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The Effect of Segregated Schools  
on African American Students at Dr. King Applied Magnet School  
in Syracuse, New York

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts  
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by

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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During the 20-year period from 1934 – 1954 the Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower administrations created federal housing policies that made it easier for white middle-class families to secure home owner loans. These policies expanded the suburbs and simultaneously created segregated African American neighborhoods in urban areas, such as Syracuse, N.Y. Housing segregation gave birth to segregated schools. These segregated public schools created negative learning outcomes for African American students for several decades. During the 1960s Syracuse closed two of the three predominantly African American schools to force integration. Although African American parents fought to keep Dr. King open and demanded the school district integrate the student population, Dr. King School remained segregated due to the lack of cooperation from white middle-class parents, who

refused to allow their children to be bused there. The unsuccessful attempts to integrate Dr. King School aren't the only failures tethered to it. It has secured a position on New York State's "Failing Schools" list for more than 10 consecutive years during this century. The schools placed on this list have consistently failed to prepare more than 10 percent of their students to demonstrate proficiency in Math and English Language Arts on state exams.

The thesis of Sharlene McKenzie is approved.

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my intelligent, talented, and beautiful daughter, Akila. The two years that you attended a school in the Syracuse City School District opened my eyes to the numerous disparities that existed in SCSD schools. Your experience triggered the journey I have begun. I appreciate your perseverance, and I thank you for your unconditional love and your endless support. Even though I moved you across country in the middle of your high school career, you have never failed to encourage me and believe in me. You are such a blessing to my life. I love you.

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## Introduction

When Dr. King penned the words, “separate was always unequal, and partly because the very idea of separation did something to my sense of dignity and self-respect” (King, 1958, p. 7), he was referring to his experience with the de jure segregation of the South under Jim Crow laws. This statement echoed the ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court that stated “segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children” in the *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* decision on in 1954. Despite the Court’s conclusion about the negative impact of segregated public schools on African American children during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, and the decades of struggle to desegregate U. S. public schools, the rate of racial imbalance in public schools during this decade mirrors the rate that existed prior to the Civil Rights era (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014). Although the post-*Brown* segregation, known as de facto segregation, results from housing patterns, rather than the “separate but equal” legislation known as Jim Crow laws that emerged as a consequence of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision in 1896, it has significantly affected the academic outcomes of the African American students attending segregated schools in Syracuse, NY.

The racially imbalanced enrollment in public schools in Syracuse, as well as in many other urban areas in the U.S., occurred as a result of housing regulations that determined the racial makeup of the neighborhoods. Through federal programs initiated under President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal, President Harry S. Truman’s Housing Act of 1949, and President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s Housing Act of 1954, racially exclusive neighborhoods were created by boundary lines and real estate practices that intentionally concentrated African American populations in specific areas of cities (Grant, 2011; Rothstein & Santow, 2012). These federally sanctioned policies routed interstate highways through African American

neighborhoods that were located near downtown areas, such as Syracuse's 15<sup>th</sup> Ward. As significant portions of African American populations were forced into public housing, white residents fled to all-white suburbs. Subsequently, the only new public housing projects were built in African American neighborhoods (Rothstein & Santow, *A Different Kind of Choice: Educational inequality and the continuing significance of racial segregation*, 2012). Housing segregation intensified as the four housing policies enacted between 1934 and 1954 under Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower, which made it easier for white Americans to secure loans to purchase homes in the suburbs, prevented African Americans from acquiring the same mortgage loans. In addition, exclusive zoning laws requiring large lot sizes and banning multiunit developments successfully prevented African Americans from relocating to the suburbs (Rothstein & Santow, 2012; Grant, 2011; Hoffman A. , 2000). This housing segregation led to neighborhood schools that were also segregated according to race.

During the civil rights activism of the 1960s, when the Syracuse school district was forced to address the issues of segregated schools and their impact of African American students, white parents resisted sending their children to schools located in predominantly African American neighborhoods. Their resistance led the school board to close certain schools in order to force integration. In this paper, I examine the effect that racially segregated schools have on students in the Syracuse City School District (SCSD). I will show how the housing segregation, caused by federal policies, led to the residential patterns that created the segregated schools that limited learning opportunities for African American students living in the City of Syracuse. Additionally, I will provide an overview of the impact school segregation has had on the academic achievement of African American students in Syracuse, N.Y. from the beginning of the school boards attempts to integrate Syracuse public schools to the current decade. This will

show the growing impact of race and class segregation in the Syracuse City School District and its effect on the learning opportunities for African American students.

A significant occurrence in the early years of the desegregation of Syracuse public schools was the improved academic performance of the African American students who transferred from predominantly African American schools to predominantly white schools. After the integration of the first predominantly white schools in the district, school board officials reported academic achievement that outweighed that of their peers who remained in the predominantly African American schools. The students' improved academic performance led the school board to abandon the compensatory program that had been sought to avoid integrating schools and seek school integration as a policy (Stout & Inger, 1968). However, decades of shifting population recreated intensely segregated schools (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014), hindered the district's ability to create racially balanced school populations, and set Syracuse apart, as the only the school district in Onondaga County struggling with this issue. Additionally, Syracuse, one of New York State's five largest school districts, ranks ninth among the country's most segregated school districts (Kucsera & Orfield, 2014).

The achievement disparities between the students in the SCSD and those who attend schools in the other school districts in Onondaga County are reported yearly when the governor's office publishes its list of failing schools. Eighteen of the SCSD's 34 schools are on the 2014 NYS "Failing School" Report list, while none of the other Onondaga County school districts are on the list. An additional disparity between the SCSD students in the failing schools and their peers in neighboring schools is poverty levels. The poverty rate in the city of Syracuse is more than twice that of the overall population of Onondaga County, but for school age children, it is almost triple that of the county (CNY Fair Housing, 2014). For Dr. King Magnet School in

particular, 91 percent of the students qualified for the free and reduced lunch program. By contrast, the students in the Moses Dewitt Elementary and Long Branch Elementary schools are twenty-four percent and forty-four percent, respectively. The students in these schools from neighboring districts also scored significantly higher on the state proficiency tests (New York State, 2017).

This paper examines the effect that segregated schools have had on the African American students at Dr. King Magnet School in Syracuse, NY from the 1960s to the present time. The literature review will provide a framework for studying effects of the racial segregation on African American students. It will focus on the ways in which educators, administrators, and policy makers contribute to the schooling experienced by students in segregated schools. The roles played by those holding these positions have been significant to the outcomes of the students in Syracuse's public schools. Chapter two provides a brief synopsis of the federal actions that contributed to de facto segregation as it exists in Syracuse and in other urban areas in the North. This lays the foundation for understanding the segregated communities and schools detailed in chapter three.

Chapter three focuses on Syracuse, N.Y. and the displacement of its African American community when urban renewal led to the creation of housing projects that concentrated crime and poverty into one area. This led to the segregated public schools that become the focus of the subsequent chapters. During the Civil Rights Movement leaders in Syracuse pushed for the desegregation of the public schools. Chapters four recounts the various attempts to racially balance Syracuse's public schools and the failure to ever achieve racial balance at Croton Elementary School, which later became Dr. King Applied Science Magnet School. As African American parents became dissatisfied with bearing the burden of desegregation due to resistance

from white parents over white students being bused to predominantly African American schools, the school board focused their efforts on the voluntary transfer of students. This left Croton Elementary School, the only remaining predominantly African American school, segregated and overcrowded for a significant period of time. Even when overcrowding was no longer an issue, this school remained segregated. Croton Elementary School, renamed Dr. Martin Luther King Elementary School on the first anniversary of his assassination, is the focus of the issue of segregated schools and its effect on African American students in Syracuse. Croton/Dr. King Elementary never achieved the school boards definition of racial balance, meaning it remains segregated. As of 2015 it was on the New York State governor's "Failing Schools" list for the tenth consecutive year. The fallout from the school's persistent failure to prepare students to reach the level of proficiency on the math and English Language Arts. (ELA) state tests is discussed in chapter five.

This issue of segregated schools, and their effect on the African American students in the Syracuse City School District in general, and Dr. King Magnet School in particular is the focus of this paper. Specifically, I seek the answer to the question, what effect have segregated schools had on the African American students in the SCSD? After examining five decades of school board decisions, their impact on African American students and the continuous segregation that has become the ironic legacy on Dr. King Elementary School, it is evident that racial and economic segregation has had a detrimental effect on the academic achievement of African American students. The adverse effects caused by segregation were a significant to the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision that ended the Jim Crow mandates that caused the segregation of schools in the southern United States. In Syracuse, and at Croton/King School in particular, the ongoing practices that kept African American students segregated within the school system also

created a system that caused inferior educational opportunities and academic outcomes for African American students.

## Literature Review

Chief Justice Warren's statement in the *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka Kansas* decision that, "Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children" is central to the purpose of this chapter. Even though the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision supported the NAACP's assertions that separate was not equal and that segregation had a negative impact on African American students, segregated public schools continue to attempt to educate African American students in many U.S. urban public schools. The de facto segregation in the post-Brown era that results from housing patterns, rather than laws that mandate racially separate facilities, continues to hinder equitable educational opportunities for African American students. Urban housing patterns have caused a significant number of urban students to attend schools that are intensely segregated by race, meaning they have an enrollment of white students that is 10 percent or less. Additionally, many African American students also attend schools in which there is "double segregation" – segregation by both race and poverty. African American and Latino students attending schools that are doubly segregated are less likely to achieve the level of success as their peers in middle class schools with majority white and Asian populations (Orfield, Ee, Frankenberg, & Siegel-Hawley, 2016).

Reardon (2016) considers four dimensions or distinctions of de facto segregation that can possibly effect academic outcomes for students. These include segregation between schools, between districts, between residential areas, and between socioeconomic statuses. All four types of segregation have manifested in the SCSD at various times during its history, although the current segregation is between residential areas and socioeconomic status. Reardon (2016) emphasizes that de facto segregation is as powerful as de jure segregation, thereby making de

facto segregation as urgent a matter in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as de jure segregation was in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Racial segregation proved to be a powerful predictor of academic achievement, even though there were other factors contributing to a lack of academic success (Reardon, 2016). These include poverty rates among the students, peer influence, and lack of challenging curriculum.

In the high poverty schools learning opportunities were affected by many of the same issues found in segregated schools nationwide – outdated text books, insufficient technology, scarce science equipment, and inadequate classroom resource materials (Hudley, 2013; Reardon, 2016). Additionally, there was less access to challenging curriculum, fewer advanced placement and honors courses at the secondary level, inadequate facilities, and an inability to retain highly skilled teachers. These schools tended to have higher instances of violent or disruptive behavioral incidents among the students. Reardon also makes a connection between peer influence and student achievement. He states that schools with high populations of low achieving students can lead to the altering of academic expectations, thereby limiting the opportunities for all students to experience advanced level curricula (Reardon, 2016).

Although the only correlation that Reardon found between residential segregation and educational outcomes was its contribution to the segregation patterns of schools, there was a significant link between race and poverty that affected student achievement. Since studies show that an underprivileged African American student is more likely to attend a school that is segregated by race, intensely segregated urban schools also tend to have high poverty rates. The difference between white students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and African American and Latino students with the same socioeconomic status is white students are not likely to be concentrated in high poverty areas as African American and Latino students are (Carnoy &

Garcia, 2017). This allows white students have exposure to different learning opportunities, not being forced to attend high poverty schools based on housing patterns. This leads to the conclusion that racially integrating schools in densely segregated urban areas is an effective way of eliminating some of the disparities that link racial segregation, poverty, and low student achievement (Reardon, 2016).

As stated earlier, the multiple dimensions of segregation studied by Reardon (2016) have been displayed in the SCSD. They will become evident later as the history of racial segregation in the district is chronicled. The issues of racial segregation between residential areas and segregation by socioeconomic status surfaces at Dr. King Magnet School, and most of the other persistently failing schools in the Syracuse City School District (SCSD). This double segregation has been a perpetual problem at Dr. King Magnet School, which was built near a low-income housing project in an African American neighborhood. It was the only intensely segregated African American elementary school that remained racially imbalanced after years of efforts to integrate the SCSD schools. This was largely due to the actions of policy makers whose decisions favored the demands of white middle-class parents and ignored those of civil rights activists and the African American parents in the district.

Researchers have found that the imbalance of political power that hindered the African American parents in the Syracuse community is experienced by parents from marginalized communities in other parts of the country, who want to influence the decisions that impact their children's education. Noguera (2003) attributed the lack of political influence available to the parents with lower socioeconomic status as a contributing factor to the poor quality of education the students in Oakland's failing public schools. Despite the fact that the majority of the students in Oakland's failing public schools were from low income households, this group wielded less

influence with policymakers than the middle-class parents and the teachers' union. The latter groups had access to financial and legal resources that the low-income parents did not (Noguera, 2003). This left parents from the high poverty, segregated communities powerless when trying to influence the decision-making progress

The chapter on Syracuse will demonstrate how the imbalance of political power played a key role in the racial struggles that granted white parents a victory when it the Syracuse School Board considered any plans to bus their children to schools located in African American neighborhoods. Even when African American parents and local activists voiced concerns over desegregation being totally reliant of the movement of African American students, policy makers avoided busing white students to predominantly African American schools. This decision resulted from the actions taken by white parents, who demonstrated their dissatisfaction with the district's busing of white students by enrolling their children in private schools. Middle-class parents in Oakland and in Syracuse could leverage the power to remove their children from schools in districts where officials would not cater to their needs. Parents who lacked this option were held captive by schools that provided low quality education (Noguera, 2003).

Additionally, the African American parents in the Syracuse community lacked the power of influence known as social capital. Social capital is one reason that middle class students have access to opportunities that students from a lower economic status do not. Historically, the informal networks that provides information, contacts, college and career opportunities, and preparation to succeed in a society strongly influenced by white middle class norms (Orfield, Ee, Frankenberg, & Siegel-Hawley, 2016) have been unavailable to many African Americans in Syracuse because those in positions of power viewed African Americans as unqualified to sit on the boards that exercised the power to make decisions in the community

(Stamp & Stamp, 2008). This exclusion denied them access to boards controlling public, private, and voluntary organizations that influenced their quality of life, and gave the policymakers and school authorities unchecked control over the quality of education and the educational outcomes of the African American students.

The deficit paradigm that has historically limited the influence of African Americans in the various governing arenas in Syracuse parallel an issue that researchers have connected to low achievement for African American students. Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott and Garrison-Wade (2008) attributed the low academic performance of African American students attending a predominantly white school to the negative perceptions white teachers had, which were based on the race of the students. They concluded that lower expectations of the academic potential of African American students, lack of respect for the students' family, and a devaluing of the students' culture have detrimental effects on the students' academic success (Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott, & Garrison-Wade, 2008). Although the students in this study preferred the environment of the predominantly white school to that of the racially segregated schools they attended previously, they felt their learning experiences were significantly impacted by teachers who showed little to no respect for their culture and made negative assumptions about them based on racial stereotypes. The students also felt the administrators were quick to pass judgement on them because of their race. This led to negative interactions between the African American students and the administrators. The researchers concluded that the white administrators' and the white teachers' failure to appreciate the cultural differences of the students and the students' failure to assimilate into the dominant culture led to the disparate treatment the African American students received (Douglas, et al., 2008).

This issue of teacher/student cultural mismatch was a concern for the former SCSD superintendent, Sharon Contreras. Contreras, who believed there is an academic value in providing teachers whose culture matches that of the students, initiated a partnership with Syracuse University that is designed to attract teachers of color to the district. The Urban Fellowship Program provides fellowships for teachers of color who will commit to five years of service in the SCSD. Since 90 percent of the district's teachers are white, in comparison to 24 percent of the students, Contreras hoped program would address the need that students have to see teachers who look like them (McMahon, Syracuse schools aim to close racial gap between teachers, students, 2016).

Gersheson, Holt, & Papageorge's (2016) research looked beyond the positive role models that Contreras sought for students of color. They found there is a direct association between teacher expectations of a student and the cultural background of the teacher. Their findings indicate that non-black teachers have lower expectations for African American students than African American teachers do. This translated into lower academic outcomes for the students. It influenced the students' decision making and beliefs about their academic prospects. African American students were more likely to decide to avoid certain subjects based on the low expectations and negative influence of white teachers who did not believe in their academic ability (Gersheson, Holt, & Papageorge, 2016). The researchers concluded that the negative educational outcomes of the students who were part of the demographic mismatch resulted from the biased expectations of teachers.

The Gersheson et al. (2016) research on the demographic teacher-student mismatch relative to the attitudes and perceptions about African American and low-income students and the normalizing of their lack of academic success provides some explanation for the gap in

achievement between students of different races that is revealed through standardized test scores. Prior to No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), there was no mandate for schools to provide data all students were achieving by separating students by race and other subgroups in the reporting of test scores. This created a problem for schools with integrated populations that had ignored and normalized the lack of achievement by nonwhite students (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). These gaps in achievement extend beyond math and reading. They encompass a range of skills that white students extract from their schooling experience, yet African American students do not. These skills help students develop their ability to reason, think critically, communicate, and create. They prepare students to participate in national and global citizenship, and help them develop an appreciation for art, music, science, and history (Rothstein, 2004).

Addressing the issue of an underachieving student population is not a new. It was successfully addressed by educators in the past when the educators noticed low performance in a group of students for which they had high expectations. During the 1940s there were disparities in academic outcomes between white male and white female students. White male students were disproportionately represented in remedial classes, had difficulty learning to read, had higher dropout rates, and more frequent discipline referrals than white female students. Rather than accepting this as normal behavior, which has been the response to students of color in U.S. public schools, educators adapted the educational environment to the needs of the underachieving students. Schools created courses that were segregated by sex, such as vocational courses. They established competitive sports teams that were for male students only. Additionally, the textbooks were restructured to appeal to masculine interests (Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Tyack & Hansot, 1990) and further engage academically.

This example from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century demonstrates the proactive measures that can be enacted to address population-specific academic concerns. Rather than submit to deficit paradigms regarding white male students, educators adopted a gender responsive pedagogy to engage them. In the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century this became known as culturally responsive teaching. Howard (2010) explains that culturally responsive teaching involves the rejection of deficit thinking regarding students and the commitment to a belief that students are capable of academic success. He states that understanding the various aspects of the students' lives, including culture, family, and community, is essential. Some of the principles of culturally responsive teaching were applied in Syracuse by many of the teachers and administrators in the integrated Syracuse school during the early years of the school board's efforts to racially balance the public schools. The involvement of school personnel with the students' families and communities helped parents, teachers, and principals create relationships that contributed to the schools' ability to effectively educate the African American students (Stout & Inger, 1968).

According to Chief Justice Warren, providing students with an education is one of the state's most important functions. He cited the schools as essential in cultivating the foundation for good citizenship, providing preparation for professional training, and inculcating civic participation in society. This is among the many reasons that the state must afford equal educational opportunities for all students (*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka KS*, 1954). Despite this decision by the Court, the needs of African American students were not the focus of decisions made regarding equality of educational opportunities in subsequent years. The next chapter will demonstrate continuous movement back to the pre-Brown separate and unequal status of U.S. public schools.

## **The Role of the U.S. Government in Creating De Facto Segregation**

The current segregation in U.S. public schools is considered de facto, because it is attributed to housing patterns, rather than legislative actions. However, if you look deeply enough into the history of racially segregated schools that exist in urban areas where federal housing programs subsidized home mortgages and revitalized cities, it becomes evident that the segregation of public schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century results from federal policies born of the same separatist paradigm that created the separate and unequal schools in the Jim Crow era. The 1954 *Brown* decision provided the NAACP with the foothold it sought to dismantle segregation in public schools throughout the southern states. The NAACP chose to focus most of their efforts on the de jure segregation, which the Jim Crow laws in the South created and enforced, despite the existence of segregated schools in the North. They reasoned that the de facto segregation in the North resulted from acts that appeared unintentional acts and researching the histories of the actions of various school district to determine intent required more resources and staff than they had at their disposal (Delmont, 2016). This was further complicated by the federal government, including the judicial and executive branches. This chapter will focus on the way actions taken by the courts, lawmakers, and Presidential administrations impacted the racial demographics of schools through policies related to housing and home ownership. It will also explain why public schools remain segregated in the U.S. despite the ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1954.

Twelve years after the U.S. Supreme Court order to desegregate schools “with all deliberate speed” a busing mandate from President Johnson accelerated the school desegregation process (Finn, 2008), but that momentum was not maintained by subsequent administrations. Johnson issued busing mandates due to the findings of sociologist James Coleman. Coleman’s determination that peer group contributed more to the academic success of African American

students than external inputs influenced Johnson's actions. Johnson's successor did not hold the same beliefs regarding busing and school desegregation, particularly as it related to de facto segregation. Leon Panetta, the director of the Office of Civil Rights in the department of Health, Education, and Welfare during the Nixon administration accused federal authorities of ignoring the segregation in the North. The Nixon administration exercised a "hands-off" policy when it came to school segregation due to Nixon's position that de facto segregation did not violate the U.S. Constitution (Nixon, 1970). Panetta, however, believed that most claims of de facto segregation in the northern states were fraudulent assertions that blamed housing patterns. He questioned whether the school boundaries were drawn to favor enrollment patterns. Panetta was convinced that the segregation that existed in the schools at that time was the result of discriminatory policies and practices from the past (Equity & Excellence in Education, 1970).

Many of the policies and practices of which Panetta spoke originated with President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. His creation of the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) in 1933 to protect middleclass homeowners in danger of losing their homes to bank foreclosure helped establish patterns of housing segregation (Grant, 2011). HOLC created a system of maps that determined which neighborhoods were high risk for mortgage loans. The neighborhoods determined to present the highest risk were outlined in red, leading to the term, redlining (Grant, 2011). These neighborhoods tended to have high minority populations. In addition to redlining, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), another agency created under FDR's New Deal initiative, and the Veterans' Administration (VA) adopted policies that also contributed significantly to the creation of white suburbs and impoverished urban areas. Their policies, which were enacted during the 1930s and 1940s, prohibited the sale of insured properties to African Americans (Rothstein & Santow, A Different Kind of Choice: Educational

inequality and the continuing significance of racial segregation, 2012). These programs, which helped white Americans procure mortgages to purchase homes, and the urban renewals policies of the 1940s and 1950s were instrumental in shaping the residential makeup of U.S. cities in the North. By utilizing the system of mapping neighborhoods established by the HOLC during the 1930s these federal agencies engaged in practices that controlled the demographics of urban and suburban populations (Grant, 2011).

Detroit, Michigan was the site of such population manipulation. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) use of the HOLC maps to determine where to place urban renewal infrastructure, including freeways, civic centers and public housing, and the FHA policies that restricted where African Americans could purchase homes, decisively established all-white suburbs around Detroit. Public housing became segregated after relocated white residents left the city. Eventually, the only new public housing projects were built in African American neighborhoods (Rothstein & Santow, *A Different Kind of Choice: Educational inequality and the continuing significance of racial segregation*, 2012). Despite these deliberate actions by federal agencies to structure the demographics of urban and suburban neighborhoods, the separation of races that occurred in urban public schools was attributed to residency guidelines rather than the federal policies that created it. This led to the use of the term *de facto* segregation.

The attempts to address segregation by the Detroit school district is significant to the study of school segregation. Housing is a key factor in the quality of life of a family. Its location defines levels of safety, access to a number of community amenities, which include employment and transportation, and the quality of education (Giele, 2013). During the 1970s, the school board attempted to address the segregation that existed in the district as a result of white flight

and various discriminatory federal policies that caused racially segregated neighborhood schools. They proposed a redistricting plan would decentralize the district through increased community involvement and integrate the schools. As a result of objections to the integration plan by parents, the Michigan state legislature passed a bill that overturned the Detroit school district's plan. The state's action led Verda Bradley and a group of African American parents to seek the assistance of the NAACP (Meinke, 2011). The NAACP filed a lawsuit against Governor Milliken and the Detroit school board on behalf of Verda's sons, Ronald and Richard. The U.S. Court of Appeals, Sixth District determined that school and housing segregation in the Detroit metropolitan area had been caused by various levels of government policies and that both the state and the school board were responsible for the segregation that existed in Detroit public schools (Meinke, 2011). The court's remedy was an order for inter-district busing that involved 53 school districts. This busing order and the de facto segregation in Detroit became the issue in the U.S. Supreme Court case, *Milliken v. Bradley*.

*Milliken v. Bradley* was decided 20 years after *Brown* and its decision led to a gradual reversal of the desegregation that *Brown's* began. The ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court in this case overturned the lower court's ruling. They determined that Detroit's suburbs were not intentionally responsible for any constitutional violation, and therefore, they could not be mandated to participate in the remedy. The Supreme Court failed to consider the extent to which illegal housing regulations contributed to the segregation in Detroit's schools (Orfield & Eaton, 1996) and the subsequent effect it had on the academic success of the students in those schools. This decision hindered the efforts to end school segregation when its existence was not directly connected to segregation laws.

In a similar way, use of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to combat segregation in public schools has been hindered by the fallacy that de facto segregation is not connected to laws that mandate segregation. Under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 schools that receive federal money may not engage in any type of discriminatory practices. Therefore, schools that refuse to admit students based on race, as is the case with de jure segregation, are ineligible for federal funding. However, the complexities of the legal connection to the cause of de facto segregation incumber its categorization as the result of legislative or discriminatory policies. This hinders the funding restrictions that would lead to application of the Civil Rights Act in non-Jim Crow schools. It has also been handled differently by the courts, who have allowed school districts a pass on addressing issues of segregation by relieving them of the responsibility for what is seen as a natural occurrence (Orfield & Eaton, 1996).

During the years following the Milliken decision, there were several cases that dealt blows to efforts to desegregate public schools. The timing of these cases often coincided with the political climate. President Reagan's administration opposed busing as a remedy for desegregation schools (Days, 1984). During his administration the 1986 federal court decision in *Riddick v. School Board of the City of Norfolk, Virginia* allowed the city of Norfolk to dismantle its busing desegregation plan, which reestablished segregated elementary schools. Although *Milliken and Riddick* laid significant ground work for the return to segregated public schools there were two 1995 decisions that worked to perpetuate the return to segregated schools. A state judge in Hartford, Connecticut relieved the state of the responsibility of integrating schools. He decided that the responsibility of reducing racial segregation in urban and suburban schools did not rest with state lawmakers. Later, the U.S. Supreme Court issued the *Missouri v. Jenkins* decision, which stated that the goal of desegregation plans should be to return control to local

districts without their having shown they had corrected the harm done by segregation (Orfield & Eaton, 1996; Teaching Tolerance, 2004).

The U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Missouri v. Jenkins* and the other court decisions and policies that enabled the resegregation of U.S. public schools have shifted the focus away from the rights of African American students to receive an equitable education to the desires of white parents and politicians (Delmont, 2016). Sixty-two years after the *Brown* decision intensely segregated schools, meaning schools with an enrollment of white students that is 10 percent or less, has tripled. Although part of this is due to Supreme Court decisions during the last 25 years (Orfield, Ee, Frankenberg, & Siegel-Hawley, 2016) the federal housing policies and practices enacted during the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century played a significant role shaping the residential landscape in many urban areas, including Syracuse, N.Y. They contributed to the racial segregation, poverty, and low student achievement, all of which are contributing factors to the schools in the Syracuse City School District (SCSD) being placed on the state's "Failing Schools" list. This next chapter examines the way housing policies impacted the City of Syracuse and the SCSD.

## Welcome to Syracuse

“Welcome to Syracuse. We’re the heart of New York,” was a tourism slogan during the 1990s. It tied Syracuse to New York State’s long-running “I love N.Y.” campaign, in which the word “love” was represented by a heart. Syracuse was founded in 1847 and is located at the center of Central New York region in Onondaga County. The notion of Syracuse being the heart of New York began in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century when its roadways, railroads, and waterways, which extended in all directions like arteries, helped its salt mining industry to peak. Later that century it became the home for the Great New York State Fair and Syracuse University, attractions that are still central to the region.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century brought a lot of growth to Syracuse, making it a center of prosperity. It became an industrial boomtown due to the prosperity of the industries there (Grant, 2011). Eighty percent of Onondaga County’s most valuable land was located in the city. This was due to the presence of several national corporations that contributed to the tax base. Carrier Corporation, the World’s largest air-conditioning company, became part of the Syracuse landscape during the 1930s (Grant, 2011). It joined a diverse manufacturing industry that contributed to the wealth of the area at that time. Manufacturers such as Will and Baumer Candles and Nettleton Shoes, which had contributed to the economic development of Syracuse since during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, continued to thrive. In addition to the Carrier Corporation, General Electric, the Solvay Process Company (later known as Allied Chemical), New Process Gear, which manufactured General Motors auto parts, and Learbury Clothing, which produced of suits for Brooks Brothers, Neiman Marcus, and a number of other retailers, all contributed to the growth of the economy in Syracuse during the years following the end of World War II. The post-war boom also brought non-manufacturing jobs to the area, such as those created when

Syracuse University expanded as a result of post war veterans using their G.I. Bill to further their education (Grant, 2011; Frank, 1982; Levy R. G., 1988; Case, 2010).

During this time period, Syracuse became the central focus of many African Americans migrating North from the Jim Crow South, seeking freedom and fortune. New York State's fair employment laws, and the numerous factory jobs available in the growing industrial economy, made it an attractive place to settle (Grant, 2011), despite policies that fostered housing segregation. Most of the African American population resided in an area in the center of Syracuse known as the 15<sup>th</sup> Ward. The 15<sup>th</sup> Ward's large concentration of the African American population in Syracuse was due to discriminatory housing practices that barred African Americans from renting or purchasing homes in most of the other sections of the city (Semuels, 2015; LaRue, 2012; Grant, 2011). It was located near the center of Syracuse, adjacent to the downtown area on one side and the Jewish community on the other. However, as the African American population grew, the middle class Jewish population began to leave the area. The dwellings close to the African American neighborhoods were the first to be abandoned. Subsequently, the African American community began to expand and occupy the urban spaces further east whenever their movement wasn't hindered by prohibitive rental and mortgage loan practices (Grant, 2011; Semuels, 2015).

The other area of the city that had a high concentration of African American residents was the Ninth Ward's Washington-Water strip. This area of downtown Syracuse encompassed a combined total of nine blocks on Washington and Water Streets. Unlike the predominantly blue-collar workers who resided in the 15<sup>th</sup> Ward, where 80 percent of the African American population resided, the Washington-Water strip residents were impoverished farm workers. This neighborhood became classified as a slum and was the first to be demolished when urban

renewal slum clearance started restructuring the Syracuse landscape (EDR Companies, 2012). The subsequent shift of the Ninth Ward population into the 15<sup>th</sup> Ward contributed to increased population density in both neighborhoods and schools.

Despite the movement of African Americans into neighborhoods that were previously Jewish, the Syracuse School District refused to allow African American students to enroll in schools whose student populations were entirely white. They gerrymandered school district boundary lines to keep African American students in the segregated elementary and middle schools even though middle class African American families began to move into neighborhoods that would have allowed their children to attend predominantly white schools (Grant, 2011). This practice required African American students to continue to attend Croton or Washington Irving elementary schools and Madison Jr. High School. The result was two elementary schools and one junior high school where the student population was more than 50 percent African American (Grant, 2011; Stout & Inger, 1968).

During the 1960s, Civil Rights groups focused on desegregating these three schools. When voluntary desegregation failed, the school district closed Washington Irving Elementary School and Madison Jr. High School, an action that required the African American students that attend these schools to transfer to white schools. Croton Elementary School, however, remained open and segregated. The long-term effects of population shift and white flight have distinguished Syracuse as a center of school segregation during this decade. This chapter will provide a historical narrative on the segregation in Syracuse public schools. It will focus, specifically, on Croton Elementary School, ironically renamed Dr. Martin Luther King Elementary School, and the negative academic effects of segregation on the African American students who attended it. The focus on Croton/Dr. King Elementary School will provide insight

into the many issues that hinder student achievement in Syracuse's public schools today. Among these issues is an imbalance of political power between white and African American parents.

### **De Facto Segregation in the Syracuse School District**

During the early 1960s national civil rights activity focused on desegregating public spaces. This included public schools, where segregation often resulted in an inferior education for many African American students (King, 1965). The Syracuse School District consisted of 18 public schools at this time. Their student population reflected the segregation that shaped the landscape of the city. Fourteen of those schools educated white students, one educated a racially balanced student population, and the three remaining schools, Croton Elementary, Washington Irving Elementary, and Madison Junior High School served a predominantly African American student body. The three African American schools were located in or near the 15<sup>th</sup> Ward, where the highest concentration of the African American population lived. The school board's attempts to provide a racially balanced learning environment for Syracuse public school students caused racial tension, which eventually led to the board's surrender to many of the demands of white parents.

The issue of racial imbalance began to emerge as a school policy issue in 1962 when Sumner Elementary School, which was located in a racially integrated neighborhood on the east side of Syracuse, faced overcrowding. The overcrowding resulted from the population growth in the area caused by urban renewal. Urban renewal, which advanced the idea of clearing slums and revitalizing the city through the construction of museums, civic centers and highways, caused the demolition of the community that dwelled in the 15<sup>th</sup> Ward and pushed a large percentage of the population eastward. In their effort to address this issue the school board proposed a plan to redesign the boundary lines that determined the racial demographics of

Sumner School (Stout & Inger, 1968). The new boundaries created a fourth predominantly African American school by transferring 60 white students from Sumner to Edward Smith Elementary, a nearby white school, and 42 African American students from Washington-Irving Elementary to Sumner (Stout & Inger, 1968; Syracuse Post Standard, 1962). The subsequent backlash caused the school board to reconsider this attempt at gerrymandering.

The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) opposed the school board's plan to rezone the neighborhoods around Sumner School and argued against changing the racially integrated student body. CORE insisted that the school board conduct a study of the problems surrounding Syracuse's racially segregated schools and recommend solutions to address the issue. The board responded to this request by adopting the position advanced by board member, David Jaquith, that segregation was a housing, not an education issue (Stout & Inger, 1968). Civil Rights activists and parents expressed their opposition to this position with boycotts and protests. Parents boycotted Washington Irving elementary school by keeping their children out of school for one day. They also picketed the Board of Education offices to pressure the school board into addressing the issue of school segregation. As a result, the school board reconsidered their proposed redistricting plan. Additionally, this community activism caused Mayor William Walsh to create a committee to study the issue under the guidance of the State Commission for Human Rights.

The Education Study Committee's 1963 report of their findings determined that patterns of racial imbalance existed in the Syracuse School District, that the board was responsible for the racial composition of the public schools in Syracuse, and that issues related to segregation could be resolved by modifying school boundaries (Stout & Inger, 1968). Subsequently, the Syracuse School Board adopted a policy that addressed the racial balance of public schools. The policy

required that the racial composition of all schools conform to the racial makeup of the neighborhoods in which they were located (Yeo, 1967a), thereby continuing to support the racially segregated schools within the district. The school board also adopted a different plan regarding the boundaries for Sumner Elementary School. Their new plan drew boundary lines that led to the transfer of African American students to nearby predominantly white schools. This maintained the racial balance that existed at Sumner prior to the overcrowding and it integrated nearby white schools (Stout & Inger, 1968).

Although the committee's report caused the school board to recognize that they bore the responsibility for racial segregation in the schools, and that segregation had an academic and social impact on both white and African American students, the school board refrained from making radical changes that would integrate the schools in the Syracuse School District. Their initial response was to establish a compensatory education program, known as the Madison Area Project at Madison Junior High School, Croton and Washington Irving Elementary schools. The goal was to improve instruction rather than address racial isolation (Stout & Inger, 1968). The Syracuse Post Standard reported that the program was a success in its first year. The article stated that the students who participated in the program enjoyed coming to school more because of the new extracurricular activities that were available. These included photography and music. The students also said they were developing better relationships with teachers because they believed the teachers were interested in their academic success (Clements, 1963). Although the Madison Area Project did lead to improved student attendance, there was no measurable academic improvement in comparison to the academic achievements of the students who were later bused to predominantly white schools. Three years later it was found that the students who were transferred to predominantly white schools showed greater academic improvement than the

students that remained at Croton Elementary, Madison Irving Elementary, and Madison Junior High School and participated in the compensatory program (Stout & Inger, 1968).

During the years that followed, the school board took additional steps to proactively address school segregation. These measures included school closings, rezoning, and voluntary transfers, which included busing. Some of these actions, however, created racial imbalances in other Syracuse schools. In 1964 Brighton Elementary School the school board closed, which had the third highest African American student population of Syracuse's elementary. This required that one hundred forty-one white and fifty African American students transfer to Hughes, McKinley, and Danforth, three nearby predominantly white elementary schools. The increase in the percentage of African American students grew from five to twelve percent in the Hughes and from three to eight percent in McKinley. Danforth school's percentage of African American students decreased from 36 to 33 percent (Syracuse Post Standard, 1964), probably due to districting changes that transferred a larger percentage of white students to the school. Although this shifting of boundaries to transfer students from Brighton Elementary School addressed the imbalance in these three schools, it neglected the racial imbalance that existed in Madison, Washington Irving, and Croton as well as the elementary and junior high schools that educated predominantly white student populations.

The school board proposed a separate plan to address the segregation issue in Madison Junior High school, which was 78 percent African American, and Prescott Junior High School, which was five percent African American. The proposal called for the closing of Prescott and busing 100 of the white students to Madison, and busing the remaining students to the Vocational School. The plan also required 30 African American students would transfer from Madison, to Levy Junior High School (Stout & Inger, 1968; Syracuse Post Standard, 1964). The

board planned to decrease the African American student population at Madison to 45 percent, increase the same population from seven to twelve percent at Levy, while showing almost no change in the African American student population at the Vocational school (Syracuse Post Standard, 1964). There was strong opposition to this plan from the parents of the white students who attended Prescott Junior High School. The parents of 80 students staged a boycott on the first day of school and kept their children home. The school board responded to their resistance by allowing them to transfer their children to any school in the Syracuse School District under what was known as the “Open School Policy”. This policy allowed students to enroll in any school that had open space (Stout & Inger, 1968). As a result, half of the 225 students from Prescott Junior High School transferred to Grant, a predominantly white junior high school. The white students that did not transfer to Grant enrolled in parochial and vocational schools. Despite this effort to integrate Madison Junior High School, it remained segregated (Stout & Inger, 1968; Syracuse Post Standard, 1964) due to the school board’s submission to the will of the white parents in the school district.

The next desegregation initiative undertaken by the school board during that year involved the voluntary busing of 58 African American students from Croton Elementary school to Edward Smith Elementary School. The Board refused to attribute the racial imbalance at either school as contributing factor for their action (Scully, 1964a). Instead, the decision to bus African American students at Croton to Smith was ascribed to three reasons. The first reason was the failure of the Madison Area Project compensatory education program. The program was unsuccessful at bridging the achievement gap between African American and white students. Later, when the funding for the Madison Area Project, which was largely underwritten by a grant from the Ford Foundation, ran out the project was discontinued. The second reason was the

success of the integration of Madison students at Levy Junior High. The African American students who transferred to Levy showed significant academic improvement over their peers who remained at Madison and participated in the compensatory program. David Jaquith, a member of the Syracuse School Board, who openly opposed integration, attributed the academic improvement to Levy's academic culture, which he said fostered student achievement (Stout & Inger, 1968; Scully, 1964a). The third reason was the overcrowding at Croton Elementary school and empty classrooms at Smith, a nearby elementary school. The available space at Smith led to the school board's proposal to bus three full classes of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, & 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students, 58 students total, to Edward Smith Elementary School (Scully, 1964a).

There was considerable opposition to the initial proposal by the school board to transfer Croton students to Smith Elementary. The parents from Smith School raised a number of issues and concerns about having the Croton students transferred. They questioned whether it was truly necessary for the reasons given or if it was a covert attempt at forced integration. A Croton parent who attended the open school board hearing to address the busing issue accused the Smith parents of hiding their issues of racial hatred and prejudice behind their rationalizations about why Croton students should not be transferred. She admonished them about clinging to racial stereotypes about African Americans as ugly and dirty, and urged them to drop their racial pretenses about the incoming students (Scully, 1964a).

Although overtly racist statements were not made during the open meetings, two Smith School parents penned a letter to the Syracuse Post Standard that manifested many of the concerns voiced by the Croton parent who spoke out at the hearing on May 6, 1964. Their letter indicated their racially biased issues about the busing project. The letter, which was published on May 14, 1964, expressed resentment regarding the busing of African American students to

Smith School. Submitted anonymously under the pseudonym, Two Parents, it rebuked authorities for violating the rights of white citizens and for diminishing school quality. They wrote, “Once we had the right to choose our own friends, to choose our own neighborhood and to put our children in decent schools. There will be no decent schools if the present plan is put in effect.” The writers also expressed concern that the education of white students would be hindered because teachers would have to give African American children more attention to advance their inferior knowledge, thereby leading to the neglect white students. The writer further stated that immigrants come to the US and work hard to get what they want, but African Americans want everything handed to them and throw temper tantrums in the form of demonstrations, sit-ins, and protests when they don’t get their way. “The Negro expects everything to be handed to him on a silver platter,” they wrote. It further stated that the additional financial burden to taxpayers who must pay for busing was an undesirable and unfair consequence of this integration effort (Two Parents, 1964).

Nine days later the newspaper published a letter from two different Smith parents, which indicated a different sentiment about the busing of Croton student. This letter responded to the letter published on May 14 and indicated that most of the parents at Smith School supported the integration effort and welcomed the Croton students. It said, “We would like to assure any Croton parents who might have read this letter that the opinions expressed by no means reflect the feelings of a majority of Edward Smith parents.” The writers of this letter, who identified themselves as Mr. and Mrs. Burns of Roosevelt Ave., Syracuse, brought attention to the silence of the writers of the May 14 letter on racial concerns at the open hearing. They wrote, “It is even more interesting to note that at the open hearing held at Edward Smith on May 6 not one opponent of the transfer (and I assume the ‘Two Parents’ were in attendance) indicated that their

objections were based on the fact that the 58 children involved were Negro.” Additionally, they reprimanded Two Parents for concealing their identity in the newspaper. “It seems to us, ‘Two Parents,’ that this open hearing would have been a much more appropriate platform from which to expound your views rather than an unsigned letter to the ‘Morning Mail.’ Of course, you would have had to identify yourselves.” The Burns’ letter indicated that 250 white Smith School parents signed and sent a document to the Syracuse School Board that indicated their support of the busing initiative. Despite the issues raised at the hearings and through letters to the newspaper, there were no racial incidents on the first day of school for the Croton students that transferred to Edward Smith Elementary school (Scully, 1964b).

At the end of the school year the Syracuse Post Standard called the integration of Smith School a token gesture when it reported that the school board had no plans to increase the number of students being bused from Croton during the 1965 – 1966 school year. The same article reported the response of the school board superintendent, Dr. Franklyn Barry to inquiries from Smith School parents regarding any plans the school board had to increase the number of Croton students bused to Smith School during the upcoming school year. Dr. Barry told parents at the year-end Parent Teachers Association (PTA) meeting that the only new students bused from Croton to Smith would be the siblings of the students in the cohorts already participating in the integration program. He said younger siblings would be allowed to attend the same school as their family members if they desired to do so. Any other new students from Croton Elementary School would be those students chosen to fill the vacancies resulting from attrition in the original group of pupils. He also relieved concerns about a possible plan to bus Smith students to any other Syracuse public school (Post Standard, 1965). Although asked to provide information on testing programs, Dr. Barry and Ronald Ayer, the assistant research director for the school board,

declined to provide parents with specific information about testing results. Instead they assured the Smith parents that the Croton students had benefited from the transfer and that Smith students had not suffered academically, as some parents had feared. They also neglected to indicate whether there had been any academic gains made by the Croton students during the school year (Post Standard, 1965).

Although the school board superintendent and assistant research director failed to comment on the academic progress of the African American students who were bused from Croton Elementary School during the PTA meeting with Smith School parents, it is significant to the issues surrounding the desegregating of schools. One month after the PTA meeting Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke at Syracuse University and addressed this issue, specifically in terms of the de facto segregation in the schools in the northern U.S. Dr. King stated that there is are deep common roots at the heart of the segregation in the schools throughout the nation and that it was intertwined with discriminatory housing and employment. He said, “Ghetto schools in urban areas and impoverished rural schools offer increasingly inferior education to more than five million families. With each advance in grade there comes greater retrogression.” He drew upon the findings of Dr. Kenneth Clark who studied children in segregated schools in Harlem, where third grade students were one year behind white students in New York City. These students were two years behind their white peers by sixth grade, and two and one-half years behind by eighth grade (King, An Address at Syracuse University, 1965).

Dr. King rebuked the North for perpetuating substandard education for African American students as a means of keeping them locked in jobs as common laborers, domestic workers, and other sources of cheap labor, just as was done in the South. The withholding of quality education to maintain oppression was a common practice in both the North and the South and he

called upon the community end the cycle of inferior education that harms African American students.

“While we must dig trenches to halt the spread of de facto segregation, concurrently we must give equal if not greater attention to the fire within—to ending the inferior educational processes within the ghetto school, to break the cycle where our Negro children who enter able to earn, come out functional illiterates, unprepared for anything other than menial unskilled jobs” (King, 1965).

Dr. King also expressed his disappointment with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which was supposed to withhold funds from schools that maintained discrimination. He noted that there was an expectation that this consequence of segregation would hasten desegregation, but instead, inadequate enforcement had led to tokenism (King, 1965).

Subsequently, the Syracuse School Board went further than the tokenism they were accused of engaging by transferring small populations of African American students to two predominantly white schools. Some of their attempts to address the racial imbalance in the city’s public schools proved unsuccessful due to the opposition of white parents who exercised their political power. The use of the Open School Policy by some white parents and the transferring of their children to private schools by others not only thwarted the school board’s plan to integrate Madison Junior High School, but it caused the school board to abandon strategies that relied upon the movement of white pupils. The urgency of constructing a plan to racially balance Syracuse public schools was more than a civil rights issue, however. Urban renewal played a significant role in the actions taken by school officials.

## **The Role of Urban Renewal in Addressing Racial Segregation in Syracuse Schools**

Urban renewal had a dual impact on the racial segregation in Syracuse. It created segregated neighborhoods by pushing the African American residence into densely populated neighborhoods with high concentrations of crime and poverty (Stout & Inger, 1968; Stamp & Stamp, 2008), thus, creating segregated community schools. It also contributed to the School Board's decision to integrate Syracuse's public schools. As urban renewal forced the relocation of African American residents out of the neighborhoods zoned for attending Madison Junior High School, a drop in Madison's enrollment occurred. This also occurred at Washington Irving Elementary School's enrollment as African American neighborhoods were demolished to clear land for middle class housing, Syracuse University residence halls, and a medical center (Stout & Inger, 1968). Urban renewal officials spoke to the school board during the 1960s about upgrading the facilities at Washington Irving and Madison so that white middle-class families would be attracted to the new housing developments (Stout & Inger, 1968). Despite this request the School Board only approved to improve the facilities at several of the predominantly white elementary and junior high schools (Scully, 1965). Rather than upgrade the Washington Irving Elementary and Madison Junior High Schools to attract middle class families to them, the board chose to close them and transfer the students to predominantly white schools.

The school board's decision to close these two predominantly African American schools was connected to two previous failures – the attempt to bus Prescott students to Madison to achieve integration and the implementation of the Madison Area Project to avoid it. The African American students who transferred from Croton to Edward Smith Elementary School showed greater gains in math and reading than those who remained at Croton and participated in the Madison Area Project. The school board superintendent reported that a study involving 24 of the

58 students bused to Smith School gained nine months during an eight-month time period. This study compared them to students of the same grade, sex, and age at Croton. Their counterparts at Croton gained only four months through their participation in the compensatory program (Stout & Inger, 1968). Since more significant improvement had occurred as a result of integration, the school board decided to pursue racial balance in the schools as the method for improving academic achievement for African American students (The Post Standard, 1965).

School Board President David Jaquith, a conservative republican who had previously stated that school segregation was a fallout of housing patterns, therefore not a matter to be taken on by the school board, became an advocate for integration after viewing the test scores of bused students (Stamp & Stamp, 2008). He attributed the change in school culture as the reason for the improvement, stating that peer influence in predominantly African American schools hindered academic achievement, but encouraged it in predominantly white schools. When Jaquith was called to speak before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in Rochester, N.Y. he told them that African American students who had transferred to Levy Junior High School from Madison indicated that there were differences in the expectations of behavior by their peers at Levy than at Madison. He said they were considered “kooks” if they cooperated with their teachers at Madison, whereas they were considered “kooks” if they did not cooperate at Levy. (Stout & Inger, 1968).

Although there may have been some merit to Jaquith’s assessment, his stated position neglects the additional services provide to students once they transferred to predominantly white schools. The students who were bused to Smith School were integrated into classrooms with their white peers. In each classroom, students of varying abilities were grouped together, which would account for peer influence. One teacher noted that although one of her male students had

been withdrawn when he initially entered her class his interaction with the students in his group contributed to his social and academic growth (Stout & Inger, 1968). She said, “The biggest change I have seen is his getting along with his own peer group. He mingles with them much more and takes part in what they are doing, even though he is one grade level lower. He has shown a great improvement in writing and wanting to do things with the class” (p. 10).

Additionally, there were supplementary tutorial services provided to students below grade level and there were reading teachers available to assist students who needed help. One teacher said that although one student had entered her classroom two grade levels behind in math and reading, the additional assistance he received helped him achieve grade level by the end of the school year (Stout & Inger, 1968).

The predominantly African American schools lacked the many of the elements that contributed to student success. The schools were overcrowded and did not allow for the type of curriculum flexibility that the well-staffed white schools offered. Many of the teachers were inexperienced and the buildings were not properly equipped, all conditions that white parents would not tolerate in the schools attended by their children. This made integration synonymous with quality education for African American students who benefitted from the political clout of the white parents at the schools they attended (Stamp & Stamp, 2008). An additional contributing factor to the academic success of the African American students who were bused to white schools was the level of teacher involvement with the students and their families.

As Syracuse moved forward with additional integration measures both teachers and administrators seemed to take personal interest in the success of the students and began incorporating aspects of what education scholars would later refer to as culturally responsive practices. They forged connections between home and school by visiting students’ homes and

helping parents become engaged in the school community. A few of the principals made visits to the homes of students to deal with racial issues and other problems that occurred during the school day, or to invite them to become involved in the PTA. Teachers also visited students' homes for various purposes, including giving a student a ride home if he/she missed the bus and helping a parent who was participating in an adult education course (Stout & Inger, 1968).

Howard (2010) connects this practice to the success of the GEAR UP program at Sunnyside High School in Southern California. He notes that the relationships built as a result of the staff going out of their way to visit the students' homes and engage the important people in their lives contributed to the students' academic improvement. In the integrated schools in Syracuse, both teachers and principals at schools that engaged the students' families outside of the school setting reported that African American parents were cooperative in matters concerning challenges their children had in the classroom and frequently came to the school to discuss their children's work (Stout & Inger, 1968). Parental involvement is another link to students' academic success (Howard, 2010) that was absent from Jaquith's statement.

In addition to parental involvement and peer influence, African American students who transferred to integrated schools were able to glean the benefits of the political capital exercised by the white parents at the school they attended. White parents sought to guarantee positive schooling experiences for their own children. The school district addressed their concerns about inadequate attention to white children in the classroom and about the lowering of academic standards by the hiring of additional staff (Stout & Inger, 1968). One parent said the additional supportive services provided assured that the same quality of education continued after her child's school was integrated and lessened concerns among white parents. "I think it made the overall situation more acceptable because they knew that rather than lowering the level of

education it [integration] would enhance it” (p. 12). This opportunity became available to more African American students as the school board moved forward with their plans to close the predominantly African American schools and send the students to the district’s white schools. However, the African American students who remained at Croton failed to receive this level of attention and resources. This limitation demonstrated one manifestation of the imbalance of political power that placed focus on the moving of African American students only.

As a result of the population shifts caused by urban renewal, the school board closed Madison Junior High and Washington Irving Elementary schools and bused all of the students to predominantly white schools throughout the city of Syracuse, integrating a total of 18 schools in 1965 (Stout & Inger, 1968). Their integration plan sent Madison students to Clary, Eastwood, Grant, Levy, Roosevelt, and H.W. Smith Junior High Schools. Washington Irving students were transferred to Elmwood, Frazier, Hyde, LeMoyne, Meacham, Porter, Roberts, Salina, Valley, Van Duyn, George Washington, and Webster Elementary schools (Post Standard, 1965). After the closing of Madison and Washington Irving, Croton, now the only predominantly African American school in Syracuse, remained open. Since the other public schools had nearly reached their capacity, closing Croton and sending the 1200 students to other district schools was not a feasible option for addressing the continuing issue of segregation that existed there. White parents had proven that they would not allow their children to be bused to a predominantly African American school, so the cross-busing of Croton students to a white school and white students to Croton was not an option either. African American parents fought the school board’s plans to leave Croton Elementary School segregated as it moved toward gradually closing it. This led to years of debate over how to address the issues of segregation and academic

achievement at Croton. This serves as an example of the ongoing inequity that was a normal part of the educational experience for African American students in the Syracuse School District.

## **Croton Elementary School**

In January 1966, the school board released their plans for what appeared to be an alternative for integrating Croton Elementary School. They requested state funding for three programs that would channel over one hundred thousand dollars of Title I money into Croton. The board planned to implement Project Upgrade, which would add staff, additional services, new equipment, and academic resources; The Lighted Elementary School, which would provide remedial and enrichment education after school and on weekends; and a Summer Language Development Program, which would support students with their language skills development during the summer. The NAACP, other local integration activists, and African American parents were displeased with the school board's plan, which was aimed solely at improving academic achievement at Croton. The opponents of the plan recognized this as a tactic to delay integration indefinitely (Scully, 1966). Robert Warr, a member of the New York State Human Rights, accused the school board of advocating "separate but equal" schools and of violating federal and state policies (Scully, 1966a). Syracuse school board officials denied that their plan to add staff, services, and equipment to the school, and to initiate programs that would extend hours of operation to include enrichment, before and after school activities, and a summer program related to any intent to maintain the segregation at Croton. Superintendent Kenneth Barry called these actions stop-gap measures. He and the school board vice president, Kenneth Gale assured the public that integration plans for Croton had not been abandoned (Kramer, 1966a). Despite Barry and Gale's assurances and the protests by African American parents, the integration of Croton never outweighed the will of the white parents in the district. Croton remained segregated because very few white parents would send their children to a predominantly African-American

elementary school located in a high poverty area. This imbalance of political power negatively affected the academic outcomes for the African American students.

Subsequent actions taken by the board indicated that the stop-gap measures veiled the board's inadequate integration plan for Croton Elementary School. At their April meeting the school board announced a desegregation plan that opponents criticized as ineffectual for addressing the segregation and overcrowding at Croton. The details of their desegregation plan, which would go into effect at the beginning of the 1966-1967 school year, called for busing 200 of Croton's 1200 students to other district schools. Considering that Croton's student population was 90 percent African American, a spokesperson for the Mayor's Human Right's Commission stated that "the plan "doesn't get at the problem in a large enough way for the fall of 1966" (Herald Journal, 1966). The desegregation issue aside, the plan failed to address the issue of overcrowding. Despite a freeze place on the enrollment of new students and the transfer of 200 students to other schools, Croton would still have 100 students beyond the building's maximum capacity (Standard, Post, 1966a). Additionally, this plan was part of a larger plan to close Croton, which the African American community opposed. They wanted Croton "open and integrated" (Scully, 1966b).

Acts of contestation by African American parents and local civil rights activists forced the tabling of a vote on the board's plan for Croton. They organized a number of actions on the day of the May 1966 school board meeting to demonstrate their opposition to the board's proposed desegregation plan. The major act involved a one-day boycott during which all Croton students either stayed home, or attended the Freedom schools that were organized by groups in the community on the day of the school board's meeting (Scully, 1966b). Five hundred members of the Syracuse community attended the meeting that evening. Twenty-nine of the

attendees addressed the members of the school board regarding the Croton desegregation plan, each voicing opposition to it. Throughout the meeting the crowd chanted the words “open and integrated” (Scully, 1966b).

Croton parents threatened a longer boycott if the school board went forth with their plan to bus only Croton students. They demanded that any school board integration plan involve cross-busing, rather than solely busing Croton students. Croton parents also supported the restructuring of Croton to make it an early childhood center. The Early Childhood Education Center would educate all of the students in grades Kindergarten – third grade from the south side of the city. This would integrate Croton and require the busing of white students. All of the older Croton students would attend one of the remaining five elementary schools on the south side of Syracuse (Scully, 1966b).

The issue of cross-busing became a core part of the integration conversation in Syracuse. Some community members, such as Hilda Rosenfeld of the Syracuse Committee for Integrated Education, believed that despite the Prescott Middle School integration failure, white middle-class parents would willingly integrate a predominantly African American school, even one located in a high poverty area, such as Croton. Mrs. Rosenfeld spoke in favor of cross-busing at the school board meeting and attempted to discredit the beliefs in its link to the white flight that caused the city to lose 20 percent of its white population during over two decades (Semuels, 2015; Scully, 1966b). “I submit that good education, not integration will continue to be responsible for flight from the city,” she told the members of the Syracuse School Board at their May 1966 meeting (Scully, 1966b). Rosenfeld was one of many community activists who opposed any busing plan that relied solely on the transporting of African American students out of Croton without transferring white students into Croton. Rosenfeld and other integrationists

asserted that “whites must bear the burden of the segregation they have created” (Kramer, 1966b). Her position on cross-busing was met with strong opposition from the white parents on the south side of Syracuse. A petition opposing compulsory cross-busing was signed by several thousand white south side residents and submitted to the Syracuse School Board. The school board held the same position as the white parents, and remained committed to the plan for the involuntary busing of African American students, which included the long-range plan to close Croton Elementary School (Kramer, 1966b).

As frustration grew in the African American community over the plan to close Croton rather than integrate it, Dr. Henry Thompson, chairperson of the NAACP education committee requested intervention from the New York State Education Department. Thompson wrote a letter to the state commissioner of education criticizing the school board’s plan to bus 200 Croton students during the upcoming school year, freeze the enrollment of new students, and eventually close Croton after all students had been transferred to other schools. He wrote, “We feel that the above plans for Croton have evaded and will continue to evade the intent and purpose of your ruling regarding racial balance of public schools” (Kramer, 1966b). When Dr. Theron Johnson, administrator of the division of intercultural relations met with Syracuse residents regarding this issue, he encountered the strong sentiments of the African American community. During the meeting an African American minister, who demanded an end to the procrastination in which the school board had engaged, told Johnson that Syracuse was on the verge of a Watts-level explosion. He said, “We do not fear the cops, nor do we fear the army. We do expect action now” (Cross, 1966).

Johnson’s visit to Syracuse did not produce the results sought by Croton parents and civil rights activists. Three weeks after his visit two Croton parents appealed to the state again,

accusing the school board of elevating their concern about maintaining their political positions over providing a quality education for Croton's African American students. They criticized the school board's recent proposal to invoke the "open school policy," which they said had been unworkable for Croton parents in the past and questioned, "Why is the board offering it in this case?" They asked the state's intervention stating, "The members of the board act like politicians trying to win every vote, instead of acting like leaders of education whose job it is to give all the children in the city the best education possible" (Post Standard, 1966). Additionally, parents and civil rights activists picketed outside the central offices of the school board during the week of their June meeting to protest the board's stance against cross-busing and the board's continued support of the long-range plan to close Croton rather than integrate it. During that week, the school board superintendent told the local newspapers that he planned to withdraw his plan to close Croton and extend the "open school policy" to Croton parents (Herald Journal, 1966), which he did.

The withdrawal of the plan also met opposition. Dr. Kenneth Gale, the school board vice president, voted against the withdrawal of the plan to bus Croton students and eventually close the school. Gale, the only member opposed to withdrawing the plan, said he voted against it because he believed that abandoning the plan gave the school board a pass on the integration issue. He also believed it would lead to the exodus of Croton's high achieving students, who would likely take advantage of the "open school policy" (Kramer, 1966c). But, as Croton parents had stated, the "open school policy" was not likely to work for their children. Although Barry stated that Croton students would receive preference when it came to open seats in the district's elementary schools, both Gale and Barry failed to address the issue of the number of limited spaces. At that time, there were only enough open seats in Syracuse schools to

accommodate 10 students (Kramer, 1966c). Additionally, the overcrowding at Croton would keep the school segregated because more than 300 students would have to transfer out in order for there to be one open seat in the building.

When Barry addressed the issues the board faced at Croton during the June 1966 school board meeting, he made several disturbing statements. Although he invited the input of local religious leaders and proposed a number of programs to improve the educational experience of Croton school during the upcoming school year, he admitted that none of his proposed actions addressed the segregation issue before the board. Barry made this confession even though the school board and the Croton community had determined that integration was key to increasing educational achievement for the students. Additionally, he revealed his bias regarding the racial mixing of students in classrooms as he reinforced his opposition to the compulsory busing of white students to Croton. He stated that although he agreed that it was necessary to end segregation to achieve quality education for all Syracuse students, it must be achieved by bringing African American students up to a higher level, not by lowering the level for all students (Kramer, 1966c; Post Standard, 1966b). Barry's statement revealed his belief that African American students were inferior to white students, rather than that the school district had been providing them with an education that was inferior to that of white students. It also mirrored the sentiments expressed in the letter published in the Post Standard two years earlier, signed by Two Parents, who felt that the education of white children would suffer as a result of integrating Edward Smith Elementary School.

The rector of Grace Episcopal Church responded immediately to Barry's request for clergy input. In a letter that the Syracuse Herald Journal published on June 30, 1966, Rev. Walter Welsh challenged Barry and the school board on their silencing of the concerns of African

American parents and their sidestepping the issue of integration. He called the cross-busing issue a smoke screen. Dismissing discussions about building upgrades and how the district might restructure the Croton campus to accommodate various other proposals to address segregation, such as the early childhood center, Welsh said the real issue was whether the district would allow African American parents an equal voice in the matters concerning their children's education. He wrote, "We ask you to face your moral, legal, and educational responsibility at Croton school now — in accordance with the honest request of mothers in that area whose integrity is as important as any in the city" (Welsh, 1966). Welsh called integrating Croton the most responsible use of the available federal and state funds.

One week after the letter was published, Barry hosted a meeting of 64 religious leaders from the Syracuse area. The purpose of the meeting was to solicit their support for his new proposal to cross-bus 1400 students – 700 white and 700 African American. Barry explained that the voluntary transfer of 700 white students from their home schools to Croton would open up 700 seats for Croton students in the various elementary schools, thereby facilitating integration at Croton. He asked the clergymen to make appeals from their pulpits, through their newsletters, and in their meetings with the adult groups in their congregations. He promised to make every effort to ensure that no child's education suffered (Scully, 1966d). Barry emphasized the academic successes that had been achieved in a short time through integration. Since the school board began integrating the public schools the number of African American high school graduates increased from 54 the first year, to 100 during the current year (Post Standard, 1966b). In the elementary and junior high schools, students in eight out of eleven integrated schools advanced three – nine months above the national average in reading based on their reading level the year before and one year after integration. (Stout & Inger, 1968). Specifically, students who

had formerly attended Washington Irving, and were bused to predominantly white schools had test results five months above their peers at Croton (Scully, 1966e). He also stressed the integration success stories in three of the city's four high schools and eight junior high schools. The only area where racial and economic segregation were still an issue were at the elementary school level he said (Scully, 1966d). There were, however, three schools where students showed negative progress, and one school where students showed no significant improvement (Stout & Inger, 1968), which Barry failed to mention in his appeal.

When Barry presented his plan to the ministers at the meeting they indicated their need for more details about the busing plan and for further discussion before endorsing it. They requested information about specific grade levels, which Barry did not have available at the time. One week later, however, Barry released the details that dictated the conditions under which the program would proceed (Post Standard, 1966c). The statement issued to the Syracuse newspapers in July indicated that the program would proceed only if there were 700 voluntary "in" and 700 voluntary "out" transfers by the September 1 deadline for the implementation of the program for the 1966 – 1967 school year. If the the required number of transfer request failed to meet the deadline the program could be attempted the following school year. Additionally, the proposal required that the district increase staff to implement the program (Post Standard, 1966c).

It is difficult to determine if Barry's new plan was a direct response to Rev. Welsh's letter in the Herald Journal regarding the cross-busing of students and the neglect shown to the concerns voiced by African American parents, but there are a few inconsistencies that call the sincerity of this plan into question. First, this is the first time Barry called upon white parents to volunteer to have their children bused. This burden had always been assigned to African

American parents. Second, the proposed program contradicted Barry's statement one month earlier at the June school board meeting, which indicated his concern that busing white students to an African American school could lead to lower levels of academic achievement for them. That statement would likely deter white parents from participating in the program. Third, he neglected to address the impact the issue of overcrowding at Croton would have on the proposed plan. Busing 700 students out and replacing them with 700 students would maintain the 1200 student enrollment, which was 300 above capacity. It seems unlikely that white middle-class parents would volunteer to transfer their children into an overcrowded school. Fourth, he allowed parents only two weeks to volunteer for this project. The school board placed the initial advertisement for this program in the August 15, 1966 Syracuse newspapers, two weeks before the closing deadline (Syracuse School Board, 1966). This left very little time to build support for this project or for parents, who might consider it, to ask questions.

Despite its late introduction Bishop Walter Foery endorsed the school board's integration plan, which became known as "Project 700". He sent a letter to each parish in the Syracuse Diocese, which the priests were instructed to read during Sunday morning mass, on August 14, the day before the Project 700 appeal went public. The letter urged white parents to give prayerful consideration to voluntarily transferring their children to Croton Elementary School and to request that African American parents participate in the voluntary transfers of their children who were students at Croton. Foery penned a one and one half page letter in which he admitted that although cross-busing wasn't the best answer to achieve integration, it was the best available answer at the time. He further stated that maintaining Croton as a segregated school was "an indictment upon the entire community. We are morally obliged to help our community in this problem" (Volmes, 1966). Foery also pointed out that the integration plan would not be

implemented unless it was guaranteed to produce a three to ten ratio of African American students to white students, otherwise the project would be negated and all families released from their pledge to participate. He cited three reasons why parents should participate. These were school board statistics supporting the academic value of an education in an integrated school, the imperative that children be prepared to live in a diverse society, and the additional services that would be provided at Croton, the only air conditioned school in the school district (Volmes, 1966).

The Syracuse School Board's Project 700 plan set a goal to transform Croton Elementary School from one that was majority African American to one that was majority white. Whether this goal was set to make white parents feel comfortable sending their children into a school located on the border of a low-income housing project, by assuring them that despite the school's location, they would still have the majority advantage or to finally put the issue of integrating Croton to rest, by having documented proof that an attempt to remedy the problem had been made, the expectation that the parents of 1400 students would volunteer to cross-bus their children within a timeframe of two weeks seems lofty. Although the school district offices received 90 calls, involving the transfer of 163 students on the first day, only 214 total transfers were requested by the September 1, 1966 deadline. As a result the program was cancelled for the 1966-1967 school year.

Charles V. Willie, a Syracuse University professor penned a letter to the editor of the Syracuse Post Standard in which he criticized cancellation of Project 700. He said the cancellation revealed "a sinister attitude of arrogance, tending toward white superiority" (Willie, 1966). He based his rebuke on his belief that the board could not tolerate the idea that middle class white children would be the minority in a high poverty, African American school, even

though they place African American children in that position all the time through their one-way busing programs. Willie also called attention to the actions taken by the board to allow all the students from Prescott to attend Grant Junior High School when parents boycotted sending them to Madison. After applauding the willingness of the 68 white families that volunteered to transfer their children, he lamented that the fact that the Croton community was denied the contribution they would have made. He noted, however, “they have helped reveal to the community what the Board of Education really stands for” (Willie, 1966).

### **Contradictions and Failures**

Willie’s letter, like Welch’s, illuminated the the school board’s hipocracy in the ongoing struggle with the African American community, particularly as it related to the integration of Croton Elementary School. The school board responded to the parents’ petitions by evading the issue of segregation or by catering to the will of the white parents in the Syracuse community that opposed the busing of their children. Their actions directly contradicted the philosophy espoused by their superintendent, Franklyn Barry, who stated that de facto segregation hindered the learning experiences of children by not allowing them to get to respect and understand people of other races and creeds. He said, “Education is the root of democracy” (Scully, 1966e), but acted in a contrary manner. His conflicting statements along side the actions taken by the board demonstrated the absence of democracy regarding the Croton Elementary School students, who were frequently denied an education comparable to that of their white peers. His statements to the Herald Journal and the Post Standard about bringing African American students to a higher level rather than lowering the level for all students, which appeared in the June 22, 1966 editions of both newspapers, indicate that he viewed African American children as receiving an inferior education, yet he evaded taking effective actions to remedy the situation.

A further demonstration of the contradictions that existed in the Syracuse School District when it involved African American students is the policy the school board adopted on creating racial balance in the schools that relied solely on the voluntary movement of students, rather than upon the direct action of the school board. The school board revised their policy on racial balance in 1967. The revision changed the definition of racial balance, which previously required that the demographics of the school reflect the demographics of the neighborhood, and therefore allowed segregation. Under the revised racial balance policy “any school whose Negro enrollment is greater than 1.5 times or less than .5 times the over-all city school district racial percentage pattern at its particular educational level, to be racially imbalanced” (Yeo, 1967a). It also set administrative requirements to ensure that the racial makeup of individual classrooms reflected the percentage of African American students and white students in the building and allowed the school to limit the enrollment new of African American students if their current enrollment was greater than 1.5 times the over-all district racial percentage. Exceptions to the enrollment restrictions were dependent upon specific enrollment requirements such as the enrollment of special education students.

Similar to other actions taken by the school board, the flaws in this policy favored the educational preferences of white parents over the needs of African American students. Two major enforcement problems existed with the plan. First, the plan relied solely upon voluntary transfers to and from schools that were racially imbalanced. The practice of voluntary transfer proved unsuccessful in achieving racial balance at Croton, the school with the highest population of African American students due to over crowding, the opposition to cross-busing, and the perceptions about African American students academic abilities. Second, the school board failed to enforce the policy in schools with high African American populations. In 1966 at least two

schools, Merrick and Danforth, became racially imbalanced due to school closings intended to force integration (Post Standard, 1965), not due to voluntary transfers or housing patterns. Croton, Merrick, Danforth, and eight other schools in the district served African American student populations that exceeded the district's demographic make-up, while 20 other schools educate student populations with African American enrollments below 10 percent (Syracuse Post Standard, 1966). These facts gave merit to the legal action filed by Croton parents who alleged that the school board only takes actions that "do not generate opposition from the white community" (Herald Journal, 1966).

The Croton parents filed the law suit because the school board used the policy to address racial imbalance at every Syracuse public school, except Croton. The school board cited Croton's 90 percent African American population as the reason for categorizing it as an exception. They believed that excluding Croton would keep it open, because the racial balance policy would restrict the number of new African American students who could enroll in the school. The lack of white students transferring into Croton, coupled with the prohibition of enrolling new African American students would cause the school to close in a few years (Stout & Inger, 1968). The school board attempted to create a different integration plan for Croton, which would lead to long-term integration throughout the school district. The plan proposed to create four sites in Syracuse, one in each quadrant, where there would be several buildings that served the educational needs of the students. This would facilitate integration by combining the student populations of each quadrant of the city onto four campuses that had centrally located gymnasiums, libraries, kitchens, health facilities, and audio/visual centers. Croton was scheduled to be the first site of this plan, which was expected to take several years to implement. The drawbacks of this plan hindered its coming to fruition. Its disadvantages included its

dependence upon numerous allocations of funding from the current and future city councils and support from future members of the school board (Stout & Inger, 1968).

After being directed by the state to draft a plan to integrate Croton within a year, the school board drafted a plan, which one board commissioner criticized as representing “tokenism” and “gradualism”. The Excel Program would choose 170 white students and 40 Croton students to participate in a program for high performing students in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. The students would meet in a self-contained area of Croton and have no contact with the rest of the school population. This would open slots for 170 Croton students in predominantly white schools. The total number of students would gradually increase each subsequent year until the school achieved racial balance (Stout & Inger, 1968). Robert Warr, the only African American on the school board, voted for the Excel Program, but joined others in the African community in criticizing the small number of students chosen to participate the first year (Yeo, 1967b).

In addition to the Excel Program a partnership with Syracuse University (SU) created a community initiative that allowed Croton students to take classes on SU’s campus. The Croton-on-Campus program allowed 25 fourth, fifth, and sixth grade Croton Elementary School students to spend one half of each school day attending special classes in a dedicated facility on the SU campus. Although this plan had the potential to address the issues surrounding academic achievement, it failed to address the issue of integration because the only students participating were Croton students. This issue became the focus of another petition filed with the state education commissioner by a group of Croton parents. They charged that this program made no progress toward ending segregation at Croton (Stout & Inger, 1968).

Regardless of the plan the school board tried, Croton, which became Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. School in 1969, remained segregated and the students, as a whole, remained at the

lower end of the academic achievement scale. By 1972 the parents at King Elementary lost confidence in the ability of the Syracuse School Board to adequately represent the needs of their community. They organized under the guidance of James May, the principal of Dr. King School, and George Moody, Sr., the administrator of the King-on-Campus program, who became spokespersons for their movement. In a statement read by Moody at a press conference in March 1972 the group demanded the City of Syracuse create a Black Board of Education that would oversee all matters relating to the education of African American students in the Syracuse schools with dense African American populations (Rappaport, 1972a).

When the group drafted their declaration of independence from the all white school board, four elementary, two junior high, and one high school had student populations that were more than 50 percent African American. Additionally, three other elementary schools had student populations that were more than 40 percent African American. The demand stated that the education that African American children received was inferior due to the system controlled by white policy makers, who had a negative perception of the African American community, its people, and its culture (Rappaport, 1972a). The group's statement said, "We feel that the educational system of Syracuse is a colonial system because it provides services to our African American community, extracts resources from that same African American community, and then excludes it from the economic and decision-making processes affecting it. We call that taxation without representation" (Rappaport, 1972a). This proposal was not supported by the majority of the African American community. The strongest voices in the African American community sought to continue the fight for integrated schools (Rappaport, 1972b) and bring an end to the ongoing fallacy of "separate but equal" that persisted within the school district.

## **The Effects of Segregation and Poverty at Dr. King Applied Science Magnet School**

During the 1970s modified strategies for achieving integrated schools emerged as new commissioners of education took over the governance of the school board. In 1976 the school board chose Sydney Johnson, the first African American to fill the role of superintendent. Johnson, a conservative republican, opposed busing students to achieve integration. He proposed a voluntary integration plan through a school choice initiative. His plan incorporated magnet schools, a concept used by school districts that did not want to incorporate the practice of forced busing to integrate schools. Magnet schools attracted diverse student populations because they offered various specialized programs that focused on specific areas, such as math, science, or the performing arts (Bednarski, 1976). Although the school board modified Johnson's original proposal, his plan achieved racial balance in 17 schools through school closings, rezoning, and "open school policy" restrictions on voluntary transfers during the 1977-1978 school year.

By early November 1977 five elementary schools, including three newly designated magnet schools, Danforth, Dr. King, and Franklin, remained racially imbalanced based on the definition provided by the New York State Education Commissioner. NYS defined racially balanced schools as those with 15 – 45 percent minority populations. Despite the ongoing process of transferring students to reduce the racial imbalance at these schools, their minority student populations remained above the 45 percent state threshold (Bednarski, 1977a). Although Danforth's minority student population dropped to 54 percent, reducing it further became a top priority for the SCSD. They worked diligently to reduce Danforth's imbalance to a 50 – 50 ratio by the end of November 1977 because they relied upon the \$195,000 federal grant to run an extended day program, a full day kindergarten, and an enrichment program at Danforth. Since federal stipulations required that schools receiving the grant maintain a 50 – 50 racial

balance (Bedarski, 1977b) lowering the number of minority students in the building became an urgent matter. The SCSD met their goal when 18 African American students agreed to transfer to other schools (Herald Journal, 1977).

The SCSD addressed the failure of the magnet school concept to create racial balance at Dr. King and Franklin by creating a tandem magnet school that attempted to combine two schools on opposite sides of the city into one school. As a result of the merger, Dr. King's previous 95 percent African American student population reduced to 46 percent and Franklin's five percent African American student population increased to 46 percent. According to the school board's plan, students attended both schools through an exchange program that required the cross-busing of students between Dr. King Magnet on the city's south side and Franklin Magnet on the city's north side. The SCSD provided busing, additional staff, and additional faculty in each building to facilitate this merger of schools (Bednarski, 1977c). The students enrolled in these two schools spent five of every 90 days at the tandem school during the first semester of the school year. During each subsequent semester the number of days would gradually increase until all students attended each school one half of the school year (Bednarski, 1977c; Saiz, 1978).

Similar to the previous approaches taken by the school board, the tandem magnet school approach failed to create a racially balanced student body at Dr. King Applied Science Magnet School and failed to eliminate the disparate treatment of African Americans in the school district. Despite the busing of students between both schools during the two years the program existed, the enrollment of African American students at Dr. King School remained above 90 percent and below 15 percent at Franklin. During this time the school district required African American parents who kept their children enrolled at Dr. King, rather than transfer them to a racially

balanced school, sign a statement declaring King school as their first choice. In effect, the statement indicated that the parents chose to keep their children in a racially imbalanced school. The school district neglected to make this a requirement for white parents who chose to keep their children at Franklin, despite the racial imbalance there (Rice, 1978). At the end of the second year of the tandem school program, the principals of both schools presented a proposal to the school board that replaced the busing of all students between schools with the transfer of Dr. King's fifth and sixth grade students to Franklin. This plan brought racial balance to Franklin, but not to King, despite the proposed expansion of the pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten programs. At the beginning of the following school year, Dr. King remained the only racially imbalanced school in the district (Saiz, 1979). The SCSD never completely resolved this issue.

The unresolved issue of segregation at Dr. King seemed to foreshadow the issues of racial imbalance the SCSD would encounter in the decades to come. Two decades after the introduction of magnet schools, the district continued to struggle with the issue of racial imbalance, partially due to white flight and an increased African American population. There were two periods during which a significant part of the white middle class population left the city. As mentioned in the previous chapter, 20 percent of the white population left Syracuse for the suburbs from 1950 – 1970. Over the next 40 years, 50 percent of the remaining white population left the city for the suburbs. During the same time the African American population increased ten-fold. Additionally, property values declined by 20.5 percent during the 1970s (Semuels, 2015). Although property values began to recover during the following decade, they dropped again at the end of the century.

The exodus of industries, such as the Carrier Corporation, whose factory closing cost the city 10,000 jobs at the beginning of the century, had a severe impact on the Syracuse economy

(Semuels, 2015). By the year 2000 more than 27 percent of the population lived below the poverty line (Office of State Comptroller, 2004) and during the next 13 years the number of high poverty census tracts increased from 12 to 30 (Semuels, 2015). These events significantly influenced the demographics of the public school population. During the 2000-2001 school year the SCSD student demographics reflected the shifts in the population and the economy. The district recorded near equal numbers of white and African America students. Sixty-three percent of them qualified for the free or reduced lunch program. However, the demographics at Dr. King Magnet School continued to demonstrate a racial and economic imbalance with a 93 percent African American student population and a 89 percent free and reduced lunch rate (New York State, 2003).

Over the next 15 years the district-wide white student population continued to shrink and the number of economically disadvantaged students continued to grow. By the 2015-2016 school year only 23 percent of the students enrolled in the SCSD were white and 80 percent qualified for the free or reduced lunch program (Semuels, 2015). During this 15 year time period the African American student population dropped by nine percent at Dr. King, while the free or reduced lunch rate rose by four percent. Although, the free or reduced lunch rate is not an exact indicator of the poverty level within the district<sup>1</sup>, when compared with the other 17 districts in the county, which have majority white student populations, and only 21 percent of the students qualifying for the free or reduced lunch program, (Semuels, 2015) there is a clear indication of income disparity.

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<sup>1</sup> Qualifying students come from households with incomes that are up to 185 percent of the poverty threshold or are participants in other government funded programs, i.e. foster care, Migrant Workers Education, or Head Start (Snyder & Musu-Gillette, 2015).

Given that white flight and the assaults to the Syracuse economy, caused by events such as business closings and job loss, affected the demographics of the city, thereby affecting the demographics of the schools, this chapter analyzes the connections between segregated schools, poverty, and academic achievement of third grade African American students at Dr. King Magnet School. It compares their proficiency levels on the NYS math and ELA tests to third grade students at elementary schools in two nearby predominantly white, middle-class school districts. According to the New York State Policy Office (2015), 93 percent of the students in New York State's "Failing Schools" are students of color and 82 percent of them receive free or reduced lunch. Failing Schools are defined as schools where the ELA and Math proficiency scores of the students rank in the bottom five percent of state or the graduation rate is below 60 percent. The schools on this list have scores below the state averages in every category.

The 2015 report indicated that failing schools averaged 5.9 percent proficiency on ELA tests, 6.2 percent on Math tests, and had graduation rates of 46.6 percent during the 2013-2014 school year. This was in contrast to the state averages that were 31.4 percent, 35.8 percent, and 76.4 percent, respectively (Policy Office, 2015). During that school year, zero percent of the students in grade three, four percent of the students in grade four, and three percent of the students in grade five received scores that indicated proficiency on the state ELA exam at Dr. King Magnet School. In math, two percent of the third grade students, 16 percent of the fourth grade students, and five percent of the fifth grade students had scores that indicated proficiency. The schoolwide average was 7.4 percent proficiency in math and 2.3 percent in ELA (Policy Office, 2015). In February 2015 when the New York State governor's office released the statewide list of "Failing Schools," 18 of the 34 schools in the SCSD were on the list. Dr. King

appeared on the NYS Failing Schools list in 2015 for 10th consecutive year (Policy Office, 2015; Weaver, 2015).

### **Persistent Failure**

The decade-long placement of Dr. King Applied Science Magnet School on the NYS “Failing Schools” list reveals the educational disparities that exist between the racially integrated public schools in Onondaga County and the schools in the SCSD. The effect of segregated schools on the African American students in Syracuse became apparent during the 1960s when the integration of schools produced positive academic outcomes for the African American students that attended them. During the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when the state began testing public school students for proficiency in ELA and math, test scores illuminated the widening of the academic achievement gap between students in SCSD schools, like Dr. King Magnet, and their peers in nearby predominantly white, middle-class school districts. This section uses the ELA and math proficiency scores of the third grade students from Dr. King and their peers in two racially balanced schools from two adjacent school districts in Onondaga County to demonstrate these disparities. Third grade students are the youngest group that NYS tests for proficiency, and therefore, the earliest indication of the effectiveness of the academic inputs students receive. The three schools examined in this section are Dr. King Magnet (Syracuse), Moses Dewitt Elementary (Jamesville-Dewitt), and Long Branch Elementary (Liverpool).

Dr. King Applied Science Magnet School, formerly Croton Elementary School, was chosen because it is the only school in the Syracuse City School District, that remained open after the school district engaged the closing of predominantly African American, racially imbalanced schools as a method for achieving integration, yet it never achieved integrated status by district or state standards. During the 2014-2015 school year 20,084 students enrolled in

SCSD schools. African American students equaled 50 percent student of the overall enrollment, which was more than double the white student enrollment. Seventy-four percent of the enrolled students qualified for free or reduced lunch. At Dr. King Magnet School, African American students represented 84 percent of the student population at and 91 percent of the 594 students qualified for the free and reduced lunch program. Dr. King Applied Magnet School students have a history of low achievement in their segregated environment, as demonstrated in other sections this paper. The elementary schools that will be engaged for comparison are middle-class suburban schools that are racially balanced by NYS standards. According to the data available at <https://data.nysed.gov/>, the New York State Education Department website that publishes school data, neither of these schools, nor any schools in their districts have been placed on the NYS “Failing Schools” list.

The first school, Moses Dewitt Elementary School, is in the Jamesville-Dewitt School District (JD) and is located adjacent to the eastern border of Syracuse. The district’s 2014-2015 K -12 enrollment was 2928. Seven percent of the students were African American and 79 percent were white. The free and reduced lunch rate was 11 percent (New York State, 2017). Moses Dewitt Elementary School was chosen because of its proximity to Dr. King Elementary School. Although it is only five miles away, there are significant differences in student demographics and student achievement in terms of proficiency on the state ELA and math tests. The second school, Long Branch Elementary School, is in the Liverpool School District. Liverpool is the second largest, single school district in Onondaga County, meaning like Syracuse, all the students live in the same municipality, as opposed to Jamesville-Dewitt, which combines two municipalities – Jamesville and Dewitt. The Liverpool School District had an enrollment of 7,202 students during the 2014-2015 school year. Eight percent of the students in

the district were African American and 78 percent of them were white. Thirty-seven percent of Liverpool's students qualified for the free or reduced lunch program that school year. Long Branch Elementary school is 10 miles from Dr. King Elementary School. It was chosen because it is the only elementary school in the Liverpool School District that has a large enough subgroup of African American students enrolled in third grade to have their outcomes on state proficiency test recorded on the state report cards. The NYS report cards do not record scores if the subgroup has five or fewer members. This is done to protect the privacy of the students (New York State, 2017.)

The chart on the following page show the percentages of third grade students at each school that demonstrated proficiency on the state ELA and math tests over a 10 year period, starting in the 2004-2005 school year (indicated by the number one) and ending in the 2013-2014 school year (indicated by the number 10). They demonstrate the considerable gap between Dr. King Magnet School students and their suburban peers in the selected schools. There was a sharp increase in the Dr. King students' math test scores during the 2006 and 2007 testing years (indicated by numbers three and four), followed by a sharp drop that eventually became single digit proficiency scores. During these third and fourth years, the state report card does not specify the schoolwide proficiency. Instead, it reports the proficiency of an unidentified "small group" of students.

There is also an absence of proficiency percentages under categories such as, African American, White, Multi-racial, etc., which indicates that five or fewer students scored at proficiency levels during each of these years. The state report card only list scores under non-racial categories, i.e., students with disabilities, English proficient, and general-education during this time period. There is no indication of who the "Small Group" is, but the Syracuse Post

Standard states that Dr. King’s test scores were “persistently low” and “failing” during those years the 2007 and 2008 school years. This means all of the students outside of the “Small Group” scored at the lowest level, indicating they were not meeting the basic learning standards (New York State, 2017).



Chart 1: Ten years of Math and ELA proficiency scores at Moses Dewitt, Long Branch, and Dr. King Magnet (New York State, 2017).

During the first testing, year only 18 percent of the third grade students at Dr. King scored at the proficiency level on the math test and only 33 percent achieved proficiency on the ELA test. By comparison, 87 percent of the Moses Dewitt third grade students and 88 percent of the Long Branch students tested at the proficiency level in math. Their ELA scores surpassed those of the Dr. King students as well. At Moses Dewitt and Long Branch, more than 80 percent of the third grade students demonstrated proficiency while only 33 percent of their peers at Dr. King achieved at the same level. The following year Moses Dewitt and Long Branch students tested at similar proficiency levels in math – 85 percent and 87 percent, respectively. During that same year, less than half of the third grade students at Dr. King achieved the level of proficiency in math. Although the ELA proficiency levels were lower than they were for the previous year’s cohort at both suburban schools, these schools continued to demonstrate proficiency levels that exceeded the state average, whereas the students at Dr. King continued to demonstrate proficiency well below the state average. To whatever extent the state administered tests and their scores indicate the academic achievement levels of the students, and the degree to which the schools successfully educate them, these scores indicate a clear disparity between the quality of education received by the Dr. King students and their suburban peers.

The students at Dr. King Magnet School are among the more than 250,000 students who failed to receive a quality education in the failing schools in New York State during the 2004/2005 – 2013/2014 ten year period. According to the governor’s office, this number includes 235,200 students of color and 205,000 free and reduced lunch recipients (Policy Office, 2015). During the summer of 2015, the New York State Board of Regents approved new regulations that designated Dr. King and 17 other schools in the SCSD as “struggling schools,” which required them to go into receivership. These schools, previously identified as “failing

schools,” have state proficiency test scores that remained in the lowest five percent of the test scores statewide for three consecutive years, beginning with the 2012-2013 school year. As a “struggling school” Dr. King went into receivership under the SCSD superintendent. Under NYS education law the superintendent, as receiver, has the power supprecede any decisions governing the school, including those made by the school board and the building principal, that conflicts with his/her intervention plan. This includes firing and hiring faculty and staff, changing curriculum, changing the school calendar, and coverting the school to a charter or community school (Engage NY, 2015). The superintendent has two years to demonstrate improvement. If demonstratable improvement is not achieved within a school two year period the governance of the school transfers to an independent receiver (NYS Education Department, 2015). Although nine of the “struggling schools” in the SCSD qualified to be removed from receivership status after two years, Dr. King did not. During the month of September 2017 the SCSD held meetings to update stakeholders as to the next steps regarding the receivership status of the school. These steps could includes turning the school over to an independent receiver for up to three years. The independent receiver could be an individual, a non-profit entity, or another school district (Engage NY, 2015).

## **Conclusion**

Syracuse, N.Y. has a long history of segregated public schools. This segregation, which was caused by restrictive housing practices that limited where African Americans could rent or purchase dwellings during the early and middle 20<sup>th</sup> century, created segregated residential patterns and segregated schools. During the early 1960s the Syracuse School Board adopted a racial balance policy that enforced segregation in the schools by requiring that the racial composition of all schools conform to the racial makeup of the neighborhoods in which they were located (Yeo, 1967a). Their subsequent practices of redrawing the enrollment zones kept the racial composition of the schools as segregated as the neighborhoods in which they were located. When they were finally forced to address the issue, integrating the schools became largely dependent upon the busing or voluntary transfer of African American students because white parents refused to allow their children to be bused to a predominantly African American school. Their boycott of the school boards first and only attempts to bus white middle-class students from Prescott Junior High School to predominantly African American, Madison Junior High School clearly communicated the message that white parents would not tolerate the busing of their children. It was also an effective demonstration of the political power the white parents possessed in the Syracuse community. The school board's subsequent propensity to cater to the will of the white parents in the school district allowed the detrimental effects of segregated schools to continue to affect the African American students that remained in them, particularly the students at Croton Elementary, later renamed Dr. King Applied Science Magnet School, where racial balance was attempted, but not achieved.

During the years when the school district bused African American students from segregated or racially imbalanced schools to predominantly white schools, the achievement

levels of the transferred students often surpassed that of the students who were left behind in the segregated schools. This caused Syracuse to gain the attention of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. The Commission called representatives from eight U.S. cities that were working to achieve integration in their public schools to testify at their hearing in Rochester, N.Y. Syracuse School Board Superintendent, Dr. Franklyn Barry, and School Board President David Jaquith, testified about the school boards integration plan and the improved academic performance of transferred students (Stout & Inger, 1968; Post Standard, 1966). The improved academic achievement of the African American students that were bused to Levy Junior High School and Edward Smith Elementary School led to a change in the attitude of key school board officials. School Board President David Jaquith retracted his previous position regarding the school board's responsibility for creating racially balanced schools. Jaquith, who had opposed integration began to support the efforts to achieve it. Despite his paradigm shift, African American parents and integration activists in Syracuse often criticized the school board for moving too slowly or for denying the parents of the African American students the opportunity to participate on an equal level as white parents in terms of their children's education. Specifically, the white parents' protests against the busing of their children were honored, requiring that integration-related busing only transfer African American students, despite the objections of African American parents.

The successful racial balance of Syracuse public schools never manifested. White flight and the growth of the African American population are among the factors that thwarted the process, despite magnet school choice initiatives that replaced busing as the dominant plan for integrating the schools. The current African American and Latino enrollment in the Syracuse City School District have earned it the designation as one of the most segregated school districts

in the nation (Kucsera & Orfield, 2014). Unfortunately, the impact this has had on educational achievement echoes the statement made by Dr. King during his speech at Syracuse University in 1965. During his address to the Syracuse community, he stated that ghetto schools in urban areas offered increasingly inferior education to the students who attended them and caused retrogression each year (King, 1965). The evidence of this is apparent at the school that bears his name, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Applied Science Magnet School, where the students consistently scored lower than their peers in the surrounding integrated school districts on the New York State ELA and Math proficiency test. Beyond the existence of a gap in academic achievement between them and their local peers, the test scores revealed that the students at Dr. King school were among the lowest five percent of students in New York State. This placed the school in the category designated “Failing Schools” for 10 consecutive years. In 2015 the state education department and the Board of Regents classified schools whose proficiency scores consistently fell into the bottom five percent as “Struggling Schools” and required the transference of school governance to the district’s superintendent, who had two years to achieve demonstrable improvement. Although nine of the eighteen schools in the SCSD achieved this goal within the two-year period, Dr. King did not. As a result, its governance transfers to an independent receiver during the 2017-2018 school year.

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