial centrality, the importance a person ascribes to their racial identity, were positively correlated (Swanson et al; Butler-Barnes et al., 2019).

My reading has led me to find that while predominantly white schools undoubtedly have a hand in shaping black racial identity, the way they do so has the potential to be positive, and children are also able to build solid identity bases elsewhere. The more pressing issue, however, is the way schools might stifle existing healthy black identities to the detriment of the everyday lives of their students. A common thread in these students' testimonies is an awareness of race and the role it plays in their life. Black identities based in white schools come with an understanding of what white society wants to see, allowing students to code-switch while maintaining strong internal blackness (Mehan et al., 1994).

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO?

Michèle cited Dalton's "commitment to diversity" as something that set it apart from the other schools that she and Joe looked into. She was wary of sending Idris into a school where he would be surrounded only by "rich white kids," but thought that the recent strides the school had made to diversify its kindergarten class signified a positive culture. Seun's mom thought that there was something "warm and genuine" in how the school presented itself to parents (Brewster & Stephenson, 2013a, 0:08:30).

If much of the blame lies with the school, it follows that all schools must lie on a spectrum of Eurocentricity and embedded racism, one delineated by practices, classroom values and institutional frameworks that both promote and stifle healthy black racial identity. Janice found liberation and joy in African-American studies courses taught at her college. It was Terri's black middle school teacher whom she credits with helping her form connections in black communities that would sustain her throughout high school. In college, Jonathan shed his white role models in exchange for an understanding of the intellectual legacy of the black men of his college (Tatum, 2004b). After graduating from Occidental College, Idris went

on to found a company that uses augmented reality to write black narratives into American curricula. In their reflections, these students can pinpoint exactly what their schools were lacking and what behaviors they adapted to fill those gaps. They know themselves best. It becomes clear that when choosing a school, the importance of black history in curricula and the availability of black role models and same-race peer networks cannot be understated.

HOW DO BLACK STUDENTS IN WHITE SCHOOLS CONCEPTUALIZE ACHIEVEMENT?

Black identity can have a variety of relationships with school, varying by developmental stage, cultural context, and degrees of racial centrality and public regard. The ideal of education as a means of mitigating racial barriers tends to be either cautiously embraced or rejected, leading to varying investments in school (Carter, 2008). Additionally, due to the black student's racialized experience of white schools, black achievement must often somehow compete with whiteness in these spaces, which has the potential to be unhealthy.

Out of all of the scenes of Idris and Seun attending school, one in particular stands out to me. In Idris' high school English class, his teacher, a slim black man with waist-length dreadlocks, reads aloud from *Invisible Man* in a very English teacher-esque voice. His words bounce around the room, where a group of white students plus Idris and the one other black face that I can make out in the frame sit. During the discussion that follows, Idris raises his hand to speak.

> "The white race," he says, pointing at the extensive highlighting he's done in his book, "in order to be successful, needed the black people. Like, Mr. Norton needed the black people or else he wouldn't have gotten to where he was—"
>
> The teacher interrupts. "Did the black people need Mr. Norton?"
>
> There's a pause. The teacher looks at Idris with a bemused expression.
>
> "Well yeah," Idris says finally. "It goes both ways." (Brewster & Stephenson, 2013a, 1:49:25)

You don't have to have read *Invisible Man* to understand what is happening here. This exchange, which seems to truly be occurring between Idris and his teacher in front of a large white audience, encapsulates the pressure that comes with being expected, and expecting of yourself, to be a perfect representative for blackness in a classroom setting in which you are hypervisible, to tread carefully around racial topics. Later, when asked whether the standards were higher for African-American boys, his teacher responded with: "Absolutely. But—perhaps especially as a black

male teacher—the standards are the standards" (Brewster & Stephenson, 2013b, 6:50).

Idris' parents received heavy criticism from black and white audience members alike for the intensity they brought to his education. Candid scenes of Idris' mother yelling at him over missing essay drafts, worksheets that hadn't been printed out, and unfinished college applications punctuate shots of Idris in class, studying at his desk, and hanging out with friends. As viewers, whenever Idris raises his hand in class, we want him to have all the right answers and fulfill the role of excellent representation for black people that his parents so clearly expect of him.

It's possible that this desire to see Idris succeed is simply sharper in black people who have been in similar classrooms. The belief that black students must be high-achieving in order to break stereotypes and advance black interests is widely held, and it's one that my own parents certainly espoused. Research shows that identities formed along these lines, identities that center "achievement as resistance" can be beneficial to black student academic performance in white schools.

Dorinda Carter Andrews' theory of Critical Race Achievement Ideology (CRAI) was developed through her observations of high-achieving black students at a predominantly white high school. CRAI involves a critical racial consciousness, adaptive strategies for overcoming racial barriers, and a sense that achievement can define one's membership in a racial group. It "assumes that a student believes in achievement as a characteristic of his or her racial group and values both achievement and racial group affiliation as a part of his or her self-definition" (p. 489). In other words, the students she observed understood schooling as a racialized process and adjusted their ideologies accordingly. They did not view success as white property and saw school as a tool for upward mobility (2008).

While these motivators embody a resilience and rejection of the status quo that is incredibly important, when a keen awareness of racism becomes a motivator for achievement it also has the potential to become crippling. It closely resembles stereotype threat, a phenomenon in which people worry about fulfilling a negative racial stereotype, which has been proven to cause students to underperform due to anxiety (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

The rhetoric of black achievement is often marked by phrases that exceptionalize and glorify the concept. The notion of "black excellence" implies that black students need to be excellent in order to compensate for the space we take up in white places. In one conversation with his son, Idris' father explained that because his own father used to get called "nigger Joe" at work, Idris had to make sure to be as productive as possible at his fancy school (Brewster & Stephenson, 2013a, 1:07:00). My parents

used a similar type of deduction to explain to my brother and I why we should "never look down." Even as I write this, the "black excellence" sticker that I have stuck to my laptop, right next to the Jamaican flag, proves to me that this is a mindset that is deeply ingrained in popular black culture and difficult to escape, that for black people in white spaces, racial centrality and pride often go hand in hand with pressure to succeed.

While it's reductive to generalize the mindsets of all black learners at white schools, I point out this achievement ideology because it is common and can be unhealthy. Sending black children to white schools for academic purposes sets up a paradigm in which they must compete against whiteness in order to prove they belong.

THE CASE FOR PREDOMINANTLY BLACK SCHOOLS

In pre-*Brown v. Board of Education* America, black schools were semi-autonomous centers of black excellence, with teachers occupying an esteemed role in society and serving as the benchmark for black achievement. Schools helped to foster self-esteem and emotional wellbeing by stressing the importance of the individual and referring to students as "Mister" and "Miss," titles that were historically denied to black individuals in white spaces. Teachers and principals embodied community aspirations, and the segregation that had been enforced gave rise to a functional system that served as a shield from racism and a source of black pride.

The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision forced many black schools to bear the burden of desegregation. Black teachers and principals were systematically dismissed and replaced with white teachers who did not embody the interests of the black community. The decision dismantled the black schools first, essentially restructuring a system that had worked. Arguably, desegregation is the root cause of much of the cultural friction that we see today between educators and students (Irvine, 1990). Today, there remains some evidence that students in predominantly black schools have higher private regard (Butler-Barnes et al., 2019).

Seun, who struggled with dyslexia, was placed on academic probation at the beginning of eighth grade and was asked to leave Dalton at the end of the year. He transferred to Benjamin Banneker Academy in Brooklyn, a school that is 92% black and Hispanic and which, according to its principal, was modeled after the segregated schools in the South. He described Benjamin Banneker as a nurturing place where Black and Latino kids from the surrounding neighborhood would do challenging work while also learning to "feel good about themselves, and not always worry about how people are going to look at them" (Brewster & Stephenson, 2013a, 0:59:17).

Benjamin Banneker sent Seun and a group of kids to Africa over the summer, where a local Benin tribe danced for them before telling them they were "back home" (Brewster & Stephenson, 2013a, 1:32:23). In the hotel that night, a friend announced to the group that she had decided to describe herself in a new way:

"I'm just going to say I'm a product of the diaspora. I got a hoodie made" (Brewster & Stephenson, 2013a, 1:33:48). Later, she mused, "Imagine if everyone who was a product of the diaspora said that. That would be like, subliminally unifying" (Brewster & Stephenson, 2013a, 1:34:37). Benjamin Banneker promotes Afrocentricity, self-esteem, and blackness as positively correlated to academics. It comes nowhere near to touching Dalton's academic performance, but very few schools do. Nonetheless, it has a 98% graduation rate and is among the best schools in Brooklyn ("Benjamin Banneker"). Schools like these present a powerful case for 'settling' for a less prestigious school.

CONCLUSION

This year, Stuyvesant, the high school I attended, accepted eight black students to its class of 749 through its selective entrance exam (Shapiro, 2021). These stark statistics are due largely to issues of available test prep and the aforementioned disparities in performance between predominantly black and predominantly white/Asian schools. They're also because black eighth-graders are, understandably, less than thrilled at the prospect of attending a school where they will be alone in every single class. So the problem persists, and the gaps widen.

The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision is one of America's many broken promises. It's undeniably unfair to ask black students to carry the burden of desegregating white schools, given the racism and isolation they will face there. I cannot argue that there is one right school choice to make. But when we allow schools like Dalton to stay white, their Eurocentric standards go unchallenged, and so does the white monopoly on education. When black students attend them, however, we are continuing a tradition of over 200 years of resistance and resilience.

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