twenty, she was working as an attendant at a Quick Trip convenience store in Atlanta. Educational funding, segregation, and access pose challenging questions as urgently in need of answers today as they have ever been. Earnest efforts to find these answers might just help us to better understand our divided society.[13]

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RICH COLLEGE STUDENTS, POOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In the fall of 2010, when I was on the faculty at Princeton University, a student emailed me asking to meet in order to talk about my classes and community–university projects focused on race, inequality, and K–12 urban education. When she showed up, I learned that she wasn't particularly interested in taking a class with me, but rather wanted to talk about some of my views on the state of public education for students who were poor and not white. As we began our conversation, she said that she felt our nation's educational system was broken and failed too many students who were not wealthy. She believed that students like her, who had not grown up in poverty or with much exposure to communities that were not similarly white and privileged, had a duty to work to equalize educational opportunities for students who were currently being educated in failing schools. Making sure that students in poverty had consistent access to a quality education was, she exclaimed, *the* civil rights issue of our time. It was, she said, a stain on our country that a child's zip code could determine the quality of their education.

Her introductory remarks, though inarguably true, had by 2010 become fairly common talking points summarizing the educational agendas of groups, individuals, and organizations who wanted, in the vein of Silicon Valley tech entrepreneurs, to change or "disrupt" how education was financed, delivered, and imagined. They joined forces under the rhetorical rubric of "school choice." The "choice" was between underperforming traditional public schools and nontraditional public school options such as charter schools, vouchers, and online cyber schools, among other options. Those most in need of such alternative options were generally poor children and those of color, as communities with high levels of both generally had the lowest-performing schools. School choice advocates said that it was unfair that wealthy parents could either pay to send their children to higher-performing private schools or, if they found their community schools lacking, simply move from one school district to another. Poor parents did not have the same economic means to find suitable education for their children.

At the time this passionate Princeton student sought me out, there was little discussion among school choice advocates about strengthening traditional public schools. They focused their efforts on a relatively narrow range of reform efforts aimed specifically at the lowest-performing schools. Their views were very much in the news and circulating in popular culture. In November 2009, President Barack Obama had announced a new federal grant called Race to the Top. It was a $4.5 billion pilot program that, among other things, rewarded states for their efforts at educational deregulation and "urged collaborations between business leaders, educators, and other stakeholders to raise student achievement and close achievement gaps . . . by expanding support for high-performing public charter schools, reinvigorating math and science education, and promoting other conditions favorable to innovation and reform."[1] That same year, a heavily marketed documentary about race- and class-based educational inefficiencies and inequalities titled *Waiting for Superman* won a top award at the prestigious Sundance Film Festival and was in wide release across the nation. The film made many of the same points about racial and economic segregation as had the student who came to visit me that day and highlighted the pent-up demand within disenfranchised communities for more types of public school options.

Also in 2010, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg appeared on Oprah Winfrey's television show with Cory Booker, then mayor of Newark, New Jersey, and Governor Chris Christie of New Jersey to make an announcement about his $100 million matching gift to Newark in order to fix its long-troubled school system. Like many of the policy proscriptions found in the Race to the Top grants and championed in the film, Zuckerberg's gift urged the district to shrink the number of traditional public schools and expand the footprint of public charter schools. These were but a few of the ubiquitous cultural conversations taking place about the undereducation of America's poor, urban youth. Consistently, the proposed "fix" involved expanding charter schools, providing alternative methods for teacher assessment and evaluation, and putting an increased focus on raising test scores. In each instance, increasing the quality of education options was referred to as a pressing civil rights issue. Though I agreed that public schools serving poor children could use an overhaul, I did not agree with the proposed remedies. I had been vocal about my dissent in my classes.

I was thus not surprised when the student's questions turned to my lectures, teaching, background, and work in education. She said that I seemed to be somewhat out of step with mainstream philanthropic and educational organizations at the forefront of fighting for comprehensive change for disadvantaged students in urban communities. She wanted to understand why I asked students to think critically about popular reform measures like charter schools and teacher-training organizations such as Teach for America. These were the kinds of educational interventions she, the Department of Education, and many reformers thought of as being central to making sustainable change. She didn't understand why I seemed hesitant to enthusiastically embrace them. She also wanted to know why I urged students in my classes to include the parents and guardians of urban students in educational conversations. From her perspective, their input was not essential and was sometimes at odds with the educational interventions that "reformers" championed. She shared that she was curious to know exactly what I meant when I said that privileged students interested in educational change in poor communities of color should probably have a metric beyond scores on standardized tests as a standard by which to judge success. From what she knew, there really wasn't any other way than test scores to ensure accountability. Signaling that it was my turn to talk, she finally asked me the question that had brought her to my office, "What do you think you are up to?"

I told her that Black parents and caretakers cared deeply about Black children, and it was never a good idea to come into someone else's community and completely exclude them from collaborating on solutions. There were not a lot of examples of that type of engagement ending well. I explained that I took issue with standardized test scores as a primary evaluative tool for poor children of color because, for reasons many researchers had studied but didn't fully understand, that population simply did not do well on them. I told her that, to me, it seemed unfair to judge a group of people by a metric that privileged wealthy whites and Asians but not students who were poor, Black, and/or Latino. I told her that what I was up to was doing the best job I could to fully and comprehensively educate the students who came to my class and to expose them to thinkers, ideas, and people with whom they were probably unfamiliar. As I walked her to the door of my office, I said that working toward the goal of an equal education for all American children was a worthy one, and that there were many ways to get there.

That is what I said to her. What I didn't say was that part of my overwhelming interest in the topic of educational reform was in trying to understand why the group of educational reformers had arisen at that particular time. I was looking for ways to explain the relatively tight-knit backgrounds and relationships that defined the majority of high-profile players in "the movement."

Educational inequality was not new. Such a widespread concern about the undereducation of poor students of color on the part of students who were elite, wealthy, and unaffected, however, was. I knew money, or the lack of it, was often the focus when the conversation turned to ways to improve inner-city schools. I wondered about the extent to which money, or the vast amounts of it available to educational entrepreneurs, was part of the reason for what seemed to me to be an explosion of interest in the systemic undereducation of Black and brown children in those same schools. I wondered if money might also explain some of the burgeoning interest on the part of the privileged in the education of the poor. I wanted to understand what *they* were up to.

Though that conversation took place some years ago, I have often returned to that one student's question. I thought about it when piecing together the narrative about the symbiotic relationship between Wall Street, private equity, and college students. With the support of venture capitalists, hedge-fund investors, captains of industry, and corporate supporters, privileged students on elite college campuses have increasingly turned to the business of education as a career following their graduation from college. Most often, they joined one of a number of burgeoning businesses promising to better educate students in failing public schools that had high levels of both poverty and non-white students. While the long-term and scalable benefits and effects of their various educational businesses remain as yet unclear, what we do know for certain is that this partnership has become an economically beneficial model from which both college students and profit-seeking businesspeople consistently benefit.

The young woman who came to see me did so during a time when student interest in underperforming urban schools was publicly debated not only by politicians, filmmakers, elected officials, and billionaire tech entrepreneurs, but also by students at Princeton and on other college campuses. Indeed, not long before the autumn of 2010 two Princeton students founded a new educational venture called Students for Educational Reform (SFER). Begun in 2009 by Alexis Monin and Catherine Bellinger while they were still freshmen at Princeton, the organization was formed because, according to the organization's website, the founders "were frustrated with the slow pace of educational change" and decided to "set out to mobilize college students and get them to advocate for education reform in the voting booth and in state capitals." This is the niche SFER planned to help fill, and it recruited college students to help execute its business plan. In 2011, the co-founders of the organization took a leave of absence from Princeton to continue to grow their new business. They were immediately successful.[2]

Draper Richards Kaplan, a San Francisco Bay–area venture philanthropy group focusing on early-stage nonprofit organizations, provided the relatively new organization with a grant in the amount of $300,000 to allow it to explore the implementation of its ideas. That one award was just the beginning. In short order, SFER received $1.6 million from Education Reform Now, a group associated with well-connected educational lobbyists under the name Democrats for Education Reform (DFER). It also received funding from the Walton Foundation, which is the philanthropic arm of the family who made their fortune from the Wal-Mart chain of stores. Clearly impressed with SFER's business model, the foundation gave SFER $250,000 in 2012, $650,000 in 2013, $300,000 in 2014, and $450,000 in 2015.[3] SFER's growth continued apace and, according to the organization's Internal Revenue Service 990 reports, by 2014 over $6.7 million had flowed to SFER's coffers since its founding. Many of the students who run Students for Education Reform volunteer and are first-generation college students who attended community schools in neighborhoods like those SFER claims to want to reform. However, the group's board of directors comprises corporate executives and wealthy philanthropists. There are no teachers, students, or community members.[4]

As noble as SFER's rhetoric and cause were, it was notable that it wanted to lobby and advocate for changes to the education system without learning about the people who relied on it, and certainly without including the members of such communities in its decision making. While this is not necessarily a recipe for poor outcomes, educational historian Diane Ravitch has observed that while it is certainly possible that, overall, those involved with what they refer to as the educational reform movement think that they are working in a way that will lead to a much-needed overhaul at the systemic level, there may be a variety of reasons for their interest:

> Some sincerely believe they are helping poor Black and brown children escape from failing public schools. Some think they are on the side of modernization and innovation. But others see an opportunity to make money in a large, risk-free, government-funded sector or an opportunity for personal advancement and power. Some—a small but important number—believe they are acting rationally by treating the public education sector as an investment opportunity.[5]

Wherever they fell on that spectrum, it's likely that Catherine and Alexis knew that an organization with a similar plan, focus, and business model had grown to be quite successful: Teach for America (TFA). TFA was started almost twenty years before SFER, in 1989, by Princeton undergraduate Wendy Kopp. Today, that organization is a titan of the educational reform movement, and in 2016 it was worth almost $400 million. These two organizations, SFER and TFA, exemplify the ways that, in the business of education, the segrenomics of education are important. While far too frequently high levels of poverty in communities of color have come to equal poor educational outcomes for some, just as often that combination offers the potential to increase the profit margins of educational entrepreneurs such as Teach for America and Students for Educational Reform. Their business models simply do not work in the absence of racial and economic segregation. Teach for America and Students for Educational Reform—at least in part—represent ways for college students to participate in the business of education. As such, they are part of a longer-term business strategy over thirty years in the making. Beginning in the 1980s, the business of public education and the funds to be made from privatizing public schooling were regularly touted in the business world, though the lucrative link to college students was not then fully developed.

The Birth of a Notion: Private Profit/Public Education

In the fall of 2000, a financial industries publication, the *Journal of Private Equity*, published an article titled "Investment Opportunities in Education: Making a Profit While Making a Difference." The article tracked the upsurge in Wall Street interest in education during the previous decade, saying that in the first ten years of the twenty-first century, private investment had increased from $2.5 million in 1990 to $4 billion in 2000. The publication saw no end in sight to the growth potential. For evidence, the article pointed to another publication, a then-recent article from *Business Insider* that proclaimed, "Although education is a huge part of the U.S. economy, until recently it wasn't much of a business . . . but as the millennium dawns, the private sector is poised to play a much larger role . . . fueled by an explosion in the money available to education start-ups." That was an understatement.[6]

Since the 1980s, various wealth-management organizations, philanthropies, and corporations have shown an increased interest in schools that educate poor children who are not white. Although for some this burgeoning interest is frequently dressed up in the language of corporate responsibility and pointed to as an

example of their "giving back" and "good citizenship," some have turned to education simply to bolster their bottom line. For that group, by the late 1990s the potential profit was so well known that conservative think tanks, investment banks, and business magazines began discussing the profit potential of investing in schooling, pointing out that the public school system was a potential $600 billion investment opportunity and comparing it to both the health care industry and the defense sector. The 1990s marked the beginning of a twentieth-century era in which those with an interest in educational profiteering hit upon new and more innovative ways to aid their bottom lines. One such company, the Edison Project, led the way by offering cash-strapped and underperforming urban school districts their services as a for-profit (in business primarily to generate profit for shareholders) educational company. The company told state and local officials that they could educate poor children of color more cost-effectively than could their own municipal school systems. When launched, the Edison Project—later renamed Edison Schools and then Edison Learning—immediately attracted Wall Street's attention.[7]

In unveiling the Edison Project at a news conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., in May of 1991, the founder, Chris Whittle, described his vision as an independent for-profit chain of schools that would break the mold of traditional education and outperform public schools across the country. According to Samuel Abrams's comprehensive history of the Edison Schools, *Education and the Commercial Mindset*, Whittle said that he chose the new organization's name because, just as Thomas Alva Edison decided against using candles to create the lightbulb, choosing instead to devise an utterly different approach to achieving a better and more cost-effective form of lighting, American educators had to break with past practices to develop a new school system. Whittle persuaded school districts and investors that Edison could provide effective and efficient administration and turn a profit by centralizing bureaucracy, scaling up or growing their model, and hiring nonunion teachers at a lower cost to districts than what they paid unionized teachers. At the same time that it wooed Wall Street, Edison also sought to increase its allure to both districts and parents by offering to buy laptops for each student, providing dual-language instruction, and promising increased parent involvement, longer school days, and year-round learning. Whittle said tuition would be less than the per-pupil expenditure cities and states then paid, and he forecast "dramatic growth: 200 schools with 150,000 students by 1996 and 1,000 schools with 2 million students by 2010." Whittle said he would need roughly $2.5 billion to $3 billion to open the first two hundred schools and that he would raise what he needed from private investors.[8]

Throughout the 1990s, Whittle's business model grew the company until it became the largest publicly traded educational-management organization ever founded. He wooed Benno Schmidt, who was then the president of Yale University, to be the company's CEO. The business continued to thrive, and at its height Edison Schools ran schools enrolling 132,000 students in twenty states. Its profit relied on receiving the same federal and state tax dollars for educating students enrolled in their schools as were paid to traditional schools on a per-pupil basis. However, unlike traditional public schools, the Edison schools also profited from the revenue generated by the fact that the company was publicly traded on the stock exchange. They were the first "experiment in corporations taking over public schools to run them for profit." The vast majority of schools and districts Edison was hired to take over were in working-class and poor communities. The company did not run many schools in communities that could be characterized as economically privileged.

Despite its popularity with investors, Edison lost a great deal of money. In December 1996, when Edison was running twelve schools, it predicted the company would become profitable once it

had twenty-five schools. By 1998, Edison was running twenty-five schools but posted losses of $11.4 million on revenue of $38.5 million. By 1999, Edison was "running fifty-one schools and posted losses of $21.9 million on revenue of $69.4 million; by 2000 Edison was running seventy-nine schools and posted losses of $49.4 million on revenue of $125 million." No matter the losses, in 1999, Edison raised nearly $250 million from investors and went public. Its stock opened at $18 a share, and by 2001 its price had shot up to $38.75 a share. In interviews, Whittle claimed that "much as locally owned restaurants, hardware stores, clothiers, groceries, and banks had been replaced by national brands like McDonald's, the Home Depot, Gap, Safeway, and Bank of America, schools, too, could and should be run by major corporations."[9]

Even with Wall Street's continued support, the company never achieved either the promised profits or test score gains. In June 2002, when financial analysts discovered that Edison was overstating its revenues, its stock plummeted to $1.01. In addition to falling from favor with Wall Street, Edison also ran into trouble with winning over communities who depended on the school systems with which it had contracted. In Philadelphia, students, community members, and teachers' unions protested their taking over management of forty schools in the city saying the company's track record was so poor it could not be trusted. School officials in Georgia, Texas, Massachusetts, and Michigan terminated Edison contracts early because of the lackluster performance of the students in the schools it managed. With each financial and educational setback, Edison's stock price plunged. By October 2002, it was down to fourteen cents a share, and NASDAQ was threatening to delist them.[10]

Despite the fact that almost every school system with which the company contracted its services ultimately severed their ties with Edison due to its inability to adequately educate students in cities such as San Francisco, Boston, Baltimore, and Philadelphia, the business model proved to Wall Street investors that educational entrepreneurship was nonetheless potentially lucrative. By 2000, the popularity among venture capitalists in growth investments that "Make a Profit While Making a Difference" pointed those interested in the growing sector toward education as a socially acceptable cause, or investment vehicle, that fulfills a rising desire for "dual bottom line" investments that are both financially and socially profitable. What Whittle began to shape, define, and perfect relative to public/private educational relationships continued to grow and deepen.[11]

Essentially, those who championed the profit potential in the fields of "impact" or "dual bottom line" investing were looking for ways for their money to contribute to solving social issues and bettering society in some way. The field has exploded and today includes a variety of subgroups: venture philanthropists, think tanks, private businesses, lobbyists, advocacy organizations, and social entrepreneurs, to name a few. The Rockefeller Foundation is but one example, and in 2007 it began to investigate the amount of money needed to address social needs globally. Judith Rodin, then president of the Rockefeller Foundation, said that it "recognized, if you put a price tag on all the social and environmental needs around the world, it is in the trillions. All of the philanthropy in the world is only $590 billion. So, the needs far exceed the resources. The one place where there are hundreds of trillions of dollars is in the private capital markets. So, we, and others, began to wonder are there ways to direct private funding to some of these incredible needs."[12]

The synchronistic rise of organizations aimed at bettering the educational futures of poor children of color and investment strategies that championed a public good meant that during the period of time I was teaching at Princeton, the business of funding the business of education was thriving. While Chris Whittle's Edison School model of education reform relied on making money by offering to manage poor school districts of color, Wendy Kopp's Teach for America model found an equally lucrative niche in supplying creatively certified teachers to similarly cash-strapped and struggling school systems.

Even though Kopp, in the twenty-five or so years since Teach for America was founded, has rarely mentioned it, she was very well aware of the corporate interest in the business of education before she founded TFA. She knew about the goals of the education reform movement and its burgeoning business and corporate interests in the education of non-white children in poor areas, and in the double bottom line: investment opportunities that yielded both the profits and the "good works" investors were so interested in achieving. In a *New York Times* article from 1989 about Teach for America's founding, Kopp explains that she first thought about this at a 1988 meeting of business and student leaders to discuss ways to improve the schools. She said, "The idea just popped into my mind," and explained, "I realized that top students might go into teaching if we could find a way to recruit them. It seemed so simple. One problem with the education reform movement is that people don't talk to college students." Her identification of college students as a missing piece in a lucrative equation to privatize and reform public education would one day make her organization one of the biggest players in the field of educational reform.[13]

Teach for America: Rich Reformers, Poor Performers

While the differing stories of TFA and how and why it is important to teaching, education, and indeed the nation itself could surely take up the space of an entire book, what I want to highlight here is how its decision to focus on "fixing" struggling schools in economically vulnerable areas, and to use newly graduating college students as the primary agents to effect that change, truly cemented the relationship between college students and the wealthy business elite in the cause of educational entrepreneurship. As Kopp reflected on the genesis of the organization in the preface to her early memoir *One Day, All Children*, she recalled that

> The idea was to create a corps of top recent college graduates—people of all academic majors and career interests—who would commit to teach two years in urban and rural public schools and become lifelong leaders dedicated to the goal of educational opportunity for all. Called Teach for America, this corps would mobilize some of the most passionate, dedicated members of my generation to change the fact that where a child is born in the United States does a great deal to determine his or her chances in life. Schools in America's inner cities and poor rural areas have low academic achievement rates.

As she tells the story, the basic idea came to her as she struggled to come up with an idea for her senior thesis—a substantial research project all undergraduate students at Princeton have to complete in order to graduate. One morning while she was out jogging, her thoughts turned to the ways students who had attended East Coast prep schools or well-resourced, highly ranked public schools described the rigors of Princeton University as "cake." For them, college classes were relatively easy when compared to how hard they had been expected to work in their academically rigorous middle and high schools. Likewise, she knew that the students who came from poorer schools and neighborhoods did not have the same level of preparation. She saw that they struggled at Princeton. As she continued to reflect on those differing experiences, and with the looming reality of her impending graduation from college and her potential joblessness along with it, she hit upon the idea of adapting a previous proposal for a national teaching corps from the late 1960s. She decided to combine that idea with the basic structure of the Peace Corps and to name the whole thing Teach America (she added the "for" a few years later). As she

saw the new organization, in addition to potentially helping students in less well-resourced schools, the new "teacher corps would provide another option to the two-year corporate training programs and grad schools. It would speak to all of us college seniors who were searching for something meaningful to do with our lives. We would jump at the chance." Given the rapid and lucrative growth of TFA, in hindsight it is clear that Kopp was right.

At the same time, it is hard not to notice that the organization focused on privileged college students and their futures almost to the exclusion of the children the college students would teach. Kopp believed that "the corps members' teaching experiences were bound to strengthen their commitment to children in low-income communities and spur their outrage at the circumstances preventing these children from fulfilling their potential." Though she couldn't know if it were true, she posited that "many corps members would decide to stay in the field of education. And those who would go into other sectors would remain advocates for social change and education reform." She goes on to add, "They would become business leaders and newspaper editors, U.S. senators and Supreme Court justices, community leaders and school board members. And, because of their experience teaching in public schools, they would make decisions that would change the country for the better." She concludes, "The teacher corps would make teaching in low-income communities an attractive choice for top grads by surrounding it with an aura of status and selectivity." The vision for the organization says more about how college students would benefit from associating with the nascent organization than about the good they would do in the classroom.[14]

Teach for America was clearly a savvy and successful educational and business gambit (the organization generally charges between $2,000 and $5,000 in finder's fees for each teacher they supply to a school district), yet it is telling that Kopp's most pressing priority before familiarizing herself with the systems, history, or creative possibilities for teaching children who were so far removed from her own background was to recruit others who clearly understood the business potential of education. Which is to say, perhaps more important than who Kopp met with are the people with whom she did not meet. As she began to flesh out the specifics of her new venture to educate children in rural and urban areas who were at the bottom of the economic and educational ladder, she does not say that she met with parents, guardians, educators, teachers, or any number of stakeholders in the communities most likely to be impacted. Instead, she chronicles her meetings with representatives in business and finance whom she asks to help her get TFA off the ground.[15]

Kopp spent the spring of her senior year contacting the CEOs of a number of corporations and philanthropic organizations. While CEOs did not offer her meetings, she did converse with high-level executives at Xerox, IBM, AT&T, and Metropolitan Life, as well as with Stanley Kaplan, the founder of the test prep company. The first company to offer her financial assistance was Union Carbide, a Fortune 500 company that had just recently decided to begin funding education reform businesses in urban school districts. The company offered her free office space. Her next coup was to secure a meeting with the CEO of Merrill Lynch, who, as she tells the story, offered her $25,000 and free office space, telephone service, and access to a copy machine for five years (an in-kind investment worth upward of $500,000 during that period of time). The space was located in the McGraw-Hill building in New York. Harold McGraw, the educational textbook company's chairman emeritus, was one of the first members of her formal advisory board. The next company to agree to help her was Mobil Oil, whose vice president of administration offered Kopp a $26,000 seed grant. By the end of the summer, Kopp had recruited a board of advisers composed of high-level corporate executives, all of whom had in the past few years begun to invest in the "dual bottom line" area of education reform and to explore ways that they could offer poor students of color more choices while increasing their own bottom

line. Kopp's fund-raising was successful in part because her thinking was in line with that of others who had access to great wealth and political access. Once her business was up and running, she also met with Chris Whittle, the Edison Schools founder, to ask him both for business advice and to invest in her educational start-up. He ended up trying to recruit her to come work for him. She declined the offer.

Kopp surrounded herself with young men and women who were all recent college graduates and as privileged as she was. Many of those working with her would impact the educations of poor, non-white children for decades to come. One of her first recruits was her brother's roommate at Harvard University, Whitney Tilson. Tilson worked alongside Kopp as a co-founder of TFA for two years before decamping for a job working on Wall Street, and then, roughly ten years later, started his own hedge fund. However, he became and remained an outspoken advocate of corporate-approved education-reform strategies of the type TFA would come to exemplify. Unlike many of Wendy Kopp's other "first hires," Tilson, though having little in the way of experience with teaching or struggling urban communities himself, at least came from an "education family." Both his parents had been public school teachers for a time in Connecticut, and his father had earned a Ph.D. in education from Stanford University and spent most of his career doing teacher training and developing and managing educational projects in third world countries. As a child, Tilson spent at least six years living in Tanzania and Nicaragua. While his experiences with poor communities of color in the United States was severely limited, he did at least have sustained international experiences on which to draw, as well as parents with some experience in public school classrooms. Few others in the early group of TFA recruits could say the same. Most had come of age in neighborhoods where poverty rates were low and attended schools that were predominantly white and academically rigorous. Though bubbling over with good intentions, they'd had little opportunity to encounter dissenting views, research, personal experiences, or analysis.[16]

Others with Ivy League backgrounds joined the early group of entrepreneurs, one of whom, Richard Barth, Kopp would eventually marry. He was also a Harvard graduate and, after working with Kopp for a short while, left the organization to work with Chris Whittle's Edison Schools. Following his stint at Edison Schools, he later became the CEO of the KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) schools, founded by two early TFA corps members, Mike Feinberg and David Levin, both Yale University graduates.

Edison Schools pioneered a particular model of educational profiteering by offering to run failing urban schools and districts. TFA grew its business by promising to provide those same cash-strapped and struggling school districts with high-quality teachers. KIPP schools premised their business model on providing those districts with high-quality public charter schools. All of the players in these organizations were longtime friends and colleagues whose business interests were deeply intertwined. By 2006, they decided to join together to use their money and access to form an organization with the express purpose of lobbying politicians to ensure the federal government was more supportive and responsive to their educational businesses.[17]

By 2005, it was clear to many educational entrepreneurs that though the explosive growth in the business of segrenomic education had come to pass, it could not continue without policy changes at the state and federal levels. By that time, Wall Street's hedge fund industry was deeply entwined with public education via the charter school movement. As Justin Miller writes in his expansive article in the *American Prospect*, "Hedging Education," hedge fund "executives see charter-school expansion as vital to the future of public education. . . . Several hedge fund managers have launched their own charter-school chains and . . . You'd be hard-pressed to find a hedge fund guy who doesn't sit on a charter-school board." Whitney Tilson became involved with charter schools almost a decade after he left TFA to start his own hedge fund.

As he tells the story, his longtime friend and former employer Wendy Kopp invited him to visit one of the two original KIPP schools in the South Bronx, an area that was and remains one of the poorest congressional districts in the nation. According to his interview in the *American Prospect*, as soon as Tilson became acquainted with charter schools, he was immediately convinced that such schools were going to be the future of education. He started bringing many of his friends, most of whom were also Ivy League graduates and hedge fund investors, to the South Bronx to see the KIPP school. He says, "KIPP was used as a converter for hedge fund guys . . . it went viral." As Tilson explains, hedge fund managers almost exclusively come from well-off backgrounds and got the best educations in the world. Given that this was his background, as well as Kopp's, as well as that of the founders of Students for Education Reform, it is instructive that he says, "I personally never knew what the situation was like for families forced to attend their local school in the South Bronx, or Brooklyn. I didn't know of anyone who dropped out of high school or college—much less that there were high schools where half the students dropped out." Despite his ignorance of the people, situation, students, and successful schools functioning in such communities, Tilson and his friends decided to use their financial and political access and college networks to institutionalize their views of what change should look like. They resolved to change the political system to make it more sympathetic to the alternatively certified teachers from TFA and the burgeoning charter school movement so popular with Wall Street.

Dave Levin told Tilson that he was trying to open up more schools, but was running into political resistance from unionized teachers whom Levin believed felt threatened by the fact that KIPP was succeeding in educating students without them. He told Tilson that KIPP's lack of union involvement was also threatening to many in the Democratic Party as a whole, since union households had historically been part of the Democratic base. In the Miller interview, Tilson recalls he was shocked that anyone would try to impede the growth of KIPP and disappointed that Democratic politicians opposed the charter expansion he and his friends championed. In response, Tilson got together with a number of other "highly educated, wealthy investors to build a political instrument to simultaneously advance pro-charter education reform and beat back what they saw as oppressive teacher unions." He explained, "Our public-school system—including charter schools—is a governmental system, and that means at the end of the day, it's run by politicians." Tilson continued, "And politicians respond to votes and they respond to money. That means if you want to change a governmental system you've got to play the political game." Tilson named his new group Democrats for Education Reform (DFER). Tellingly, its mission was not to explore innovative ways to educate poor, disenfranchised students, but rather, its mission was "to break the teacher unions' stranglehold over the Democratic Party." Going forward, school choice efforts would have deep-pocketed, well-connected lobbyists.[18]

DFER's founders include executives working with successful Wall Street firms such as Anchorage Capital Partners (a group that manages/invests over $8 billion); Greenlight Capital (which manages $6.8 billion); and Pershing Square Capital Management, with $5.5 billion under its management. In terms of the difference it makes when political and educational reform is attempted by those with access to money and political power, if not hands-on experience, "DFER identified then-Senator Barack Obama and then–Newark Mayor Cory Booker as promising politicians willing to break with teacher unions." Of course, when Senator Obama became President Obama, DFER found that it had a seat at a much larger table. For starters, the group worked to convince him to appoint Chicago school superintendent Arne Duncan as secretary of education. DFER knew Duncan supported charter

school expansion and that he wouldn't mind shrinking the influence of unions in public education. Once Duncan took over, DFER lobbied the administration to pursue favorable education policies like Race to the Top, which rewarded states willing to support both the expansion of charter schools and the employment of non-unionized teachers. As Tilson reported to Miller, "All of a sudden, there were politicians all over the country who were willing to back education reform. We were able to raise more money, but there were also a lot more fields to play on."[19]

All of this success for the largest players in the educational reform field (Teach for America, Edison Learning, and KIPP Schools) came from ventures promising to help poor children improve educationally and to narrow the achievement gap for students in areas that were highly racially segregated without addressing the poverty or segregation with which those students were surrounded. In some ways, it was a twenty-first-century, updated version of the separate but equal doctrine the Supreme Court had struck down in the mid-twentieth century. This is surprising, because the TFA founders were highly educated at the time they began their educational efforts, and there is an abundance of research proving that racial and economic integration is one surefire way to close the achievement gaps in which they were all so interested. We will never know what might have happened if, instead of deciding to bring young, motivated college students into the teaching profession, offering to run highly segregated school districts, supporting the proliferation of racially and economically segregated charter schools, or lobbying federal officials to expand funds for educational programs that depend on racial and economic segregation for their growth, they had all spent their time, contacts, and money on finding ways to pursue the integration of the schools, neighborhoods, and cities that others claimed could not be integrated. Though the means to do it is an intractable twentieth-century problem, integration is one of the few strategies that has made systemic progress toward bringing about the kind of educational change that the close-knit group of educational reformers say is their goal.

Integration: A Road Not Traveled

In his 2013 article for the journal *National Affairs*, Frederick Hess points out what he describes as a single-minded focus on the creation of "90/90/90 schools"—schools where more than 90 percent of the students are low-income, more than 90 percent are of color, and more than 90 percent fail to meet set academic standards. He says, "School reformers, state and local education officials, exemplary charter-school operators, and managers of philanthropic foundations make it very clear that they are primarily in the business of educating poor Black and Hispanic children." He added, "Anyone who has spent much time in the company of school reformers in the past decade has seen this practice turn almost comical, as when charter-school operators try to one-up one another over who can claim the most disadvantaged student population." By way of example, it is worth noting that today, according to its website, the KIPP chain serves almost 80,000 students, 96 percent of whom are Black or Latino, and almost 90 percent of whom come from households that exist near the federal poverty level. In almost all major American cities, most Black and Latino students attend public schools where a majority of their classmates qualify as poor or low-income. Such neighborhoods and students are the engines of growth for both charter schools and other educational businesses. Segregation pays.[20]

This is unfortunate, because as Nikole Hannah-Jones has found in her investigative reporting for *This American Life* about our national retreat from racial and economic integration as the solution to unequal achievement levels, "all sorts of people are trying to rethink and reinvent education, to get poor minority kids performing as well as white kids. But there's one thing nobody tries anymore, despite lots of evidence that it works: desegregation."[21]

Indeed, today Black and Latino students are likely to live in neighborhoods that are heavily segregated by race and economics, attend underresourced schools, receive lower grades, score lower on standardized tests, drop out of high school at a higher rate, and face more suspensions. These differences are particularly stark when these students of color are also poor. Because public schools are funded mostly by local property taxes, wealthier communities have the resources to spend more for school buildings, teaching supplies, administration, extracurricular programs, and technology. Such communities can also pay higher salaries and attract the teachers and administrators that they want. As a result, U.S. public schools in economically privileged communities are among the highest-performing schools in the world. Unsurprisingly, poor schools are among the lowest. What that means is that the largest growth potential for those who see education as a business lies in areas with the highest poverty levels and lowest achievement scores.

A report issued in September of 2012 by the Civil Rights Project at UCLA confirms Hannah-Jones's thinking. It shows that school segregation for Blacks, Latinos, and poor students has returned to levels we haven't seen since the 1970s. The report summarizes the consensus of nearly sixty years of social science research on the harms caused by school segregation. Put simply, the research confirms that separate schools remain extremely unequal. This is because schools with concentrated poverty and high levels of racial segregation limit educational opportunities and outcomes as a result of less-experienced and -qualified teachers, high levels of teacher turnover, and inadequate facilities and learning materials. Test scores and college-level success are also far lower for students who attend racially segregated schools. And a recent book called *Taming the River* co-authored by Camille Charles, a sociologist at the University of Pennsylvania, found that when looking at achievement data for Black and Latino students in the top thirty colleges in the country, two-thirds of the difference between their scores and grades could be predicted based on how racially segregated the neighborhoods and high schools were from which they came.[22]

However, Kopp and the other educational reformers with whom she worked chose to focus on teaching, testing, and charter school expansion as the fix for all that was educationally broken. The benefit for poor students of color rarely matched the promises these educational reform organizations made or kept pace with the benefit for the groups of young, elite college students who raised so much money by promising long-term change both in schools and throughout our education system. And the money, as well as organizational growth, is substantial. By 2013, Teach for America could claim over 10,000 corps members and 28,000 alumni. At that point, its members had taught roughly three million students. In terms of funding, by 2015, according to its annual report, the organization had net assets of slightly more than $371 million.[23]

To be clear, the students attracted to working in such communities as teachers or in other roles are often passionate and sincere. They are not bad people. Given their lives and backgrounds, many just believe that their insight, hard work, and will are enough to overcome the poverty, social disorder, financial hurdles, and structured inequality that some argue necessarily doom less-privileged children to a life on the rungs of the second tier. There is not much research to support their beliefs. Nonetheless, such passion and belief, coupled with the need to find employment after graduation, meant that for a time, on some college campuses such as Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Williams, and Swarthmore, public education and the financing, testing, and reform of it became an extremely popular career choice. When my son graduated from Amherst College in 2013, during the commencement the school's president mentioned that equal numbers of graduating students would be pursuing careers in financial services as would be joining some type of business endeavor associated with public education. Schools like Amherst and Princeton were not the only ones sending significant numbers of their students into urban communities with which they might have previously been all but totally unfamiliar. The education pipeline between high-performing schools and early careers in education continues apace.[24]

For example, an article headline from 2013 in the *Yale Daily News*, the student paper, proclaimed that for Yale students, "Leaving the Classroom After Graduation Means Going Back to the Classroom—But as a Teacher." The article chronicles the ways that the school steadily ranked among the highest-contributing colleges for several years. "I think [TFA's] mission resonates with our students at Yale as a way they can have a profound impact on the lives of others, and at the same time expand their personal and professional growth," said the director of undergraduate career services Jeanine Dames in an email to the *Yale Daily News* in 2013. Zak Newman, a political science major interested in education reform, is quoted in the article as saying that he thinks TFA's success in recruiting Ivy League students has largely come from its ability to "insert itself into the mainstream" of postgraduate opportunities along with consulting and investment banking. TFA is now "up there with Citibank" as an option regularly considered by students, he said. While that model was clearly a success for the business conceived by Kopp and others, it has not come close to solving the riddle of educational inequality.[25]

As the next chapter shows, the issue is not white interest in Black education, or that there is something inherently wrong with the wealthy proposing educational strategies for the less fortunate. In our contemporary period, we hear that education is a civil right and unequal education a moral wrong. Between 1880 and 1930, wealthy businessmen, philanthropists, Wall Street traders, and government officials believed the same things and joined together to propose a variety of solutions aimed at ensuring that Black people in the American South had access to publicly funded education. They argued bitterly over the training of teachers qualified to teach in the region, quality, availability of school buildings, taxes versus philanthropic funding, and the relevance of vocational education and job acquisition as the most reliable indicator of whether an education was or was not successful. Even from its earliest days, Black education in the United States was as important to the financial interests of businesses as it is today.

2

WHITE PHILANTHROPY, BLACK EDUCATION

> I have never seen greater human sacrifices made for the cause of education. Children without shoes on their feet gave from fifty cents to one dollar and old men and old women, whose costumes represented several years of wear, gave from one to five dollars.
>
> —M.H. Griffin, 1925

Between 1921 and 1925, M.H. Griffin traveled the country on behalf of the Julius Rosenwald Building Fund to advise Black communities about how best to qualify for matching funds from the Rosenwald Foundation to build schools in their rural, southern communities. By the end of the night referenced in the epigraph above, when the community had given all they thought they had, which amounted to some $1,300, they still found themselves short almost $1,000 of the amount they needed to ensure they would qualify for matching funds. At that point, Griffin reported seeing a level of commitment and sacrifice that was emotionally moving to him. He wrote, "Colored men offered to pawn their cows and calves for the money and they did do just this thing. They made notes and gave for security pledges on their future crops . . . and their other belongings for the money. They raised in this way one thousand dollars, and we started out for a contractor."[1] This is just one story among many from the turn of the twentieth century chronicling the educational partnership between northern white