Urbanization and Persistent Educational Inequalities: The Need for Collective Action Towards Equity and Social Justice

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Abstract

This article examines the history, development, and issues of urban education in the United States. In an effort to address persistent educational inequalities and better support youth placed at risk because of existing disparities, this article connects interdisciplinary literature and illuminates the plight of high-poverty, public schools in urban settings. The author issues a call for collective action for social justice and educational equity.

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In order to address persistent and growing social inequalities in public schools and better support youth placed at risk because of these alarming disparities, 21st century educators must understand the history of urban education and how urbanization continues to impact teaching and learning in the United States. Urban public schools face numerous pressing issues on a daily basis due to the repercussions of urbanization, particularly concentrated economic disadvantage and racial segregation. Ross (2013) reminds us that concentrated poverty in urban areas exacerbates the challenges of being poor as "several challenges [in cities] persist… concentrated poverty, crime, affordable-housing shortages, a lack of investment in good public-transit systems, job loss, and segregation" (p. 1). Irrespective of the region, many families with school-aged children in urban public schools are living in severe poverty across the nation. Poverty and vulnerability are intensely intertwined as are poverty and low academic achievement. Urban public schools face historic conditions and challenges that impede the capacity to effectively educate our most vulnerable youth and often perpetuate systemic oppression. Therefore, understanding how urbanization and educational inequalities impact our youth is paramount.

It is my hope that building awareness of the history and impact of urbanization will assist in the eradication of persistent inequalities in our education system. Census data (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2015) reveal racial and ethnic minority populations are more likely to live in high-poverty, urban settings, which intensify existing educational inequalities. From substandard facilities to demonstrably insufficient curriculum, students in urban school districts are presented with numerous barriers to academic success and well-being. The complex realities facing urban public schools regularly compromise the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development of youth. Significant development issues increase at-risk situations and limit an individual's educational access and opportunities. Additionally, curriculum and instruction practices in urban public schools frequently operate under or are encouraged to function using a cultural deficit model that further impairs student learning and family-community relationships.

Although students in pre-K through college are impacted by poverty, this paper predominantly focuses on the secondary level (grades 6–12) and adolescents (ages 11–18). The focus on middle and high school youth is due to a marked absence of literature on adolescents, urban public education, and 21st century poverty. Additionally, the time period marked as adolescence already presents formidable physical, cognitive, and social-emotional challenges, which innately increase the number of youth placed at risk. Understanding the impact of urbanization on public schooling is a vital piece of ensuring that socially marginalized, adolescent learners are properly supported in the classroom. The National Middle School Association (2010) asserts that adolescents "deserve an education that will enhance their healthy growth as

lifelong learners, ethical and democratic citizens, and increasingly competent, self-sufficient individuals who are optimistic about the future and prepared to succeed in our ever-changing world" (para. 1). In this essay, I explore the history, development, and issues of urban public education in the United States.

The History of Urban Public Education in the United States

Although the United States has made significant advancements in many fields, public schools in urban environments continue to suffer from vast inequalities that have been present since their inception. As educators, we must be conscious of these inequalities and work together to address the needs of diverse learners, especially adolescents from socially marginalized populations. Discussing the urbanization of public schools from a historical lens first necessitates an understanding of the difference between *schooling* and *education*.

Although the terms schooling and education are often used interchangeably, the truth is that schooling and education are not synonymous. Bowles and Gintis (1976) define schooling as the process of reproducing social and class-based inequities. In fact, public schools in the United States were originally established to socialize immigrants (Cuban, 1993; Tyack, 2004; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Historically, public schools felt compelled to indoctrinate ethnic and racial minorities to transform these children into "ideal Americans" and maintain the status quo. Spring (2012) explains, "By the 1830's, Noah Webster's dream of a unified national culture continued to be threatened by freed and enslaved Africans, Native Americans, and a 'new menace' that appeared in the form of immigrant Irish" (p. 10). During the early 1900's, Cuban (1993) reports,

Most often superintendents, principals, and teachers—reflecting the larger society's dominant attitudes toward Eastern and Southern European newcomers—saw their job as that of helping children discard their ethnic cultures in order to embrace what educators saw as American ideals and habits. (p. 63)

Unfortunately, students in minority groups continue to be negatively impacted by what scholars such as Delpit (1988, 1995, 2012) refer to as the "culture of power"; this involves values and practices enacted in institutions such as schooling where the dominant culture is unfairly elevated resulting in barriers for those in minority groups.

Hale (2001) asserts that the majority of minority students, particularly African Americans and Hispanic young adults, attend urban public schools that fail to prepare students for the future. Research indicates that experiences during the adolescent years are a crucial turning point in an individual's life trajectory (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995). Unfortunately, according to a national report by Jiang, Ekono, and Skinner (2015), 19% (4.7 million) of all adolescents live in poor families with income below the federal poverty line, while 41% (9.9 million) live slightly above the poverty line. Together the poor and near-poor adolescent population accounts for 60% of all adolescents in the United States, and the majority of these adolescents living in poverty are members of minority groups attending public middle and high schools characterized as urban and struggling. Unfortunately, the process of socialization in schooling perpetuates the inequitable social structure that plagues urban education.

In contrast to the idea of schooling, education is the process of enlightening and stimulating an individual's mental, physical,

emotional, and spiritual growth (Dewey, 1897). According to Dewey (1916), education is "a fostering, a nurturing, a cultivating process" and "when the schools depart from the educational conditions effective in the out-of-school environment, they necessarily substitute a bookish, pseudo-intellectual spirit for a social spirit" (pp. 10–11). Unlike schooling, education is an active and rewarding process of continual growth. The Greek philosopher Socrates asserted that education was about enlightening students by extracting what was already within them. In fact, the word *education* comes from the Latin word *educare,* which means "to draw or lead out" (Harris, 1988). Research documents that the American education system emphasizes preparation for the workforce and often neglects the civic purposes of education (Cuban, 1993; Ravitch, 2014; Spring, 2012; Tyack, 1974, 2004). Bowles and Gintis (1976) assert,

> The structure of social relations in education not only inures the student to the discipline of the workplace, but develops the types of personal demeanor, modes of self-presentation, self-image, and social class identifications which are the crucial ingredients of job adequacy. Specifically, the social relationships of education… replicate the hierarchical divisions of labor. (p. 131)

As a result of North America's capitalistic structure, the majority of United States public schools, which educate over 90% of our children (Opportunity to Learn, 2015), are concerned with producing workers and consumers instead of enlightened citizens of a global society (Cuban, 1993; Haberman, 1991; Tyack, 2004; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Between 1820 and 1860, the rate of urbanization reached unprecedented heights, and many small towns in North America merged into metropolitan areas (Tyack, 1974).

According to Tyack, "While the total population grew about 33 percent per decade, the number of people in places of 2,500 or more (people) increased three times as fast" (p. 30). Along with this increase in population, schools began to face urban social crises. Sadly, as superintendents and politicians of the late 19th century addressed the problems of urban schools, they increasingly advocated for structural reform that marginalized poor, minority groups and resulted in giving the dominant group more power (Spring, 2012; Tyack, 1974; Wilson, 1987). Tyack reports, "across the nation many of the whites who controlled systems of public education excluded, segregated, or cheated black pupils" (p. 110).

As early as the 1800's, America's desire to create workers for a rapidly industrial nation materialized in the curriculum and design of public schools (Cuban, 1993). United States public schools began to implement factory models to teach children vocational skills and workplace standards. Cuban described a typical classroom in the 1890's as having "rows of desks bolted to the floor [facing] a teacher's desk and blackboard" (p. 24). Additionally, based on an 1892 report on urban schools, Cuban (1993) details, "instruction was married to drill and singsong recitations from children who lacked the faintest understanding of what they were saying" (p. 26), which Ravitch (2014) argues is also the unjust reality for today's economically disadvantaged. This combined with the current focus on standardized testing in the United States creates what Ravitch calls the "Walmartization of American education."

History reveals that Industrialism infiltrated the core of North American cities. Isenberg (2004) reports that local businesses began to lose customers. The development of large factories outside of the city, in turn, drove the creation of stores outside of the downtown

area. These stores were favored because of proximity to work and the convenience of easily accessible parking. This new economic division created a new residential division, the beginning of the creation of suburbs where redlining practices, or the discriminatory denial of home loans or insurance coverage, began to occur throughout the United States (Hanchett, 1998; Isenberg, 2004). Areas with high percentages of poor and minority residents were given high-lending risk ratings from the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC), and urbanization discouraged middle/upper-class families from investing in downtown areas (Hanchett, 1998; Isenberg, 2004).

To complicate matters, during the 1970's and 1980's many members of the working class moved out of the ghettos and into middle class White suburbs (Venkatesh, 2000; Wilson, 1987). The mass departure of the middle and working classes from cities intensified already concentrated inner-city poverty (Wilson, 1987). As residents moved out of cities and industrial development increased in the suburban areas, tax revenues in urban areas declined (Isenberg, 2004; Wilson, 1987). The most recent data available show the situation has only become worse. Cox (2013) reports more than 80% of new population growth in urban areas is below the poverty line. This amounts to 10 million individuals of the 43 million found in major metropolitan areas (1,000,000 or more residents) living below the poverty line. This number is not reflective of the near-poor. Cox also notes that while the rate of poverty in urban areas has decreased overall from pre-World War II levels, the impact per person has significantly increased.

The substantial exodus of the middle class and the consequent rise of highly concentrated poverty in large cities resulted in urban social isolation of impoverished individuals. Anyon (1997) states, "This political isolation of American cities—and their minority populations—is accompanied by the isolation of poorer urban residents from the economic mainstream of middle-class jobs" (p. 4). Throughout the history of the United States, urban education has faced an array of complicated challenges, including the aim to address contending interests and exist in a largely inequitable social structure.

The Current State of Urban Public Education
The current state of urban public education in America is tremendously grim. In fact, Noguera (2003) argues, "Failure is the word used most frequently to describe urban public schools in the United States, because the list of problems confronting these institutions is so long and daunting" (p. 3). Today urban school systems are large complex structures. The enormous size of urban public school systems makes dealing with intractable conditions, such as massive teacher shortages, even more complicated. Additionally, urban public school systems are generally managed as and by poorly functioning bureaucracies that are completely disconnected from the communities and children they are intended to serve.

Urban public schools also face severely inadequate funding, inherently resulting in poorly maintained facilities, scarce instructional supplies, larger class sizes, and lack of needed special services or programs (Anyon, 1997; Kozol, 1991; Spring, 2012). The consequences of poverty move public schools away from the essential attributes of successful education. Unfortunately, Anyon (1997) states, "despite greater need, 79% of large city districts studied by the Council of the Great City Schools are funded at a lower rate than are suburban schools" (p. 7) making the implementation of a supportive school environment challenging and in many cases, impossible. The problems faced by urban public schools are increasingly worsening (Anyon, 2014). Kretovics and Nussel

(1994) write, "At the same time the problems and issues that influence urban schools are being renamed, reviewed, or restructured, the underlying despair of poverty and disabling effects of educational and social disadvantages remain constant" (p. ix). As described in Kozol's (1985, 1991, 2005, 2012) work, devastating conditions of urban public schools have plagued urban schools systems for decades, and the impact of these conditions impedes the improvement of urban schools and achievement of educational equality. In Kozol's (2005) account of visits to numerous North American public schools in urban environments, he reports that the educational conditions of inner-city children have significantly deteriorated, and he labels the current resegregation practices of schools as American apartheid. The reality is that the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act and Race to the Top initiative, as authorized by the Bush administration and reauthorized by the Obama administration, have resulted in the removal of education as defined by Dewey in many urban public schools. Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morison (2006) estimate that half of all African American, Native American, and Hispanic students, most of whom attend urban schools, drop out of public high schools each year. Additionally, Kretovics and Nussel (1994) note,

> Much of the research regarding high school dropouts has indicated that many of the problems are located within the organization and structure of schools, the availability and commitment of teachers because of large classes and overcrowded schools, and the content of the curriculum. (p. 7)

It appears that many of the students who drop out of school are incredibly aware of the false promises of equitable education and life opportunities. To complicate matters, urban public schools are increasingly resegregating

(Kozol, 2005; Mickelson, 2001). Anyon (2005) argues that "one consequence of residential segregation in metropolitan areas is, of course, educational segregation: Minority children are enrolled in schools with much higher levels of poverty, as indicated by eligibility for free and reduced-price school lunches" (p. 80).

As a result of multifaceted political, social, economic, and cultural issues, urban schools struggle with an array of complicated problems including high-dropout rates, poor attendance, low test scores, higher rates of unqualified or lateral entry teachers, teacher shortages, lower teacher salaries, and district pressure to raise test scores. Indeed, the current problems facing urban public schools and the education of innumerable youth are both profound and deeply disconcerting.

The Role of Urbanization in Impacting Political Issues of Urban Public Schools

Urban development has always been shaped by various human actors, most specifically politicians (Isenberg, 2004). Unfortunately, biased political practices that affect urbanization have inequitable consequences for urban public schools in the United States. Politicians typically address issues and make policy decisions based on their own worldview. Tyack (2004) reports,

> During the last century most of the prominent policymakers in public education and most administrators of public school systems have been U.S. born, white, prosperous, male, and Protestant. As 'mainstream' leaders, they have generally assumed that their own beliefs about social diversity were authoritative. (p. 73)

This self-fulfilling mechanism only serves to maintain the status quo, which ultimately creates more issues for urban public schools.

The impact of urbanization on political forces is especially notable in education

reform. As urbanization proceeds, issues faced by urban public schools radically increase. In turn, politicians initiate and implement various school reforms. Unfortunately, the educational politics of school reform often create policies without practical means for achieving or measuring outcomes. Symbolic policies in education, such as NCLB, are used to advantage the dominant group (Smith, M. L., 2004) and simultaneously such policies encumber urban public schools. Kretovics and Nussel (1994) assert, "Poor and minority students are told that they have equality of educational opportunity, but the system is rigged against them" (p. 5). Lassiter (2005) demonstrates how federal initiatives, including subjective financial support, succeed in creating prosperous White suburbs and poverty-stricken urban centers. Wilson (1987) describes the impoverished realities of ghetto neighborhoods and argues that these urban centers "are populated almost exclusively by the most disadvantaged segments of the black urban community, that heterogeneous grouping of families and individuals who are outside the mainstream of the American occupational system" (p. 8). Moreover, Lassiter notes that our nation's political dome, in response to the civil rights movement and anti-bussing backlash of the past 20 years, has deemed resistance that is "color blind" as socially acceptable, even if this ideology results in massive suburban sprawl and rampant urban poverty.

Our nation's schools are clearly in need of political realignment and public accountability. Dewey (1916) asserts that in education, children must actively participate in social situations and incessantly reconstruct experiences. Dewey further states, "The required beliefs cannot be hammered in; the needed attitudes cannot be plastered on" (p. 13). Unfortunately, political mandates, such as No Child Left Behind, discourage students attending public schools in urban systems from being active participants that take ownership of their own education. According to Kozol (2005), most urban public schools require students to spend a vast majority of their time listening to lectures and filling out low-level worksheets. Unfortunately, many teachers in high-poverty, urban public schools comply with unjust mandates because of district pressure and unmanageable circumstances such as overcrowded classrooms and shortage of support staff. My own research over the past decade confirms that students attending high-poverty, public schools in urban environments are required to recurrently practice mundane tasks that produce no distinguishable academic improvements (Mickelson & Shankar-Brown, 2008; Shankar-Brown, 2012, 2013a, 2013b; Yon & Shankar-Brown, 2009). My research also illuminates that socially marginalized students attending high-poverty, urban schools experience increased educational disconnect, in contrast with children attending economically advantaged schools who are encouraged to engage in higher-level thinking, use creativity, collaborate, and experience personalized instruction. Additionally, students enrolled in economically advantaged public schools have far more resources, higher quality instruction, and greater teacher stability.

Urban public schools are haunted by the illusion of the democratic process. Although education reform in urban environments frequently sounds and even feels good to the general public and those individuals working in social institutions, the fact is that these educational reforms accomplish very little and often make matters worse. Frequently, provisions of various political acts increase problems for urban schools and amplify the social inequities experienced by urban students. According to M. L. Smith (2004) and Anyon (2014), politics has its full grasp upon the educational system in America. Although

the current issues facing urban public schools have tenacious roots that are a part of a larger social milieu, I believe that politics are the manifestation of these recurrent social battles. The role of urbanization in impacting political issues of schooling in urban environments must be recognized and addressed; otherwise, urban public schools will continue to deteriorate and perpetuate social inequities that result in millions of youth being placed at risk.

The Role of Urbanization in Impacting Social Issues of Urban Public Schools

Urbanization plays a crucial role in impacting social issues of public schooling in urban environments and contributes to the profound social challenges that urban students endure. Urbanization primarily affects social issues of urban schools by increasing racial inequities. For example, the racial isolation of urban centers has resulted in resegregation of public schools in the United States. The sad legacy of race relations is all too visible in major cities around the United States, such as New Haven, Baltimore, Atlanta, Charlotte, Miami, Los Angeles, Houston, Las Vegas and our nation's capital, Washington, DC (Anyon, 2014). Bayor (1996) reports that discriminatory social practices are evident all over Atlanta, specifically when one examines current public housing placement, business development, and school segregation. Racially separated neighborhoods are also apparent in Charlotte (Hanchett, 1998). As in many large cities, Black families in Charlotte have seen a severe resurgence of physical and educational isolation.

Charlotte's renowned urban development and bussing policies have heightened the effects of racial isolation and racial discrimination in this city (Smith, S., 2004). Several public schools in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg district have disproportionately high concentrations of poverty and significant numbers of African American and Hispanic students (Smith, S.,

2004). Henig, Hula, Orr, and Pedescleaux (1999) assert, "Nearly two out of every three (65 percent) black children in the United States attend a high-poverty school, compared to 27 percent of white children; thus, the odds are stacked against African American educational success" (p. 12). It has been over half of a century since the 1954 United States Supreme Court ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education*, and yet, public schools across America, particularly in the South, are rapidly resegregating. Mickelson (2001) notes that both the direct and indirect effects of segregation in public schools undermine the academic opportunities of Black and Hispanic students. Steven Smith (2004) reveals that various policies enacted by the school board and county commission have had serious consequences for urban students, as many of these policies have encouraged the development of affluent White neighborhoods and selectively used student assignment to create a resegregated school system.

From a historical social lens, it becomes quickly clear that public schools have been structured for children to excel or fail based on their class, ethnicity, gender, and race. The schooling process largely devalues the culture and experiences of minority children and places them at an automatic disadvantage (Spring, 2012). The coincidence between poverty and race cannot be denied. Sadly, innumerable urban Black students are surrounded by vastly impoverished conditions, both in schools and their neighborhoods. Kretovics and Nussel note that poor minorities are

> blamed for the poverty into which they were born, underserved by the vehicle that claims to offer hope of mobility, and then blamed again for their lack of success in a system that is structured to virtually ensure their failure. (p. 5)

Black and Latino students generally attend urban public schools with atrocious conditions, including unclean bathrooms and low-level curriculum, and these students are repeatedly punished in school for not being in the dominant culture (Carter, 2005; Ferguson, 2000; Kozol, 2005). In many public schools, Black males are disproportionately charged with out-of-school suspension and four more times as likely as their White peers to receive in-school suspension (Center for Civil Rights Remedies, 2012). Black and Latino students are also frequently placed in lower tracks and assigned to special education classes at a higher rate than their White peers. Unfair tracking practices have many consequences for poor minority students, especially those attending urban public schools where expectations are already more likely to be low. Oakes (2005) reports that students in high-track classes are much more likely to receive engaging and challenging curriculum, such as Shakespeare and creative projects, and students in lower-tracks are typically given low-level curriculum such as reading kits and dull worksheets. Moreover, Mickelson (2003) notes, "Among whites, the racial stratification of school structures signals their privilege; among minorities, it may cue oppositional attitudes or stereotype threat that contribute to racial discrimination in education" (p. 1102). Ferguson (2000) describes schools as powerful institutions that "create, shape, and regulate" social identities (p. 2).

The Role of Urbanization in Impacting Economic Issues of Urban Public Schools

Urbanization plays a critical role in creating the economic issues that burden urban schools. A recent study by Sirin (2005) reveals that family socioeconomic status is the primary determinant of school financing in the United States. As a result of concentrated poverty, urban districts lack a sufficient tax base, and schools in urban areas receive fewer tax dollars than suburban schools. Anyon (2005) states, "Poor and minority students have fewer state and local dollars to spend per student than districts with the least number of poor and minority students" (p. 63). Additionally, Sirin notes, "nearly half of all public school funding is based on property taxes within a school district" (p. 445). Children recognize funding inequities early on, as exemplified by various letters that Kozol (2005) received from urban students. For instance, a young girl named Elizabeth wrote, "It is not fair that other kids have a garden and new things. But we don't have that" (p. 40). Similarly, an eight-year-old student named Alliyah told Kozol,

> We do not have the things you have. You have Clean things. We do not have that. You have a clean bathroom. We do not have that. You have Parks and we do not have Parks. You have all the thing and we do not have all the thing. (p. 39)

Similarly, my work with school-aged children experiencing homelessness reveals children's awareness of social and economic divides (Mickelson & Shankar-Brown, 2008; Shankar-Brown, 2012, 2013a, 2013b; Yon & Shankar-Brown, 2009). Some urban schools have had to take drastic measures because of insufficient financial resources, such as locking down libraries and removing elective courses (Kozol, 2005). Urbanization creates inequitable economic structure in urban schools and these inequities have several, profound consequences for urban students.

Due to advances in technology, manufacturing positions in urban areas are scarce. However, research indicates that urban public schools still prepare students for industrial jobs (Anyon, 1997; Sugrue, 2005; Wilson, 1987). Poor economic conditions impacted by urbanization result in insufficient

school systems and ultimately trap urban students in a cycle of poverty. Lack of appropriate qualifications, lack of industrial positions, and prejudice towards poor minority students lead to the growth of what Wilson (1987) calls the underclass, which suffers from unemployment and social isolation. Tyack (2004) concludes,

> So long as school resources continue to reflect the gross inequalities of wealth and income in this country, major achievement gaps will persist between the prosperous and the poor, and too many students will continue to be, now, as in the past, thoroughly trained for failure. (p. 126)

Anyon (2005, 2014) argues that education is a product of economic society, and in fact, urban schools reflect and influence the disparities that exist among varying income levels in the United States. America is a capitalistic nation that thrives on competition, and therefore, middle/upper-class citizens are unlikely to advocate for any reform that would level the economy. Unfortunately, Anyon reveals that inner-city schools call for radical reform, as urban public schools can only improve after the economic systems that fuel America's educational system have been restructured. While urban public school failures are often attributed to racial differences, Anyon (1997, 2005, 2014) and Wilson (1987) note that urban public school issues stem from economic inequities. For instance, Anyon (2014) reports, "even in metropolitan areas with excellent public transit systems, less than half the jobs are accessible by public transit" (p. 85). The current state of urban public schools necessitates the economic development of urban areas including fair housing policies, increased employment, adequate transportation, and affordable housing (Anyon, 2005; Smith, M. L., 2004).

Beyond impacting urban public schools collectively, economic influences affect urban students on a local level. The product of urban students receiving inadequate education, frequently because of enormous economic disparities, results in perpetuating the cycle of poverty. Research indicates that parental wealth, income, and educational attainment directly correlate with students' academic achievement (Lareau, 2003; Mickelson, 2001), and research further indicates that academic achievement affects an individual's life opportunities (Dearden, Ferri, & Meghir, 2002). The opportunity gap is more visible today than ever before. Recently published data from *The Equality of Opportunity Project* (Chetty & Hendren, 2015) clearly demonstrates the unconscionable disparities in our nation, including the link between education quality and ZIP code. The effects of social class on education immensely limit life opportunities for children of poverty, while privileging children from middle/upper-class statuses. Lareau (2003) reports,

> In terms of income and wealth, the richest 10 percent of families in our society own almost 80 percent of all real estate (other than family homes), more than 90 percent of all securities (stocks and bonds) and about 60 percent of all the money in bank accounts. (p. 28)

Therefore, the academic gap between rich and poor children can largely be explained by the economic variance among parents. Sirin (2005) notes that families with higher socioeconomic status are able to provide more resources for their children, including increased social capital, and this places middle/upper-class children at an automatic advantage, especially when compared to economically deprived students. Children from middle/upper-class families often participate

in extracurricular activities to enrich their educational experience. Lareau (2003) points out that many urban students who come from poor and working-class homes do not have the necessary transportation or additional funds to enroll their children in extracurricular groups, such as a sports team or drama club. Parents from lower socio-economic levels are typically preoccupied with the hardships of survival (Hart & Risley, 1995). Moreover, the Opportunity to Learn (OTL) Campaign (2015) notes that racially and economically disadvantaged students have a 51% "opportunity to learn" compared to their advantaged White peers.

The Role of Urbanization in Impacting Cultural Issues of Urban Public Schools

Urban public school systems have the task of educating a tremendously diverse group of students. Unfortunately, cultural differences between institutions and students are rarely considered in educational policies and the management of urban schools, and this blatant neglect creates myriad issues. The demographics of most large cities are reflected in their urban public schools. Unfortunately, as a result of biased school structure, the cultural differences of Black and Latino students and class differences of low-income students put already marginalized students at an educational disadvantage. Through a variety of educational methods, such as cultural genocide and assimilation practices, American public schools have deculturalized minority groups, including Blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, and Asians, and continue to do so.

For many urban students, cultural issues are at the forefront of their schooling and educational experiences. Differing cultural customs and proxemics can lead to classroom tensions between student and teacher (Hutchison, 2006) and this, in turn, can fuel the achievement gap as well as teacher transfer rates, because both parties can feel disrespected (Delpit, 1995). In fact, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) argue that many racial and ethnic minority children have low academic achievement because they evade the "burden of acting white." According to Ogbu (2004), African American students often develop oppositional identity or resist the White, middle-class structure of American schools. As discussed earlier through the work of Wilson (1987), urbanization has resulted in concentrated areas of poor African Americans. Yet while it is estimated that the majority (Anyon, 2014) of the students attending urban schools are members of a minority group, the majority of teachers in America are White females (Delpit, 2012). The cultural dissonance between teachers and urban students inherently complicates issues encountered at urban schools.

Unfortunately, many teachers are ill-prepared to work with diverse student populations in urban environments (Cole, 1995; Delpit, 2012). Educators working in urban public schools are faced with numerous challenges including poverty, cultural diversity, violence, overcrowding, and a multitude of languages being spoken in school (Kretovics & Nussel, 1994). Successful teaching in urban schools is different from teaching in suburban environments, as suburban schools generally have more homogeneous student populations, more parental support, and more stable student populations (Anyon, 2014; Kozol, 2005). Noguera (2003) argues that students in urban schools need caring, committed, and culturally knowledgeable teachers. Fuller (1994) notes, "Preparing pre-service teachers for their future classrooms becomes more complex as the school population becomes more diverse. Changing demographics require changing teacher education strategies" (p. 270).

The middle-class norms used and required in public schools, such as language, often devalue minority students. Major (1994) states, "Though many of the words and phrases may sound harsh and even obscene to outsiders, [black slang] is essential to the cultural enrichment of African Americans" (p. 101). White teachers naturally correct the language of minority students; however, Delpit (1995) explains, "forcing speakers to monitor their language for rules while speaking, typically produces silence" and "correction may also affect students' attitudes toward their teachers" (p. 51). The result of racial isolation in the urbanization process innately leads to cultural conflicts between the dominant groups and dominated groups (Spring, 2012).

Curriculum and reform efforts that do not acknowledge the culture of minority students indicate disrespect on the part of administrators and policymakers (Anyon, 1997). Sadly, Spring (2012) notes, "From colonial times to today, educators have preached quality of opportunity and good citizenship, while engaging in acts of religious intolerance, racial segregation, cultural genocide, and discrimination against immigrants and non-whites" (p. 2). Unfortunately, the fact remains that public schools in the United States favor the conditions and norms of the wealthy and middle-class. Lareau (2003) asserts, for middle-class families, "the boundaries between home and institutions are fluid" (p. 165). Public schools operate from a middle-class frame of reference, and these "middle-class norms" are rarely taught to children living in poverty. Lee and Bowen (2006) report that students from low-income, minority families lack necessary cultural capital to excel in school, and schools do not assist students in learning the rules of culture and power that permeate North American society. Anyon (1997) notes that the middle-class curriculum and language isolates and alienates the urban student. Urban schools will continue to struggle with cultural issues as long as middle-class institutions refuse to acknowledge and welcome the diverse cultures of their student populations.

The Future of Urban Public Education

Urbanization has been taxing on schools and communities and has profoundly contributed to the political, social, economic, and cultural issues that plague urban public schools. Urbanization has exacerbated the issues faced by poor and minority children, particularly young adolescents, and continues to shape and burden urban schools. The current social structure of U.S. public schools is as inequitable as the society that it reflects. The false promises of "American" education boil and fester in the vast majority of urban public schools, as schooling privileges certain children and marginalizes others. Nonetheless, Kretovics and Nussel (1994) remind us that "irrespective of the many social, economic, and political problems that face urban communities, the schools exist for the purpose of educating all children" (p. xi).

We must address the inequitable social structure, biased institutional practices, effects of urbanization, and intolerable conditions of urban public schools as society and millions of children's lives are at stake. Fortunately, there are committed educators around the globe working towards building equitable learning environments and advocating for the learning needs of *all* students. While the future of urban education is uncertain and appears bleak, those of us committed to education (e.g., teacher educators, teachers, administrators, counselors, social workers, parents/guardians, members of the community) have the opportunity to improve the devastating plight of urban public schools. We must work collectively and continue to march together for equity in education for our youth, who as

President John F. Kennedy (1963) stated, "are the world's most valuable resource and its best hope for the future" (para. 1).

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