"I'm Usually the Only Black in My Class": The Human and Social Costs of Within-School Segregation

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"I'M USUALLY THE ONLY BLACK IN MY CLASS": THE HUMAN AND SOCIAL COSTS OF WITHIN-SCHOOL SEGREGATION

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> ... *it seemed that as long as Blacks and Whites attended the same*
> *school, the level of their integration was unimportant.*[1]

INTRODUCTION

In 1954 the United States Supreme Court determined that the legal separation of Black and White youth in America's schools would negatively affect the "hearts and minds" of Black children in "a way unlikely ever to be undone."[2] The Court consequently ruled that within the field of education, racial segregation had "no place."[3] Then, like now, the social science research that buttressed the Court's decision was primarily concerned with the psychological as well as the educational costs of Black Americans attending racially segregated institutions. Accordingly, researchers have documented

    1.   Sue Ellen Henry & Abe Feuerstein, *"Now We Go to Their School": Desegregation and its Contemporary Legacy,* 68 J. NEGRO EDUC. 164, 179 (1999).

    2.   Brown v. Board of Ed., 347 U.S. 483, 494 (1954).

    3.   *Id.* at 495.

the extent to which Black children attending predominantly or entirely Black schools suffer educationally due to inadequate academic and economic resources, less competent and experienced teaching personnel, deteriorating facilities, and less varied and inadequately rigorous curricular offerings.[4] In terms of psychological costs, social scientists had developed, early on, the empirical evidence necessary for the plaintiffs in the *Brown* case to argue that segregated schooling facilities were detrimental to the esteem and subsequent academic motivation of African-American youths.[5]

Fewer researchers, however, have focused on the costs to students who attend integrated schools that are plagued by within-school segregation. This has been the case even though "one of the most likely outcomes of any school desegregation plan is resegregation within schools, or the process of placing Black students into the low-track, remedial classes and White students into high-track or honors classes."[6] Within-school segregation is also a common phenomenon in racially mixed schools or schools that were

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4.   *See* JONATHON KOZOL, SAVAGE INEQUALITIES (1991); GARY ORFIELD & SUSAN E. EATON, DISMANTLING DESEGREGATION: THE QUIET REVERSAL OF BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION (1996); *see also* JEANNIE OAKES, MULTIPLYING INEQUALITIES: THE EFFECTS OF RACE, SOCIAL CLASS, AND TRACKING ON OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE (1990) (examining the distribution of science and mathematics learning opportunities in elementary and secondary schools in the U.S.); EDUCATIONAL TESTING SERVICE, THE STATE OF INEQUALITY (1988) (analyzing the degrees of inequality in the public school system and efforts to provide greater equity); AMY STUART WELLS & ROBERT L. CRAIN, STEPPING OVER THE COLOR LINE: AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN WHITE SUBURBAN SCHOOLS (1997) (analyzing a school choice plan in St. Louis, Missouri allowing Black students to attend White suburban schools) [hereinafter WELLS & CRANE, STEPPING OVER THE COLOR LINE].

5.   *See* Kenneth. B. Clark, *Effect of Prejudice and Discrimination on Personality Development*, Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth (1950); Helen L. Witmer & Ruth Kotinsky, *Personality in the Making: The Fact-Finding Report of the Mid-century White House Conference on Children and Youth*, Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth (1952); *see also* Kenneth B. Clark & Mamie P. Clark, *Emotional Factors in Racial Identification in Negro Children*, 19 J. NEGRO EDUC. 341 (1950) (investigating the development of racial identification in Black children); Max Deutscher & Isidor Chein, *The Psychological Effects of Enforced Segregation: A Survey of Social Science Opinion*, 26 J. PSYCHOL. 259 (1948) (presenting findings on the psychological effects of enforced segregation on Whites as well as Blacks); Isidor Chein, *What are the Psychological Effects of Segregation Under Conditions of Equal Facilities*, 3 INT'L J. OPINION & ATTITUDE RES. 229 (1949). More recent research has challenged the conclusions of these studies in light of the contention that this earlier research relied on oversimplified or inadequate measures of esteem. *See* Bruce Hare, *Racial and Socioeconomic Variations in Preadolescent Area-Specific and General Self-Esteem*. 1 INT.L J. INTERCULTURAL REL., 31 (1977) (arguing that low socioeconomic status exercises a greater negative influence on self-esteem than race); Margaret Beale-Spencer, *Black Children's Race Awareness, Racial Attitudes and Self-Concept: A Reinterpretation*, 25 J. CHILD PSYCHOL. & PSYCHIATRY & ALLIED DISCIPLINES 433 (July 1984) (presenting data showing that Black preschool children that indicated Eurocentric based racial values were well adjusted).

6.   Amy Stuart Wells, *Reexamining Social Science Research on School Desegregation: Long-versus Short-term Effects*, 96 TCHRS. C. REC. 691, 696 (1995) [hereinafter Wells, *Reexamining Social Science Research on School Desegregation*].

integrated by means other than a court order or school district policy that defined a desegregation plan.[7]

The work that has focused on within-school segregation has been most concerned with how this phenomenon limits the educational opportunities and might incur a psychological toll on the mass of Black students who find themselves relegated to lower-ability classrooms in integrated schools. This Article, however, allows us to begin to examine the other side of the coin. It reports on how within-school segregation practices create psychological, social, and educational pressures for those few Black students who have escaped enrollment in the least rigorous courses in their school. More precisely, the Article offers insight into how high achieving Black students in one integrated high school (that I will refer to as Hillside) struggle with being, in most cases, the *only* Black student in their Advanced Placement courses. Before reporting on the experiences of these high achieving students in Part IV of this Article, Part I provides a brief review of the research literature on desegregation. The review will highlight the degree to which within-school segregation has been featured as a part of this body of work. In Parts II and III, I then situate these high achievers within the logic of the larger study of which they were a part. Finally, in Part V, the Article concludes with a discussion of how these findings are relevant to the "the hearts and minds" of White Americans and the prospect of creating a more equitable society.[8]

I. LITERATURE REVIEW

Most of the research that has been conducted on desegregated or racially mixed schools has focused on examining whether minority students, primarily Black Americans, benefited academically (as measured by standardized test results) from their enrollment in integrated institutions.[9] Most of these studies relied on pre-test/post-test analyses in order to measure the change in Black students' achievement "test scores over a

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7. JEANNIE OAKES, KEEPING TRACK: HOW SCHOOLS STRUCTURE INEQUALITY 64 (1985); *see also* Jeannie Oakes, *More than Misapplied Technology: A Normative and Political Response to Hallinan on Tracking*, 67 SOC. EDUC. 84, 88 (1994) [hereinafter Oakes, *More than Misapplied Technology*]; Jeannie Oakes, *One More Thought*, 67 SOC. EDUC. 91 (1994); Maureen Hallinan, *Tracking from Theory to Practice*, 67 SOC. EDUC. 79, 80–81 (1994).

8. Throughout this Article, I consciously rely on the term "equitable" and not "equal." As suggested by a number of scholars, resources and opportunities might have to be unequally distributed in order to ensure that the least advantaged in society are provided with the support and assistance necessary for competing with the most advantaged in society. In other words, the equal distribution of resources and opportunities does not account for the fact that the privileged are necessarily already advantaged in the race for social and economic rewards. Thus if we are to level the playing field, the least advantaged might require a greater distribution of resources compared to the most advantaged.

9. Gary Orfield, *Research Politics and the Antibusing Debate*, 42 LAW & CONTEMP. PROBS. 141, 151–53 (Autumn 1978).

one-year period, usually during the first year of desegregation."[10] In the first comprehensive review on the effects of school desegregation on children, St. John, however, pointed out that in most of these studies "school racial composition rather than classroom racial composition [was] the focus, and reports [did] not specify whether grouping practices resulted in within-school segregation."[11] Within-school segregation is known to suppress, however, the school achievement performance of minority youth given that minority children will more often than not find themselves in classrooms in which curricular coverage is comparatively sparse,[12] time on task is truncated,[13] and pedagogical practices are least engaging.[14]

This reduction in minority[15] students' opportunities to learn is, in part, a function of minority youth being regularly assigned to those lower-ability classrooms that are a part of a high school's regular curricular program. Such assignments occur even when Black and other non-Asian minority youths have test scores equal to or higher than White students who are dispropor-tionately assigned to higher-ability classrooms.[16] These assignments also

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10. Wells, *Reexamining Social Science Research on School Desegregation, supra* note 6, at 694.

11. *See* NANCY H. ST. JOHN, SCHOOL DESEGREGATION: OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN 37 (1975); *see also* Wells, *Reexamining Social Science Research on School Desegregation, supra* note 6, at 696. Wells states that although studies focusing on within-school segregation could help to explain why school desegregation is more helpful in some schools than in others, policy makers have, until recently, paid little attention to within-school segregation. *Id.*

12. OAKES, KEEPING TRACK: HOW SCHOOLS STRUCTURE INEQUALITY, *supra* note 7, at 78.

13. *Id.* at 97–105.

14. *Id.* at 105–12; *see also* Jeannie Oakes, Adam Gamoran, & Reba N. Page, *Curriculum Differentiation Opportunities Outcomes and Meaning, in* HANDBOOK OF RESEARCH ON CURRICU-LUM 570, 576–92 (Philip Jackson ed., 1992) [hereinafter Oakes, et al. *Curriculum Differentiation: Opportunities, Outcomes, and Meanings.*

15. In this Article the term minority refers to non-Asian minorities. Asian minorities like Whites are disproportionately enrolled in higher-ability tracks.

16. *See* Hallinan, *Tracking: From Theory to Practice, supra* note 7, at 80; *see also* John A. Kovach, & Don E. Gordon, *Inclusive Education: A Modern Day Civil-Rights Struggle,* 61 EDUC. F. 247 (Spring 1997) [hereinafter Kovach & Gordon, *Inclusive Education*]. Some researchers have found that racial group differences in ability group assignment nearly disappear when achievement is controlled, *see* Maureen Hallinan, *School Differences in Tracking Structures and Track Assignments,* 1 J. RES. ADOLESCENCE 251 (1991); Maureen Hallinan, *Sociological Perspectives on Black-White Inequalities in American Schooling,* SOC. EDUC. (Extra Issue 2001); Aaron M. Pallas et al., *Ability Group Effects: Instructional, Social or Institutional?* 67 SOC. EDUC. 27 (1994), and that Black students are more likely to be assigned to higher-ability groups. *See* Karl Alex-ander, Martha Cook & Edward L. McDill, *Curriculum Tracking and Educational Stratification: Some Further Evidence,* 43 AM. SOC. REV. 47 (1978); Adam Gammoran & Robert D. Mare, *Secondary School Tracking and Education Inequality: Compensation, Reinforcement, or Neutrality?* 94 AM. J. SOC. 1146 (1989). However, Oakes indicates that such findings rest on large survey studies that "obscure between-system differences in track assignments resulting from the composition of the student population in the schools." Oakes, *More Than Misapplied Technology, supra* note 7, at 87.

Oakes continues by explaining that the measures in these studies "are usually too gross to detect differential placement practices within schools" because:

occur despite overwhelming evidence that regardless of prior achievement, students would make greater achievement gains if enrolled in higher-ability classes.[17]

Within-school segregation and its accordant constraint on minority students' opportunities to learn is also a function of the fact that minority students are disproportionately identified as learning or behaviorally disabled and therefore find themselves in pull-out programs that are characterized by low teacher expectations and increased risk of educational failure.[18] Importantly, Black students are three times as likely as White students to be labeled as retarded or behaviorally disturbed.[19]

Because within-school segregation constrains the learning opportunities of Black students, the failure to investigate whether

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> [I]n both [low-income, high-minority communities and White and wealthy suburban areas] the schools strive to ... offer both college preparatory and non-college preparatory programs and courses ... However, such communities and schools are not so similar in how well students score on traditional measures of academic ability and achievement. Differences in the typical "ability" composition of schools (with students in White and wealth schools scoring higher on average) mean that many minority students attending schools in predominantly minority communities demonstrate ability levels—as measured by test scores—that would not be high enough to qualify them for academic tracks in Whiter and wealthier communities. However, because their schools need to fill a requisite number of academic track "slots" some of these students are enrolled in the academic tracks at their schools. Consequently when data about two such communities are aggregated, one finds a pattern of track placement that appears to give a slight advantage to African American students (after controlling for ability) of being assigned to academic tracks. This aggregation can mask considerable discrimination against minority students in high track placements" as is found in studies that examine track placement within particular schools or school systems.

Id. at 87–88.

17.   Oakes et al., *Curriculum Differentiation: Opportunities, Outcomes, and Meanings, supra* note 14; *See also* Maureen Hallinan, *Ability Group Effects on Learning in High School*, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Washington DC (2000); Hallinan, *Sociological Perspectives on Black-White Inequalities in American Schooling, supra* note 16.

18.   Kovach & Gordon, *Inclusive Education, supra* note 16, at 249. "Pull-out special education programs were developed to help students with a variety of special needs get 'up to speed' before retuning to the regular classroom." *Id.*; John M. Patton, *The Disproportionate Representation of African Americans in Special Education: Looking Behind the Curtain for Understanding Solutions*, 32 J. SPECIAL EDUC. 25 (1998); Harvey Kantor, & Barbara Brenzel, *Urban Education and the "Truly Disadvantaged": The Historical Roots of the Contemporary Crisis, 1945–1990, in* THE "UNDERCLASS" DEBATE:VIEWS FROM HISTORY 366 (Michael B. Katz ed., 1993).

19.   Kovach & Gordon, *Inclusive Education, supra* note 16, at 249; *see also* NATIONAL RE-SEARCH COUNCIL, PLACING CHILDREN IN SPECIAL EDUCATION: A STRATEGY FOR EQUITY. (Kirby A. Heller et al., eds., 1982) (analyzing the causes of disproportionate representation of minorities in special education).

desegregated schools continue to be segregated at the classroom level, has contributed to our inability to produce definitive findings regarding the impact of desegregation on the achievement performance of Black youth.[20] Despite mixed results in more recent comprehensive literature reviews on desegregation, with regards to whether Blacks benefit academically from attending integrated schools, researchers conclude that overall "desegregation is associated with modest gains in the academic achievement of Blacks. [This is particularly the case] when students initially attend desegregated schools in kindergarten or first grade."[21] Many of these same reviews conclude that there is little evidence that the achievement of White students is affected (negatively or positively) as a consequence of desegregation.[22]

Other desegregation research has examined the impact of integrated schools on intergroup attitudes and interracial relations. The effects of integrated schools on intergroup attitudes and interracial relations have been generally positive when: children's experiences with desegregation occurred in the early grades; schools actively sought to improve intergroup relations; teachers were committed to the desegregation goals of the school; cooperative instructional strategies were employed among students who perceived themselves as having equal status; and students were not tracked by interest or current achievement levels.[23] Importantly, as was the case with the pre-test/post-test studies, the racial composition of the school versus that of the classroom, was relevant to the outcomes of these studies. More precisely, the racial composition of the classroom, as opposed to the school as a whole, was more likely to affect the rate at which Black and White students interacted.[24]

Still other research has been concerned with whether desegregation negatively impacts Black students by diminishing their self-esteem and their racial identity.[25] While several researchers have found short-run negative effects on the academic self-concept of Blacks, we do not yet have

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20. *See* ST. JOHN, SCHOOL DESEGREGATION: OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN, *supra* note 11, at 37–40.

21. AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION,, *School Desegregation, in* ENCYCLOPEDIA OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH 1132, 1134 (Marvin Alkin ed., 1992) [hereinafter *School Desegregation*]; *See also* Robert L. Crain, National Institute of Education, *Is Nineteen Really Better than Ninety-three? in* SCHOOL DESEGREGATION AND BLACK ACHIEVEMENT 68, 88 (Thomas D. Cook et al. eds., 1984); Susan E. Mayer & Christopher Jencks, *Growing Up in Poor Neighborhoods: How Much Does it Matter?* 243 SCI. 1441 (1989).

22. *See* Janet W. Schofield, *School Desegregation and Intergroup Relations: A Review of the Literature* 16 REV. RES. EDUC. 335 (1988).

23. See *School Desegregation, supra* note 21.

24. MARTIN PATCHEN, BLACK-WHITE CONTACT IN SCHOOLS: ITS SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EFFECTS 141–48 (1982).

25. *See* Edgar G. Epps, *Minority Children: Desegregation, Self-Evaluation, and Achievement Orientation in* EFFECTIVE SCHOOL DESEGREGATION: EQUITY, QUALITY AND FEASIBILITY 85–106 (Willis D. Hawley ed., 1981).

any evidence that desegregation has a long-term negative impact on the psychological well being of Black children.[26] "Still unclear, however, is whether [these short-term psychological effects] reflect ego- or identity-damaging experiences in desegregated schools, or what Rosenberg calls contextual dissonance: feeling out of harmony with the environment."[27] Willis D. Hawley argues that our lack of clarity regarding the "effects of desegregation on children of color" is in part a function of the fact that the outcomes are dependent on the "nature of the experiences" minority children have in desegregated settings.[28] He additionally notes that how-ever "obvious this assertion seems, the experiences that children have are almost never fully specified by researchers though it is these experiences that determine the effects of segregation."[29]

The somewhat recent publication by Wells and Crain,[30] as well as work previously conducted by Rosenbaum and his associates,[31] provide us with more detailed accounts of the experiences of Black children in ra-cially mixed or desegregated public institutions.[32] However, even these studies are concerned with the general impact that attending integrated schools has on Black students. The intent of these works is not to eluci-date the extent to which the schools are integrated at the classroom level

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26.   *Id.; see also* Bruce R. Hare, *Development and Change Among Desegregated Adolescents: A Longitudinal Study of Self-Perception and Achievement, in* 1 ADVANCES IN MOTIVATION AND ACHIEVEMENT 173, 198 (David E. Bartz & Martin L. Maehr eds., 1984); *School Desegrega-tion, supra* note 21, at 1134–37.

27.   *School Desegregation, supra* note 21, at 1137.

28.   *Id.*

29.   *Id.*

30.   WELLS & CRAIN, STEPPING OVER THE COLOR LINE, *supra* note 4.

31.   James E. Rosenbaum, Marilyn J. Kulieke & Leonard S. Rubinowitz, *Low-Income Black Children in White Suburban Schools: A Study of School and Student Responses,* 56 J. NEGRO EDUC. 35 (Winter 1987) (examining the effects of school desegregation resulting from the judicial remedy in a housing discrimination lawsuit) [hereinafter Rosenbaum et al., *Low-Income Black Children in White Suburban Schools*]; *see also* James E. Rosenbaum Marilyn J. Kulieke & Leonard S. Rubinowitz, *White Suburban Schools' Responses to Low-income Black children: Sources of Successes and Problems,* 20 URB. REV. 28 (Spring 1988) (reporting the in-school experiences of low-income Black children who move into middle-income White suburbs).

32.   *See* RICHARD L. ZWEIGENHAFT & G. WILLIAM DOMHOFF, BLACKS IN THE WHITE ESTABLISHMENT?: A STUDY OF RACE AND CLASS IN AMERICA (1991) (examining the experi-ences of Black students who attend elite, private educational institutions that are predominately White. The subject of institutionalized within-school segregation is how-ever less germane to these settings, because so few Blacks are enrolled in these institutions and the academic pressure of these classrooms, like that found in Catholic schools, *see* ANTHONY S. BRYK, ET AL., CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND THE COMMON GOOD (1993) (discussing Catholic Schools and the nature of academic press), works against the production of a racially stratified academic placement system.

and how the accordant level of integration (or segregation) affects the experiences of Black students in these suburban settings.[33]

A. *Summative Interpretation of Literature*

Taken in total, the desegregation literature has understudied the effects of within-school segregation. This has been the case even though it is common for integrated schools to resegregate at the classroom level. Additionally, the level of integration at the classroom level is known to affect the educational, psychological, and social outcomes for students attending desegregated and racially mixed schools. Research that has attended to within-school segregation is most often framed within the literature on ability grouping and tracking. Such literature is, however, preoccupied (and necessarily so) with those minority children who are assigned disproportionately to lower-ability classrooms and experience compromised learning opportunities as a consequence of such racial segregation. Researchers have also explored how the disproportionate placement of minority youth in lower-ability classrooms might produce or exacerbate feelings of self-doubt and academic inadequacy on the part of these students.[34]

Within this same tradition, we hear very little about the experiences of those students of color who are amongst the academic elite in their schools. In the case of these students, within-school segregation operates such that they are racially isolated in the classroom. That is, having enrolled in the most rigorous courses in their schools, they often find that no other members of their racial group are enrolled in these classes. How are these students harmed by within-school segregation? What damage is

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33.   However, Rosenbaum and his associates do explain that after their student participants moved from schools in the city to suburban schools, their inclusion in special education programs rose from 7% to 19%. They comment that the parents of those students classified as requiring special education were often initially "suspicious about the potential stigma of such placements." Rosenbaum et al., *Low-income Black Children in White Suburban Schools, supra* note 31, at 40. In most cases, these same parents, nevertheless, "concluded that their children were making better progress in these classes." *Id.* Rosenbaum and his associates, however, offer us no more insight into the classroom experiences of these special education students. Details regarding the experiences of student participants who were otherwise placed in the academic hierarchy is also limited to the feelings of parents, who were more impressed with the care and attention their children received from suburban teachers as compared to city teachers. They were also impressed with the higher academic standards of the suburban schools. *Id.* at 43.

34.   *See* Kovach & Gordon, *Inclusive Education, supra* note 16, at 249; *see also* Barbara M. Byrne, *Adolescent Self-Concept, Ability Grouping, and Social Comparison: Reexamining Academic Track Differences in High School,* 20 YOUTH & SOC'Y 46, 46 (September 1988); Ruben Espinosa & Alberto Ochoa, *Concentration of California Hispanic Students in Schools with Low Achievement: A Research Note,* 95 AM. J. EDUC. 77 (1986).

done to their "heart and minds?" And what of the "hearts and minds" of the White students who sit beside them?

This Article explores these questions by referencing the voices and experiences of the Black academic elite in one integrated high school. These Black students, who carried competitive cumulative grade point averages (GPA) and were enrolled in Advanced Placement courses, found that they were often the *only* Black in their classes. As I will show, their unique positioning in a racially stratified academic hierarchy and their accordant experiences further reveals the educational, social, and psychological costs of segregative educational practices. Before reporting on the experiences of these students, I will first situate them within the logic of the larger research project of which they were a part.

II. THE LARGER PROJECT AND METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

The data reported on in this Article was drawn from a study that was designed to develop an ecological account of how the expression and intersection of micro- (e.g., school and family context), meso- (e.g., neighborhood and city context), and macro- (e.g., gender, social class, historical time and its relationship to social opportunity) level factors affect how Black youths differentially reconcile their racial identity and affiliation with other Blacks in order to achieve academically in one high school. This larger project began with semi-structured individual interviews with high and low achievers in Hillside's 2002 and 2003 graduating classes. These interviews captured a wide scope of issues, including the nature and level of the students' engagement in school, their evaluation of their high school and classroom experiences, the racial composition of their peer networks, their interactions with their friends and classmates, and their impressions of how race operated in their school and in society at large. Questions that asked students to elaborate upon their classroom experiences, assess how race operated in their school, explain what they liked and disliked about attending their high school, and provide advice to incoming Black students, prompted the most academically competitive students to discuss their experiences of being the only Black (or sometimes one of two Blacks) in a classroom.

For the purposes of this Article these interviews were supplemented by observations conducted at the school site. In addition to shadowing intermittently a number of the most achieving students as they attended classes, participated in extracurricular activities and had lunch, we additionally conducted general observations of the school site. More precisely, we observed a variety of school-based activities including sporting events, lunchtime in the cafeteria, passing in the hallways, dances, assemblies, graduation etc. These observations were supplemented by the collection of school paraphernalia and documents (e.g., school newspapers; printed

policies; public relations documents; advertisements for special school events).

Relevant observations were also conducted in the Hillside Community. For example, we documented meetings sponsored by different civic organizations to discuss the Black-White achievement gap in particular or the performance of the Hillside School District's (HSD) Black students in general. The local chapter of the NAACP or local church groups, sponsored some of these meetings, while other meetings were sponsored by the Concerned Citizens on Black Achievement (a pseudonym). This latter committee was a HSD sponsored committee of Black parents, local activists, school leaders, and teachers charged with providing the school superintendent guidance and insight in light of her efforts to monitor and improve the achievement of Black students in the district.

In this Article, particularly in Part IV, I rely heavily on the student interviews to document the toll of being the only Black or one of two Black students in the most academically competitive classrooms in Hillside High. The shadowing activities and general school observations further document the racial segregation that marked Hillside High School. Observations of community meetings also allow me to elaborate upon some of the issues and themes that were revealed via student interviews and school site observations. Before delineating the racial segregation that occurred at Hillside and reporting on how high achievers in the most advanced courses struggled with this segregation, I will situate Hillside High as part of the Hillside School District. My discussion of the district context elucidates how public discourse regarding Black-White achievement gap, the stigmatization of Black students, and a racially stratified academic placement system framed the high school context to further illuminate the particular situation in which our focal participants found themselves.

III. The Research Setting

A. *The Hillside District*

Hillside High School is one of four public high schools included in the Hillside School District. The School district is predominantly White (65% White; 14% Black; 17% Asian; 9% Hispanic; 2% Arabic; 3% other) with only 14% of the student population qualifying for free or reduced lunch. Located in a small affluent city that is also home to a major university, the HSD, like other school districts that are part of a college town, struggles publicly with an exaggerated Black-White achievement gap.[35]

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35. For more than a decade, local newspapers have featured articles covering the Black-White achievement gap with the following headlines: *Minority Gaps Worry City*

Local newspapers inform Hillside Residents that on average, the middle-class Black students of the HSD are doing less well on standardized tests than the poor White students in the district. Additionally, they learn that the Black children in the Hillside district have regularly performed less well on standardized measures compared to less privileged Black students in other districts in the state. Moreover, a district level report, which will go unnamed in order to maintain the anonymity of the district, indicated that the under-performance of Black students relative to Whites was not limited to standardized tests. Black students were also under-performing in accordance with other achievement measures (e.g., cumulative grade point averages). In sum, there has been substantive public discussion that Black students in HSD—including those who are middle class—are at-risk for poor academic performance.

There are a variety of publicly available theories about why the gap exists in the Hillside district. The local newspapers speculate about a broad range of factors including presumed differences in how White and Black students' experience culture, familial support, peer-group pressures, teacher expectations, and access to institutional resources. A 1995 survey on discrimination offers insights from students regarding how some of the above factors might intersect to produce "the gap." This survey, which was distributed to high school students in the district and was written and analyzed by a committee of their peers, specifically highlights how racial stereotypes, lower teacher expectations, and a stratified academic placement may interact and contribute to the low academic performance of Black students. The findings from the survey, which were compiled into a report I will refer to as the "Student Survey on Discrimination" (SSD),[36] showed that 73% of the student respondents felt that negative stereotypes were the most common form of racism evidenced in the school district and that "the majority of such stereotypes were directed towards African American students." The following excerpts represent some of the negative stereotypes that White and/or Asian American students reported had been said to them about Black Americans or they themselves believed about Black Americans:

- "Black men can't read or write"

- "Black kids are stupid"

- "All Blacks are gangsters and live in the ghetto"

School Officials (1989); *School Officials Seek to Boost Minority Scores* (1993); *Talk Energizes School Officials: [HSD] Principals Meet to Discuss Closing Black-White Test Gap* (1995); *Black Achievement Gap Persists* (1996); *Consensus Lacking on Achievement-Gap Causes* (1997); *How Serious are We About Closing the GAP?* (1999); *Achievement Gap Persists* (2000).

36.   In order to maintain the anonymity of the high school under study and the surrounding school district, I will not reference the real name or other publishing information of the report.

- "Black people are violent"

- "A lot of Black people are on welfare"

- "There are three groups: the ghetto which are lower class usually in this community they are the Blacks, Arabs, and Hispanics; the middle class which are supposed to be Caucasians; and the Asians who are supposed to be above all because of their intelligence."

- "All Black people are stupid and loud. This is true in most cases."[37]

Significantly, this was the second time in eight years that this discrimination survey had been administered and the "unilateral targeting of African Americans [for negative stereotyping] stands in sharp contrast to the first survey which was conducted in 1988 and in which many other groups were stereotyped frequently."

The SSD also reported on student perception that a racially "stratified academic placement system was an undeniable feature" of the Hillside School District. Though there is no official tracking system in HSD "for the most part it is minority students, particularly African Americans, who make up a disproportionately high percentage of those in basic and lower level classes. In higher level classes, the inverse occurs." A substantive portion of the respondents attributed this stratification to differential treatment and expectations on the part of school officials. Not surprisingly, while one third of the survey respondents cited negative labeling by teachers and administrators for the racial stratification that defined course-taking in the HSD, Black students were more apt than White students to indicate that they were being labeled in ways that impacted their course taking (i.e., 59% of African Americas compared to 31% of Whites). Regarding the amount of involvement by other school officials in these discriminatory practices, 23% of the students felt counselors discourage minorities from taking Advanced Placement (AP) and Accelerated (AC) courses. The racial distribution revealed that 45% of Black students cited this as a reason compared to 20% of the Whites; and while 21% of all student respondents cited the role played by teachers, 40% of the Black respondents compared to 18% of the Caucasian respondents identified teachers as a factor.

At a public meeting of Concerned Citizens on Black Achievement, Black parents in attendance complained about the course selection guide they received prior to their child's transition to high school. One mother described the complexity of the course guide when she stated that "you needed a PhD" to make sense of the guide; other parents around the

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37.   The content of the materials used for support throughout this article, which have not been fully cited in order to preserve the anonymity of the participants in this case study, has been verified. *Ed.*

room nodded in agreement. Another mother reported that if it were not for some of her White friends whose children had gone through high school on the college prep track, she would not have known how to craft her child's course selection in middle school in order to ensure that her daughter was on track for taking the most advanced courses when she got to high school. A father emphasized his impression that very few parents would realize that they needed to read the course selection guide "backwards." He explained that you first needed to figure out where you wanted your child to be in terms of his or her course-taking in his or her senior year. Then you needed to work your way backward through the book to figure out what your child would have to take during their freshman year in order to qualify for that final course of study.

The HSD administrative coordinator of secondary schools agreed that the course guide was confusing and indicated that the district was working on revising it. But she also added that the district was also looking to re-train teachers in order that they might develop greater expectations for minority youth and become active in encouraging them to pursue more challenging courses. Against this backdrop of public debate over the Black-White achievement gap, increasing student recognition of the negative labeling of Black students, and a racially stratified academic placement system that is the subject of concern for Black families and school administrators, sits Hillside High School.

B. *Hillside High School*

Hillside High School is a comprehensive and overcrowded high school that is set on a sprawling campus. The current structure, including building extensions, was designed to house 1800 students. Approximately 2,700 students are now in attendance at Hillside. Fifteen portable classrooms have been erected on the campus to ease overcrowding.

The campus grounds also features four tennis courts, a field hockey field, football field, soccer practice field and three parking lots. One lot is designated for staff with a select number of spots for visitors. The building facility houses a swimming pool, garage for automotive shop, a small theater, and a large auditorium with balcony seating. There are 15 science labs and 4 computer labs—two of which provide open access to all classes in the building and two of which are wedded to specific academic programs. Students can also take advantage of the 25 computers in the school library, which houses nearly 30,000 books.

The campus grounds and building accommodations only hint at the extracurricular offerings that are provided by the school. The school features more than 30 student clubs and a competitive sports program that features more than 25 interscholastic sports. It is not uncommon for the Hillside athletic program to take home as many as five state championships in a given year. The music program is nationally recognized and the

theater program includes a theater guild that is student led and produces a number of elaborate theatrical productions each year.

The academic offerings are similarly impressive. Advanced Placement Courses are provided in over 15 subjects including Calculus AB and BC, Physics, Computer Science, Chemistry, German, French, Spanish, Latin, English, and U.S. and European History. There are also a series of accelerated courses (or intensive courses) that are offered in the primary subject areas of Math, English, Science, and Social Studies. These courses move more rapidly and are more challenging than the core courses in these subject areas, but are not as demanding as the AP courses. Finally, remedial course offerings are provided in both math and science.

Situated in a district that has a low drop-out rate (less than 5%), the impressive school curricula coupled with the students' competitive college aptitude test scores places Hillside amongst the most competitive high schools in the nation. Each year approximately 30 students qualify as National Merit Finalists and another 30 qualify as National Merit Semi-Finalists. The mean scores of both the SAT Verbal and SAT Math are always just shy of 600 and the ACT means for each of the subject areas consistently hovers around 24. Approximately 90% of each graduating class indicate that they will continue their education in a 2 year or 4 year college program.

Nearly three quarters of the student body is White, and Black students approach 15% of the student body.[38] Asian students who are approximately 6% of the student body represent the next largest minority group on campus followed by Hispanic students who hover around 3% of the population. Middle Eastern, Native American and Multi-Ethnic students combined constitute 3% of the student body. Almost 4% of the student population is categorized as other.

C. *School Organization and Practices in the Creation of*
Black (Academically Non-Competitive) and
White (Academically Rigorous) Spaces

Hillside is organized according to instructional wings. There is an athletic wing where the gymnasiums and physical education classrooms are clustered. There is a music wing that includes a band room, choral rooms, and an orchestra practice room. There is also a vocational wing where automotive shop, health sciences, drafting and other vocational courses are offered. The yearbook office and the student newspaper headquarters are also housed in this wing. The central part of the building, or the Main hall, houses most of the academic courses with the first floor being designated primarily for physical science classes (both upper-level

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38.   I have opted not to report exact statistics in order to maintain the anonymity of the school under study.

courses such as chemistry and physics and lower-level courses such as "physical" science), the second floor is designated primarily for language and history courses, and the third floor is designated primarily for English and math courses. Some of the math classrooms, however, can be found on the first floor next to the vocational education wing. While the teachers in these classrooms teach advanced math courses such as Calculus and Algebra 3–4, most of the lower-level remedial math courses are also taught within this cluster of classrooms.[39]

The racial stratification reported on in the SSD report became evident during our[40] school visits. While we observed remedial math courses and vocational courses with anywhere from 20% to 40% Black students, the AP and AC courses we observed generally had 1 or sometimes 2 Black students enrolled, which constituted 3% to 8 % of the class. The college prep courses we visited that were neither AP nor AC usually had between 2 and 4 Black students, which constituted 7% to 15% of the class. In contrast, sections of the African-American literature course—an elective in English—was populated almost wholly by Black students who constituted between 82% and 90% of the class.

This racially stratified academic placement system and the wing organization of the school produced noticeably Black spaces and movement in the building. For example, the juxtaposition of the vocational wing and the preponderance of remedial math courses that are found in what will be referred to as "North hall", resulted in their being a disproportionately high number of Black students moving around North hall during passing. Additionally, because only 2 years of math are required for graduation and a disproportionate number of Black students are not enrolled in more advanced math and science courses, Black students are less likely to be found on the 3rd floor of the building where sections of Algebra 3–4 are taught.

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39.   There are two levels of remedial math courses in the school. There are upper-level courses that are consistent with traditional high school math courses (e.g., algebra, geometry). However, these courses are watered down and provide students with "extra help." For example, the remedial Geometry course does not require students to solve proofs and otherwise covers less course material than the regular Geometry course. Then there are lower-level math courses that either offer instruction in "core" mathematical skills or integrate the study of computation, algebra, geometry, analysis, etc in a special math program. It is important to note that the designers of this integrated math program did not intend it for remedial study. Both teachers and students, however, discuss their impression that these classes are used to house those students who presumably struggle the most with mathematics. I use the word presumably because several faculty and students conveyed their impression that Black students are more likely than others students to be improperly placed in this program even when they are capable of completing the work in more challenging mathematics courses.

40.   Observations were conducted with the assistance of graduate-student research assistants.

Because the first floor houses courses in which Black students are over-enrolled and is the gateway by which students enter and exit the building, Black students have a greater likelihood of encountering each other on the first floor. Consequently, Blacks often congregate informally on this floor. Their preference is to cluster just inside of the main entrance, several yards away from the cafeteria. Such clusters are especially identifiable just before the first bell rings and around lunch-time. Black students also cluster near a second entrance that is near the physical education wing. During lunch hour Black males make up the majority of students on the basketball courts in this wing.

As conveyed by the following exchange with Deanne and Sharon, two Black students who assisted me with data collection, Black students were acutely aware of how the organization of the school and the racialized patterns of course-taking determined how Black bodies moved through Hillside and came together to produce identifiably Black spaces.

> *Author:* What do you think we [i.e., my graduate student research assistants and I] should pay attention to? What do you think would give us insight into Black life at [Hillside?]
>
> *Deanne:* The hallways.
>
> *Sharon:* Yeah.
>
> *Deanne:* All the Black people are on the first floor particularly down [North hall]. And then you see some of them on the second floor and even less on the third floor. Except during second and third hour when they're all on the third floor . . .
>
> *Sharon:* Because they're all taking African-American Literature [Sharon and Deanne were both enrolled in the course].[41]

Because these Black spaces did not coincide with rigorous academic spaces, a divide was institutionalized between the Black academic elite and the other Black students in the school. One member of Hillside's Black academic elite, Jasmine, poignantly articulated the extent of this divide:

> [Hillside] is structured so that the . . . math department, . . . the English department, . . . and the history department is together. And then . . . towards . . . the back of the school . . . are . . . [remedial level math and science courses] like ecology and core math, and integrated math. A lot of my friends are in those classes, so I don't see them at all . . . we're sepa-

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41. Interview with Deanne and Sharon, Hillside High School Students, at local University office (January 29, 2002) (on file with author).

rate. And that's another thing. [I find it hard to believe people when they] tell me [that] there's 11% Black kids in this school, ... [because] I only see 3% of them during *my* school day. Because I'm ... [in the main hall]. And ... [the other Black students are] back in [North hall], [a]nd I never go back there. So to me, this school's kind of segregated in the sense that Black people are [in North hall], and then there's a few Blacks [and a lot of White kids] in the main halls ... So that's why I don't see them. It's just, I can't. And we don't have time. I don't have time to walk all the way to [North] hall and miss my next class.[42]

D. *Hillside's Black Academic Elite*

Like Jasmine, who graduated with a 3.8 average and took AP Physics and Calculus BC her senior year, the young people whose voices will be reported on in the remainder of this Article were amongst the Black academic elite at Hillside High. The exclusiveness of their status was marked both by their GPAs and their course loads.

Each one of these students was enrolled in the Hillside graduating class of 2002. Only 17 of the 84 Black students in the class of 2002 carried GPAs of 3.0 or higher during the spring of 2001. Moreover, only 6 of these 17 students had enrolled in advanced-placement courses in either their junior or their senior year. The students who share their voices and experiences in this Article represent 5 of these 6 youth. In this Article I refer to them as Sidney, Jasmine, Makela, Anthony, and Kevin. During the spring of 2001 each of these five students had a GPA of 3.3 or higher. Each of them would graduate from Hillside with a GPA of 3.5 or higher. Despite their academic success, these students give us insight into the social and psychological toll associated with the re-segregation that occurs within integrated high schools. These students explain that their enrollment in courses such as Calculus AB, Calculus BC, AP U.S. History, AP Physics, AP Spanish, AP Biology, AP Chemistry, and AP English meant that they were the only Black or sometimes one of two Black students in these courses. They indicate that this social isolation came at a cost despite their continued ability to perform competitively in school. These students' voices therefore provide us with a slightly different story regarding the ills of within school desegregation.

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42. Interview with Jasmine, Hillside High School Student, Hillside High School Conference Room (November 14, 2000) [hereinafter Interview with Jasmine] (on file with author).

IV. FINDINGS

How do these students conceive of their experience of often being the only Black student in the most rigorous courses in Hillside High School? Beginning with the voice of Makela, she defines it as an intimidating experience. Having asked her whether it is easy or hard to be a high achiever in her school she responded: . . . the classes that I take are hard. And . . . if you're the only Black person, sitting around a lot of White people, *you get intimidated.*[43]

But what is the source of this intimidation? What is it about being the only Black amongst a lot of White people that would cause a student like Makela to feel less than confident in this setting? In part, the intimidation arose from the pressure of White others presuming that these Black youth represented the views and perspectives of all Black Americans. The students reported on how "everyone in the classroom" would turn and face them, when a race-related issue was raised in class discussion. Thus Makela explained that she "just [got] real tense" when they were "talking about racism and . . . slavery" in her A.P. U.S. History course. She added, "I [didn't] want to say anything because I [didn't] want to bring all that pressure on [myself]."[44] For her, the pressure was linked to her belief that her White peers and teachers would find it hard to imagine that her perspectives on any race-related issue were hers alone. Rather, she maintained that they would interpret her statement as reflective of what all, or what at least most, Black Americans thought. The credence of Makela's belief was reinforced by the Black students' report of instances in which either a teacher or White classmate turned to them and asked, "So what do Black people think about this or that issue?" Not surprisingly, the students shunned and resented these moments because in the words of Anthony, "I can only speak for [myself]. I can't speak for every Black person in America."[45]

The students also reported that they often felt that their racial isolation in these courses cast them as outsiders in the classroom. For Kevin, this outsider status was marked by his impression that in these spaces he could find little affirmation of himself as a Black person. This desire for affirmation and its elusiveness when one is the only Black presence in the room was revealed in Kevin's response to a question that asked him what advice he would offer an incoming student to Hillside who was Black. In response to that inquiry Kevin stated:

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43.   Interview with Makela, Hillside High School Student, Hillside High School Conference Room (November 9, 2000) (emphasis added) [hereinafter Interview with Makela (November 9, 2000)] (on file with author).

44.   *Id.*

45.   Interview with Anthony, Hillside High School student, hallway of Hillside High School (March 14, 2002) [hereinafter Interview with Anthony (March 14, 2002)] (on file with author).

> I would say personally that I feel that since I take a lot of
> advanced classes, and I'm usually the only Black in my class,
> ... so being in my situation ... I would try to maybe say
> that you ... should take classes where you know African
> Americans are going to be ... so you can just have a chance
> to socialize with them and get to know them. You know,
> kind of make sure you stay around.[46]

When I later asked Kevin why it was important to "kind of stay
around" the other Black students at Hillside, he explained "because they
help affirm who you are—you often aren't affirmed as a Black person in
this school—particularly in the classes I'm in."[47]

In light of Kevin's comments, the search for Black affirmation in a
racially stratified academic placement system requires the Black student to
embrace the least rigorous courses in the school while avoiding the most
rigorous. The potentially negative academic consequences of pursuing
such choices are immediately evident. As previously indicated, students
learn less in lower-ability compared to higher-ability courses.[48] Addition-
ally, a less rigorous academic program can constrain the options students
have available to them with regards to competing for college admissions
and college financial assistance.

Through Jasmine's voice, however, we come to understand the po-
tentially negative academic consequences of also being the sole Black
outsider in the predominantly White classroom. Jasmine explained that
because she did not "fit in" with her White classmates she was constrained
in her ability to develop in-class peer relations that could support her aca-
demic efforts. She stated:

> I don't feel like I have the support from the other kids in my
> [Advanced or Accelerated] classes like I do from my best
> friend [who is Black and] in [AC] English with me—we
> help each other out. And with my other classes, I don't really
> have a lot of friends ... And then I kind of isolate myself in
> most classes ... I don't feel like I fit in ... with those kind of
> kids ... [T]hey drive me crazy ... I'll think something's hard
> and then they'll say, oh that's so easy ... [A]ggravating stuff
> like that. And so, I really just kind of ... isolate myself, and
> go to class, and I pay attention ... And they really don't like
> the same things I do. *And I'm ... the only Black person in four*

46.   Interview with Kevin, Hillside High School student, local University office (Au-
gust 23, 2001) [hereinafter Interview with Kevin (August 23, 2001)] (on file with author).
47.   *Id.*
48.   *See supra* note 12.

of my classes . . . So I don't feel like I really fit in anywhere in any of those classes.[49]

The most profound sense of stress, however, was linked to the students' recognition that their lone presence in a classroom was sometimes met with speculation and doubts about their ability to meet the academic demands of the course. Consequently, the students recount instances in which their competitive performance in their Advanced Placement courses generated surprise on the part of their teachers. In response to my inquiring about whether there was anything hard about being a Black student at Hillside, Sidney responded:

> I think that teachers probably do have some stereotypes. And I've kind of sensed that maybe one or two of my teachers when they find out what I'm capable of, when they see me walking [in my Advanced classes], they have certain expectations and they're surprised [by my performance].[50]

Sidney, however, indicated that the communication of lowered expectations on the part of her teachers is generally subtle. When I asked her how she had learned that some teachers had been surprised by her academic performance in the AP courses, she stated, "I think . . . some of it is body language, and the like."[51] But she adds, "They won't ever admit it. I mean they'll never admit it."[52]

The "it" to which Sidney believes teachers will never admit is their unstated impression that their Black students are less capable than their White ones. Makela similarly references what she interprets as teachers' unstated impression regarding the limited academic promise of their African-American students. According to Makela:

> If you're Black . . . [and] you come into [an Advanced] class, . . . [teachers] just give you this vibe that you're not going to be able to do it. You're not going to do well . . . [P]eople just automatically place this feel on you—sometimes people just think I'm stupid. And they don't know me. They think I'm ignorant. But that's not me at all.[53]

Having attuned themselves to the subtlety with which such impressions are nevertheless communicated (whether via body language, "vibes,"

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49.   Interview with Jasmine (November 14, 2000), *supra* note 42.

50.   Interview with Sidney, Hillside High School student, Hillside High School Conference Room (February 15, 2001) [hereinafter Interview with Sidney (February 15, 2001)] (on file with author).

51.   *Id.*

52.   *Id.*

53.   Interview with Makela (November 9, 2000), *supra* note 43.

or the "feel" that is put on you), Sidney and Makela, like the other Black students reported on in this Article, discuss their conscious efforts to mitigate against these lowered expectations. Sidney, stated:

> I don't think I'm insolent. But sometimes if I feel that a teacher does have some feelings like that, I will make an effort to ... [demonstrate] my intelligence or something like that and catch them off their guard, and put them in a situation where they kind of will have to [recognize me as intelligent].[54]

Makela remembered:

> [I]n [AP U.S.] history most people write their term papers on things like the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln, and things like that. I wrote my paper on Motown and how it affected the music industry. And people [said that] that's not a term paper. My teacher [asked], "Are you sure you're going to be able to do this?" ... It turns out I got a 95, the highest grade on the term paper. [My teacher] was like, "this is so good." I knew that but *she* did not.[55]

Other students, however, reported that they had to counter low teacher expectations when the communication style of the teacher was less than subtle. Jasmine recalled how she had been publicly stigmatized as a less than able learner in the first section of an AP Analysis course she had been enrolled in her junior year. Jasmine had taken a class with this teacher during her freshman year and had received a "B" in that class. As Jasmine recalled:

> I had to switch AP Analysis teachers this year ... [M]y first teacher—I had her freshman year, and I did fine—I got a "B" in that class, but ... I guess a "B" was bad, ... [because] I guess she wants perfection. And the first day of school [the teacher] comes up to me and says [in front of everyone], "Do you think you can handle this class?" She didn't ask anyone else that ... [I said yes], I can handle this class. And for the next week or so she'd always stop [by my desk] and say, "[Jasmine] are you understanding this?" ... I am not slow. Well I am not slow! And so my dad got really mad, and he [told me to] switch teachers.[56]

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54.   Interview with Sidney (February 15, 2001), *supra* note 50.

55.   Interview with Makela (November 9, 2000), *supra* note 43.

56.   Interview with Jasmine, Hillside High School student, Hillside High-School Conference Room (February 21, 2001).

Jasmine's feeling of insult was magnified by her knowledge that there were White students in the course who she knew had also received a "B" from this teacher in the freshman year math course to which she referred. The teacher had not, however, felt the need to publicly raise doubts about whether these students were capable of meeting the academic demands of AP Analysis.

Jasmine explained that in light of this teacher's lowered expectations of her, she experienced exceptional joy from her superior performance on a quiz that had been administered prior to her transferring out of the section. She recalled:

> [E]verybody in the class got "C"s or "D"s. And I was the only "A." And I was just like are you sure you don't want to ask these people if they can do well—if they think they're [going to] do well.[57]

Jasmine, however, only raised this retort in her head and her teacher never questioned (at least in public) the ability of Jasmine's classmates to "handle" AP Analysis in light of their less than competitive performance on this quiz. Jasmine stressed, in a later interaction I had with her that "I knew I had to do well on that quiz because she expected so little of me."[58] Jasmine's understanding that she "had to do well" signifies her general sense that she carries the burden of having to prove White people wrong regarding the capabilities of Black students. More specifically Jasmine noted:

> I've had a lot of teachers that think because I'm the only Black kid in the class that I'm stupid. And it feels so good when you say, oh, I got an "A" on this test, what did the other White students do? I feel like a lot of times I have to prove something to them . . . because, . . . [Black people have] always been considered . . . a dumb race . . . And it's just, we may not even have to work harder, but, you do. I work just as hard as my White friends, but I feel like working just as much as them is not good enough . . . I need to go beyond what they do to prove things to people. [T]here's . . . no such thing as an achievement gap. I do not believe in that at all. It's just that kids are not being challenged, . . . so I guess in that sense it's been harder [being a Black student in these classes].[59]

Jasmine's high achieving peers confirm that this sense of burden—this sense of having to prove something to White people—is magnified in light of their exclusive location in Hillside's academic hierarchy. For example,

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57. *Id.*

58. Interview with Jasmine, Hillside High School Student, Research Meeting, Hillside High-School Conference Room (March 14, 2002) (on file with author).

59. *Id.*

when I asked Makela what advice she would give to an incoming freshman who was Black, she responded:

> There's going to be a lot of stereotypes towards you ... [W]hen I walk into my AP and AC classes, it's just you, and you are all alone, and it's this big barrier to show that you can do it. [For example] last year, in my AP US History class [the teacher] had two classes [in which] about sixty kids [were enrolled] and I was the only Black person ... in both classes.[60]

While the two high achieving males referenced in this Article, like the other males in the study, were less apt to offer as elaborate insight into Black life at Hillside, their more succinct accounts of their experiences mirrored the impressions that were elaborated upon by the young women. Anthony stated, "[In these classes] it's as if you're always on—as if how you do says something about all the other Black people in the school."[61] Kevin who offered more elaborate commentary stated:

> I think for the most part, [the White students in my classes] look at the few African-American students in there and they'll think, okay, they're probably lower than me, or not doing as well as me. And so they don't give them as much credit for doing whatever they're doing in class; even when [the Black students are] doing better than [the White students]—it's like you're always working to get beyond these negative beliefs about who you are and what you can do.[62]

Some readers might readily interpret these students' "working to get beyond ... negative beliefs about who you are and what you can do" in only a positive light. That is, they might choose to emphasize the extent to which this burden motivated these students to excel academically and persevere through scholastically trying times. For example, Sidney decided that she could not drop Calculus BC even when she was not doing as well as she wanted to, because she believed that such an action on her part would reinforce negative stereotypes not only about girls' mathematical abilities but about that of Blacks. In her words:

> When I wasn't doing as well in Calculus [BC] as I wanted to, I guess I could have easily dropped that class—and it wouldn't have been anything. But I think part of ... the reason [why I didn't drop the class] was [because I wanted to learn the material]. But another part of it was, ... I'm one of

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60.   Interview with Makela (November 9, 2000), *supra* note 43.

61.   Interview with Anthony, Hillside High School Student, Hillside High School Conference Room (February 16, 2001).

62.   Interview with Kevin (August 23, 2001), *supra* note 46.

the only girls and the only Black [student] and [if I dropped out of this class] that would make a profound statement.[63]

Despite the ways in which the students' desires to affirm the abilities of Black Americans repeatedly motivated them to excel academically, no child should have to carry such a burden. Why should any individual child be placed in a situation where she is forced to imagine that the slights in her performance are likely to reinforce the negative images of her racial group? At the same time, there is little assurance that her individual successes will provide robust enough evidence in the mind of others that she is other than an exception to the rule. As the only Black student in the most rigorous courses in Hillside High School, these students' lone presence in these predominantly White classrooms inadvertently provided the symbolic register that the average Black student in the school was not up to the most demanding academic challenges Hillside had to offer (even if this *one* Black child was capable of meeting those challenges). Such impressions are further reinforced in light of the disproportionate representation of Black students in the least academically demanding courses in the school. Within the context of racially stratified academic placement system, then, these Black high-achievers were expending a tremendous amount of psychic and emotional energy waging a battle that they could not win in light of an unconscionable burden they should not carry.

CONCLUSION

The literature on within-school segregation has generally emphasized the extent to which the mass of Black students relegated to lower-ability classrooms suffer educationally in light of racially stratified academic placement systems. The voices and experiences of the students featured in this Article, however, illustrate the toll also assumed by those few Black students who find that they are usually the only non-Asian, minority, student to integrate the most rigorous courses in their school.

As the only Black student in these classrooms these students were under tremendous pressure. All of them made reference to their racial isolation in these classrooms and the extent to which their connections to the other Black students in the school were disrupted, strained, or complicated by these institutionalized divides. They reported on their anxiety and resentment of having been positioned such that they were expected to speak for all Black Americans. They lamented not being affirmed as Black people in these classrooms and indicated that it was more difficult to develop in-class peer relations that would further support their academic excellence. Moreover, they were profoundly troubled by the

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63.　Interview with Sidney (February 15, 2001), *supra* note 50.

burden of having to personally prove White people wrong or at least not prove them right in light of any negative impressions Whites might hold regarding Black talent and ability.

The experiences of these students are consistent with the research findings on tokenism in the workplace. While most of this research has examined the experiences of women in male dominated professions (and secondly males in female dominated professions),[64] there has been growing attention to the professional and psychological stressors that Blacks experience when they are racial tokens in a White-employee dominated workplace. This research confirms that "numerical rarity by race" significantly increases the likelihood that Blacks will experience "token stress" (e.g., a heightened sense of isolation; the experienced need to show greater competence than their peers; juggling multiple demands of being Black in the setting), which increases their risk for psychological distress (i.e., heightened anxiety and depression).[65]

The voices of these youth, therefore, indicate that tokenism, whether it is articulated in Corporate America or in educational institutions takes its toll. Often as the only Black student in rigorous academic courses, these students found that they suffered social, educational, and psychological trials.

Such trials are likely associated with other human and social costs. For example, one must necessarily wonder if these students would have been even more academically competitive if they did not have to otherwise expend much of their energy struggling with the aforementioned pressures. Additionally, one wonders the extent to which these prospective pressures cause individual Black students to opt out of taking these more challenging classes; we have some preliminary support for the proposition that such pressures do dissuade Black students from enrolling in advanced courses.

Kevin, himself, noted that he would advise incoming Black students to enroll in courses where they could "stay around" other Black students. The likelihood of "staying around" other Black students is, magnified, however, as one travels down rather than up the academic hierarchy at Hillside High School. Additionally, at a meeting of the HSD's Concerned Citizens on Black Achievement in which high achievers representing the different high schools in the district were asked to talk about their own school experiences, one student stated: "It's hard being the only Black student in a class. There's a lot of pressure. That's why I think a lot of Black students don't sign up for advanced classes."

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64. *See* ROSABETH M. KANTOR, MEN AND WOMEN OF THE CORPORATION (1977); *see also* Alison M. Konrad et al., *Diversity in Work Group Sex Composition: Implications for Majority and Minority Members*, 10 RES. SOC. ORG. 115 (1992); Anne Statham Macke, *Token Men and Women: A Note on the Salience of Sex and Occupation Among Professionals and Semi-Professionals*, 8 SOC. WORK & OCCUPATIONS 25 (1981).

65. Pamela B. Jackson et al., *Composition of the Workplace and Psychological Well-Being: The Effects of Tokenism on America's Black Elite*, 74 SOC. FORCES 543 (1995).

The unique positioning of these high achieving Black students in a racially stratified academic hierarchy also raises questions about how their White classmates might also be harmed by these segregative practices. Is there a cost, individually and socially, to be paid for White children statistically dominating the most challenging courses in any integrated school? When a school's academic hierarchy is racially stratified, White students will likely recognize that people like themselves disproportionately populate the most rigorous academic spaces in the school, while people unlike themselves disproportionately populate the least rigorous academic spaces in the school. Under these circumstances do White children unconsciously come to perceive themselves as intellectually superior to minority youths? And what are the social implications of having engendered these perceptions?

Social science surveys continue to reveal that over time White Americans have registered greater commitment to the concept of equal opportunity. Simultaneously, however, White Americans believe that non-Asian minority youth, particularly Black Americans, are less intelligent and possess less of a work ethic than Whites do.[66] Social and political analysts have conveyed that this juxtaposition of beliefs explains, in part, the embrace of discriminatory practices on the part of White Americans and their resistance to social policies aimed at producing a more equitable society.[67]

If these analysts are right, within-school segregation is likely only to enhance White American's sense of their intellectual superiority and reinforce the impressions that they have won their privileged and competitive statuses both within and outside of schools solely as a consequence of their merit. Such impressions are not only wholly consistent with their articulated commitment to equal opportunity but would further jeopardize any long-term prospects for them supporting legislative and educational initiatives aimed at creating more equitable social opportunities across racial groups (e.g., equitable school funding; heterogeneous ability grouping; school desegregation; affirmative action). Taken in total, the findings reported herein and the accordant social implications, complement traditional examinations of the negative impact of within-school segregation and further legitimize the call for "the elimination of all vestiges of segregation" that currently plague America's schools.[68] Furthermore, any attempts to eliminate the dual school system

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66.   Farley Reynolds, *Racial Trends and Differences in the United States 30 Years After the Civil Rights Decade*, 26 Soc. Sci. Res. 235–262 (1997).

67.   *Id.*; WELLS & CRAIN, STEPPING OVER THE COLOR LINE, *supra* note 4; Jolleen Kirschenman & Katherine M. Neckerman, *"We'd Love to Hire Them, But ...":The Meaning of Race for Employers, in* THE URBAN UNDERCLASS (Christopher Jencks & Paul E. Peterson eds., 1991).

68.   This quote alludes to Willis' definition of "within–school-*integration*" which he defines as "the elimination of all vestiges of segregation from all policies, practices, pro-

that now confronts America, should thoroughly take into account the effects that within-school segregation has on Black students—not just those Black students placed in lower-track courses, but those placed in upper-track courses as well.

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grams and activities within a district's school." H. D.Willis, *The Shifting Focus in School De-segregation*, Paper presented to the SWRL Board of Directors and The 1995 Equity Conference, (November 1, 1994).