> motto seems to have been "Do to southerners what you do not want to do to yourself." Good reasons have always been offered, of course, for not moving vigorously ahead in the North as well as the South. First, it was that the problem was worse in the South. Then the facts began to show that was no longer true. We then began to hear the de facto–de jure refrain. Somehow residential segregation in the North was accidental or de facto and that made it better than the legally supported de jure segregation in the South. It was a hard distinction for black children in totally segregated schools in the North to understand, but it allowed us to avoid the problem.[31]

Justice Powell took pleasure in quoting Senator Ribicoff, who, like himself, also recognized the unfairness of applying a different standard in the North than in the South. But Nixon's test for his Supreme Court appointees had triumphed. As Haldeman had predicted, Nixon got his Court. And the Nixon Court never approved metropolitan desegregation in the North.[32]

6 What Should We Hope For?

Four years after Supreme Court Justice Lewis Powell Jr. supplied the deciding vote that quashed the Detroit metropolitan desegregation plan, he shifted his view closer to the position of the liberal minority on the Court on the issue of affirmative action. Powell again provided the deciding vote in a 5–4 decision that allowed colleges and universities to use race as a factor in college admissions.[1] It is tempting to speculate that he might have voted differently on metropolitan desegregation if he had remained on the Court long enough to see the success of city-suburban busing in Raleigh and Charlotte.

In 1954 virtually all members of the United States Senate and the House of Representatives from the Old South had signed the "Southern Manifesto" in opposition to the Supreme Court's decision outlawing school segregation in *Brown v. Board of Education.* Despite this strong initial resistance, large-scale metropolitan desegregation was eventually achieved in the South. Would the anti-busing frenzy have resulted in a "Northern Manifesto" if the Supreme Court had ordered school desegregation in metropolitan Detroit? Would the Supreme Court have voted differently or would public reaction to metropolitan desegregation have been different if we had known then what we know now?

Two generations of children have grown up since large-scale desegregation began in the South. Three decades of research after the 1974 Detroit decision revealed much about the costs of continued segregation as well as the potential benefits of racially and economically balanced schools. One question raised in the Detroit case has been answered. White flight from northern cities was, without a doubt, hastened by the Detroit decision. In Syracuse, 98 percent of all black residents of Onondaga County lived within the city, though countywide they made up only 9 percent of the total population of 460,000. If Syracuse had desegregated on a countywide basis as Raleigh did, so that poor and minority students were spread throughout the system, integration would most likely have proceeded peacefully and effectively. But because desegregation was restricted to the city, it was extremely difficult to racially balance schools for long. And for most white parents, it was not a wrenching decision to move to the suburbs in order to avoid sending their children to low-performance schools that rapidly became overloaded with poor and minority pupils.

In Raleigh, by contrast, where schools were fairly balanced throughout the county, and continuously rebalanced, few families moved to another metropolitan area to avoid desegregation, and private school enrollment increased by only a few percentage points after the merger, even though the proportion of blacks in Wake County was nearly three times that in Syracuse's Onondaga County. Virtually all middle- and upper-class families in Raleigh and Wake County continued to enroll their children in the public schools. When schools reflect a fair balance of all children, parents feel their children are safe and do not believe the norms underlying a good school are going to be upset. Polls of Wake County parents strongly supported that view. In 2006, 94 percent of parents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "My child's school provides a high-quality educational program." Ninety-six percent said it was "a safe place to learn."[2]

The norms of a good school are shaped more by the children who come through the door than the dollars spent on books, buildings, laboratories, teacher salaries, or other traditional measures of school quality. This was the finding of a landmark study of equal educational opportunity by James Coleman in 1966.[3] The largest survey of schools up to that time, it was funded by Congress with the expectation that it would reveal wide disparities in traditional spending measures between black and white schools. The differences it found were not as large as expected, due partly to efforts in the South to provide equal facilities for black schools, as a way to undergird the "separate but equal" doctrine. Coleman's research revealed that what really counted was who you went to school with. This finding, which astonished both Congress and most educators, was initially disputed by many and ignored by others.[4] But Coleman's central finding has since been reconfirmed in many studies: "The social composition of the student body is more highly related to achievement, independent of the student's own social background, than is any other school factor."[5]

Simply put, Coleman found that the achievement of both poor and rich children was depressed by attending a school where most children came from low-income families. More important to the goal of achieving equal educational opportunity, he found that the achievement of poor children was raised by attending a predominantly middle-class school, while the achievement of affluent children in the school was not harmed. This was true even if per-pupil expenditures were the same at both schools. No research over the last forty years has overturned Coleman's finding that most of the achievement difference between schools was due to the family backgrounds of students attending those

schools, and that the high tide of achievement in a predominantly middle-class school raises all boats.

Why is this so? Why should it matter who is sitting next to a child as long as the child pays attention, works hard, and does her homework? If we are only talking about two pupils, it doesn't matter if one is wealthy and the other is from the projects, or if one is white and the other black. But if we are talking about a school where 70 or 80 percent of those a child is likely to sit next to are from the projects, it makes a huge difference. The fact that poor parents are much more likely to have dropped out of school, to speak nonstandard English, to be unable to provide regular medical care or homework supervision doesn't change even if their children transfer to a school where most of their classmates are middle class. These poor children may still have bad teeth and start school without having heard bedtime stories. They may enter first grade with a smaller Standard English vocabulary and may have more trouble learning to read.[6] But many other things will change for these poor children in a school that is fairly balanced across lines of socioeconomic class, like those in Wake County.

The norms of behavior, the language spoken, and the expectations of teachers will be vastly different. Gangs will not run the schools. The learning curve will be higher. Students and teachers will no longer have to confront a culture that ridicules traditional school achievement. Sloppy and vulgar speech are less likely to be tolerated. The vocabularies of poor children will grow as they interact with advantaged classmates. More will learn to read sooner. Teachers will not be overburdened and burned out, as they often are in high-poverty schools. Children will not have an easy time ducking homework assignments. Better teachers with even higher expectations for what counts as good work will be attracted to these high-performing schools.

Teacher turnover will decrease. Poor children in predominantly middle-class schools may not achieve at the level of students who start school far more advantaged than they are. But more poor children will reach grade level, and they will graduate in far greater numbers.

Those who believe the Supreme Court was right to halt metropolitan desegregation plans in the North often portray such plans as unnecessary and burdensome. They denigrate them as utopian schemes of social engineering that freedom-loving Americans should resist. They point to highly publicized inner-city academies like KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) that have achieved powerful results without "forced busing." These are good schools, and they have been successful partly for the same reason that Raleigh has: they changed the norms that are operative in most inner-city schools. They did it by setting requirements for longer school days (starting as early as 6:30 a.m. and often not ending until 5 p.m.), Saturday classes, mandatory summer school, and behavioral contracts with parents.

A similarly successful private school I visited in Harlem required that a guardian accompany the student applicant for a full-day visit to the school. On completion of the visit, the prospective student had to write an essay explaining what the school was about and why he or she wanted to attend. Students and parents who find out about such schools and commit the time and effort to apply and abide by these stringent rules are a small subset of impoverished inner-city families. They tend to be children from stable homes with the most motivated parents (or a single parent) who enforce strong beliefs in educational achievement and who back up school norms governing good behavior and academic effort. When drawn to a KIPP academy or a similar school with other like-minded parents, they reinforce those norms. They confirm Coleman's findings that paren-

tal background factors are critical to establishing a context for higher achievement. But such schools are few in number—islands of hope in a sea of poverty, as a recent report funded by the Gates Foundation confirmed.[7]

In 2004 KIPP and other charter schools enrolled only 2 percent of all public school students in the nation. Many of them did no better than other public schools in improving the achievement of children in high-poverty schools. In Washington, D.C., a city that enrolled 26 percent of its pupils in charter schools in 2005—one of the highest rates in the nation—only 12 percent of its eighth grade students reached proficiency in reading and 7 percent in math.[8] No city like Washington or Syracuse with high concentrations of schools in poverty has been able to replicate the success of KIPP and similar exceptional schools on a citywide basis. By creating fairly balanced schools on a countywide basis, Wake County changed the norms in *all* schools attended by poor students.

Wake Is Not the Only One

While Wake has been a leader in closing the achievement gap, metropolitan desegregation has also markedly improved academic achievement of poor and minority pupils in other districts. The most successful desegregation occurred in the South, especially in the countywide school districts that are common in many southern states, and later through city-suburban mergers. Massive resistance and delaying tactics blocked desegregation for more than a decade: only 2 percent of black students had entered white schools in the South by 1964. But by 1988 southern schools were the most integrated in the nation, with 44 percent of black students attending schools that were majority white, compared with only 23 percent of blacks in the Northeast. Equally important, in 2003 there were three times as many poor minority students attending affluent schools (those with less than 10 percent of their students receiving free and reduced lunch) in the South as there were in the Northeast.[9]

Charlotte's school merger with Mecklenburg County in 1971, though court-ordered, achieved outcomes that were nearly as remarkable as Raleigh's. Being one of the earliest metropolitan plans, it was also one of the most studied. The first few years of integration saw considerable turbulence, and ten high schools closed for short periods due to racial tension. But eventually, significant gains were made. Roslyn Arlen Mickelson's fifteen-year study showed not only that desegregation benefited both black and white students but that students who attended desegregated schools for more years accrued more benefits: "The more time both black and white students spend in desegregated elementary schools, the higher their standardized test scores in middle and high school and the higher their track placements in secondary schools."[10]

Chattanooga, Tennessee, offers an interesting parallel with both Syracuse and Raleigh. It was a declining industrial city of about the same size as Syracuse that had tried the usual paths to revival. It had cleaned up downtown, torn down substandard housing, and built a $45 million aquarium on the banks of the Tennessee River in hopes of becoming a "destination city." But this was not enough to reverse the decline. After years of shrinking school enrollments and mushrooming expenses, with some of the lowest test scores in the state, the city's business and civic leadership came together to convince voters that excellent public schools were the missing link in their chain of hopes for Chattanooga. As in Raleigh, they feared Chattanooga was becoming the hole in a donut of metropolitan prosperity. "We need to be concerned about the overall school system because it's re-

lated to our economic health," said Ronald O'Neal, owner of a large plumbing and manufacturing company and president of the Hamilton County School Board. "That's what draws companies in. They want to know about our schools."

Chattanooga's School Board decided to follow Nashville and Knoxville on the road to merger with the suburbs. It wasn't easy. The city schools' 155,000 pupils were 65 percent black, while schools in Hamilton County were 95 percent white. There were fears of massive busing and loss of teaching jobs in a merged system. After two years of debate, the city chose merger in 1997 by a referendum vote of 22,694 to 19,044. For three years after the merger, as the consolidated system designed new approaches to teaching and learning in more diverse schools, test scores were nearly flat. But by 2000 Chattanooga–Hamilton County became one of the fastest-improving school systems in the state. Over the next seven years the dropout rate was cut in half, and 75 percent of all students graduated from high school in 2007. Passing rates for black children in grades three through eight rose to 81 percent in math and 83 percent in reading by that year, while rates for low-income students were 83 percent in math and 85 percent in reading. "The merger brought new energy not just in the schools, but in the community," said Daniel Challener, president of the Public Education Foundation. "It was a catalyst for greater community involvement and investment."[11]

Louisville, Kentucky, like Charlotte, had once operated separate schools for whites and blacks. It had been ordered in 1975 to develop a metropolitan desegregation plan for schools in the city and Jefferson County. Black achievement rose and dropout rates fell. President Ronald Reagan's secretary of education, Terrel H. Bell, called Jefferson County's desegregation plan the most successful in the country. In 2001, after a federal court de-

clared Jefferson County "unitary," or free of the vestiges of past discrimination, the district acted to prevent resegregation. A study of 38 districts that had been declared "unitary" showed that in fact significant resegregation had occurred in most districts.

Charlotte was one of them. Though most Charlotte schools remained racially balanced, resegregation increased when Charlotte adopted a neighborhood school policy after being declared unitary in 2002. In the South overall, the percentage of blacks in majority-white schools dropped from a peak of 44 percent in 1988 to 28 percent in 2005.[12]

Louisville and Jefferson County voluntarily adopted a managed choice plan to maintain racial balance among its 97,000 students, which were one third black overall. As in Raleigh, parents could list their preferences, but assignments were tailored to sustain a black enrollment of at least 15 percent but no more than 50 percent. Jefferson County schools continued to make progress. More than 80 percent of black and 77 percent of white graduates strongly agreed that it was important for "my long-term success in life" to have attended desegregated schools.[13]

But in 2007 the Supreme Court struck down Jefferson County's voluntary plan on the grounds that assignment by race was unconstitutional now that Louisville and Jefferson County had jointly eliminated their previous race-based school systems. The Court's decision, by a 5 to 4 vote, did permit taking race into account within narrow limits, such as drawing attendance zones for new schools or allocating resources for special programs, but it eliminated most voluntary desegregation programs based on race. That decision may lead Louisville and other districts to adopt Raleigh's policy of balancing schools by family income rather than race, as Fairfax County, Virginia, has done.[14] There is strong evidence to support such a policy.

Why Class and Income Trump Race

A national study of 913 high schools completed in 2005 confirmed the benefit of socioeconomically balanced schools. It found that "schools serving mostly lower-income students tend to be organized and operated differently than those serving more affluent students." The differences paralleled those in Raleigh and were traceable to four characteristics of balanced schools: higher teacher expectations, greater amounts of homework, more rigorous courses, and students' feelings of safety. Poor students in schools balanced according to income learned, on average, twice as much as those in high-poverty schools.[15]

In much of the discussion of desegregation, race is often used as a proxy for income or social class. Studies frequently refer to "poor blacks" or "low-income minorities." Such usage is understandable: blacks and minorities are disproportionately poor. But class or income trumps race as a determinant of academic achievement.[16] When black and white students of similar income and parental education are compared, most of the racial difference disappears. This is true whether one is comparing test scores or measures of behavior in school. A study of antisocial behavior calculated the frequency of noncooperative behavior, dishonesty, disobedience, and violence among twelve-year-olds. A comparison of the raw scores of all black children in the sample with all whites indicated that blacks were markedly more antisocial than whites, a thirteen-point difference. But when blacks and whites of similar social class and parental education were compared, the differences were negligible: only three points, an antisocial score of 53 for blacks and 50 for whites. The average antisocial score of the poorest children, regardless of race, was 49, but it was only 28 for children in the best-off

families. The real difference in school behavior was family income.[17]

Without a doubt, poor black children bear the additional disadvantage of historic discrimination because of skin color. Continued efforts to achieve racial desegregation are justified on that ground alone, although the composition of the current Supreme Court makes it highly unlikely that this argument will prevail. But when poor black children are integrated with poor whites, as happened in parts of Boston and in some rural districts in the South, neither black nor white children made gains. The real gains come from integration by class or income. In recognition of overwhelming research evidence supporting this proposition, Wake County in January 2000 became the first large school district to adopt income rather than race as the principal measure of balance. The new policy stipulated, first, that no school would be majority-poor—that is, the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch would not exceed 40 percent. And second, no school would have more than 25 percent of its students reading below grade level.

Wake County was not abandoning hope for continued racial balance. The School Board understood that a high proportion of black and Hispanic families were poor. In 1994 nearly a third of the county's minority students read below grade level, and more than half of them received subsidized lunches, while only 15 percent of whites fell into either category. Economic integration would bring about significant racial balance as well. But by 2000 Wake was also aware that the courts were turning against racial assignment. The Fourth District Court of Appeals, which had jurisdiction over North Carolina, had recently barred the use of race as a basis for student assignments in Arlington, Virginia.

Stephen Wray, chair of the Wake School Board, explained the

board's unanimous vote for the change: "Our objective has shifted from racial diversity to one that is focused on achievement. I am comfortable with racial diversity being a by-product of this new plan. Still, it is important to understand the difference." Bill Fletcher, a conservative member of the board sensitive to complaints about busing, agreed: "The issue for me has always been educational effectiveness. That's what this policy is about, it's not social engineering."[18] The income-balance policy indeed proved to be educationally effective, and it was politically effective as well. It did not slow Wake's success in closing the racial achievement gap, but it did manage to sidestep future court challenges to Wake's long-standing racial balance plan. All poor children—whites, blacks, Asians, and Hispanics—benefited. Most importantly, it was highly effective in maintaining Wake's reputation as a place where there are no bad schools—an enormous boon for economic prosperity in the region.

While significant gains can occur solely by changing the complexion and social-class composition of students within schools, those gains can be frustrated if students are resegregated within the school by shunting poor or black children into a separate track where academic demands are low and where classes are taught by the least able teachers. Studies of racial desegregation have shown exactly that trend in some schools.[19] Wake County did not let this happen. Not only were children's expectations changed by being placed in classrooms where most of their peers were doing their homework and coming to class ready to work, but teachers' expectations were changed as well.

Wake's new culture of teaching in a data-driven system brought teachers together in teams to look at how all children at each grade-level were performing, not just the children in individual classrooms. Teachers began to question one another about why poor Hispanic boys were reading so poorly in some third

grade classrooms but not in others. Principals redirected funds and extra teachers toward low-performing children, in the form of catch-up classes, extra tutoring after school, and summer programs. Wake's reputation helped the county recruit teachers from other states who knew they were not going to be assigned to inner-city schools that had become not much more than warehouses for poor, low-performing students.

That perception also attracted top administrative talent from inside and outside the system. Some principals elsewhere were willing to come to Wake as assistant principals, just to be part of a system that was making history and truly providing equal educational opportunity to all children. Wake made a point of rewarding high performance with bonuses. Teachers who demonstrated teaching excellence by passing the rigorous National Board certification program received an extra 12 percent of their base salary. By 2008 Wake County had the highest percentage of nationally certified teachers of any urban school district in the country.

What happened outside of school was just as important. The politics of maintaining public support for balanced schools was a creative and ceaseless effort. Once it adopted a policy of economic balance, Wake never stopped selling it. The leadership of the school system, especially Superintendent Bill McNeal and his successor, Del Burns, never assumed that all parents would understand the rationale or, if they did, would agree that it was worth busing children out of their neighborhood to keep schools integrated by social class. They founded the Wake Partnership—an annual conference of parents, business leaders, politicians, and principals—to explain what the system was achieving and to set new goals. It usually drew several thousand participants. A citizen task force wrote a report, "Healthy Schools," about the benefits of Wake's policy that won wide attention in the media.

Socioeconomic balance became part of the everyday language that teachers and parents used to talk about Wake's educational rationale.

Because of the influx of new families drawn to Raleigh's booming economy, new schools were opened every year, and reassignments were often necessary to keep the system in balance. Wake's wide variety of magnet schools, with their different academic emphases, gave parents a lot of choices, but inevitably some parents did not get the school they wanted for their child. The administration tried to be responsive and make adjustments, but still not all parents got a satisfactory choice. They had an opportunity to voice their complaints at public hearings held throughout the county each year. These lengthy hearings imposed a burden on the School Board, but as board member Tom Oxholm explained, "We've learned to handle this like the Department of Transportation handles new highways. Not everyone is going to like it. But it helps that everyone gets a hearing."[20] The busing policy was refined over the years to minimize complaints by reducing time on the bus and maintaining stability of enrollment within each school whenever possible.

The overwhelming majority of Wake parents were convinced that busing was worth it. Despite challenges from those who favored a neighborhood school policy, for more than three decades Wake citizens elected a School Board majority that supported balanced schools. Poll data also showed a dramatic shift nationally over those years in favor of diversity. In Gallup polls, 72 percent of white parents said in 1963 that they would not send their children to a school that was majority black. By 1990, that number had shrunk to only 34 percent. While questions that implied "forced busing" were opposed by a majority of whites, 60 percent of whites polled by Public Agenda supported "redrawing district lines to combine mostly black and mostly white districts into one school district," as Wake County did.[21]

Wake parents' confidence in the benefits of its balance policies was not shaken by debates about whether the reported academic gains of their children were as substantial as claimed. Some observers have claimed that North Carolina and other states lowered the bar on state tests to avoid penalties under the federal No Child Left Behind law that required annual testing of all public school children. But Wake set its goal of 95 percent passing before the federal law was passed, and there has been no evidence that North Carolina watered down its tests or that the remarkable closure of the test gap between black and white children in Wake was a sham. Both North Carolina and New York received above-average ratings in a recent comparison of the quality of their state testing programs.[22] Wake's pupils have done well on the SAT, which many college admissions officers regard as the gold standard of verbal and mathematical achievement. Wake students also significantly exceeded national averages on Advanced Placement tests.[23]

Teaching beyond the Test

Remarkable as Wake's success has been in shrinking the test gap between black and white pupils, it obscures other even more important achievements. As a nation, we have over-focused if not fixated on testing. But test scores explain only a small part of the reasons why people are successful in later life. In an ingenious study of life success as measured by occupational status and income, Christopher Jencks found that school grades and test scores explained only a fifth of adult success. What mattered more might be called the Woody Allen virtues: showing up

and sticking with it. Much of the variance in success later in life could be attributed not to grades or class standing but to whether students finished high school at all. This was true even when Jencks compared male siblings in the same family, thus controlling to some degree for family environment and genetic inheritance.[24] Poor and minority children in Wake were more likely to stay in school and graduate than poor and minority children in Syracuse or other cities where they were trapped in schools with high concentrations of poverty and low expectations.

Employers increasingly value those who can resolve conflicts and work cooperatively in diverse teams across lines of race and class in order to solve problems. Raleigh children of different races and family backgrounds have been learning to cooperate in classroom projects for two generations, and when they enter the workplace they help Raleigh's economy prosper. Some people dismiss diversity claims as liberal rhetoric, but the economist Scott Page has shown mathematically that diversity matters in firms and in political decision-making as well as in schools. Diverse perspectives "increase the number of solutions that a collection of people can find by creating different connections among the possible solutions," Page's research showed.

Mixing groups by class or race does not guarantee a diversity of views—think of the radical Weathermen whose diverse social origins could not override a rigid ideology that led to planting bombs in the 1960s. Conversely, homogeneity doesn't always lead to shared perspectives—both George W. Bush and John Kerry were affluent white graduates of Yale, and yet their political views were dramatically different. But for solving tough problems in business or politics, the best bet is to bring together large groups of diverse people with different perspectives. Page claimed that diversity trumps not only homogeneity but also ability. That is, one is likely to get a better solution to a problem

from a random selection of law school graduates with diverse backgrounds and perspectives than from a group of the highest ranked whites with similar backgrounds.

Page's mathematical models showed that diverse groups were better at making predictions and that "a group's errors depend in equal parts on the ability of its members to predict and their diversity."[25] His work reminded me not only of Raleigh's classrooms, where children benefit from diversity, but also of my visits to Japanese schools, where fourth-grade children of diverse abilities would spend a whole morning in small groups trying to arrange jugs and containers of different sizes and shapes into order by volume. Teachers spent as much time discussing with the class how some groups reasoned incorrectly to arrive at the wrong answers as they did probing the methods of those who got it right. Japanese elementary schools strive to maximize the intelligence of the group, and perhaps this helps explain why their students rank among the highest in the world in mathematical achievement. Virtually no student is allowed to fail.

Children also benefit in other ways from attending diverse schools. Follow-up studies of children from inner-city schools in Boston, St. Louis, and Hartford who were voluntarily bused to suburban schools showed that they experienced major gains in social capital. Under the influence of middle-class peers, teenagers who formerly did not even understand the word "resume" began to think about how to build one. As adults, they were more likely to obtain white-collar and professional jobs, to live in integrated neighborhoods, and to have white friends.[26] The Gautreaux study of children from Chicago housing projects whose parents were given vouchers to move to the suburbs and attend schools there had fewer disciplinary problems, performed better in sports, got better jobs with better benefits, and were more likely to attend college than similar children who stayed in

city schools. Robert Crain's follow-up studies of Hartford children showed that bused children had fewer difficulties with police and that teenage girls were less like to have a child before age 18.[27]

Perhaps the largest scale experiment of integration by social class and race occurred in the U.S. armed forces. Follow-up studies of thousands of poor blacks who served in Vietnam showed that they earned substantially more in civilian life than blacks from the same background who had not served. Much of this difference in outcome was attributable to the wider social networks black soldiers acquired as well as their ability to cooperate effectively across boundaries of race and class. Twice as many blacks as whites re-enlisted in order to take advantage of educational benefits within the military and the extension of the GI Bill for postservice benefits. At the end of the Vietnam War, 14 percent of all army sergeants were black. By 1990 a third of sergeants were black, as were 12 percent of commissioned officers. Colin L. Powell became chairman of the Joints Chief of Staff at a time when less than 1 percent of senior executives in the private sector were black. In the army more than 7 percent of generals were African American.

Integration was a crucial first step, but the army realized that it could not create integrated fighting units if it continued to promote only whites. When the sociologists Charles Moskos and John Sibley Butler looked closely at how the army brought black officers up through the ranks, they found it was not the result of setting artificial promotion quotas. Rather, the army set objective goals and provided compensatory educational programs so that minorities and the poor would qualify for promotion. While these programs were being developed, bottlenecks developed and fewer blacks were able to pass the qualification tests for promotion. But these problems were eventually worked out, and

those who received promotions were seen by their fellow soldiers as having earned the job. This was true all the way up to the level of general. The best route to generalship was through West Point, but in 1968 only one out of a hundred plebes entering the academy were black. The army began coaching promising black and white enlisted men so that they could pass entrance tests to a special school that provided an extra year of studies to prepare students for rigorous college-level work at West Point. By 1993, 84 blacks were part of the entering class at the academy, and 40 percent of those black plebes were enlisted men who came through the army's racially integrated prep school.

Schools for the children of officers and enlisted men and women were also integrated by race and class. Nationwide, the average SAT combined score in 1994 was 741 for black schoolchildren and 940 for whites. But in schools run by the military, the gap was narrower—804 for blacks and 945 for whites—showing again that balanced schools raised the achievement of poor and minority children without depressing the achievement of whites. And significantly, the percentage of seniors in Defense Department high schools who were planning to enter college upon graduation was almost the same for both racial groups: 69 percent for whites and 64 percent for blacks.[28]

Lessons Learned

What lessons can be drawn from the Raleigh story? There are many strands woven into the tale of Raleigh's urban renaissance, among them an exceptional biracial cooperation stretching back to the Reconstruction period after the Civil War. Some of the strands are common to other modern cities of the South that also drew new industries with tax breaks in states that were less

union-friendly than those in the North. But not all cities in the South or even North Carolina prospered as did Raleigh—nearby Rocky Mount and Fayetteville are two examples.

Raleigh's growth was characterized by a smart urban policy. It bulldozed less and conserved more of the attractive old city by adopting a transportation policy that ran big interstates around the city rather than through it, as did Syracuse. Raleigh was an early developer of mixed-used zoning within the city, combining attractive apartments with ground-floor retail space in a way that drew residents back into lively city streets that felt safe. It capitalized on its university assets by cooperating with the state to establish the Research Triangle Park in the 1950s.

The Research Triangle was mostly pine woods for many years. It did not really take off until after the merger of Raleigh and Wake County schools. Business leaders took an aggressive role in making the consolidation happen. They feared that the decline of Raleigh's inner city would soon become an implosion, creating a dead core that would discourage investment in the region. They knew that progressive technology-based firms would not be attracted to a dying city that projected an image of the old integration-resistant South. They wanted racially diverse, topnotch schools that would prepare the children of current employees to work in a diverse global economy and would draw talent to the area.

A 2007 Brookings Report on America's cities found that two of the major causes of decline in cities like Syracuse was that they neglected to adapt to the new electronic, information-driven global economy and they failed to overcome the extreme economic and residential isolation of the poor and minorities in the inner city. Many of these declining urban centers have a 30 percent gap on average eighth grade math and reading tests compared with test scores statewide. Of the 301 cities in the Brook-

ings study, all of which had a population over 50,000, those in the bottom fifth on measures of economic health and growth (which included Syracuse) were also the most racially segregated.[29]

If economically and racially balanced schools are the key to revitalizing declining cities, is there a way to put that keystone back in the arch of urban renewal? Could the Detroit decision be reversed? It's unlikely. Yet the rationale for Detroit's metropolitan desegregation plan is in some ways more persuasive today than it was in 1974 when it fell one vote shy of a majority in the Supreme Court. The four justices voting in the minority thought the Michigan courts were right in finding that the patterns of segregation were caused by a web of housing discrimination and other actions by the state that maintained segregated schools—despite the fact that suburban districts did not legally bar black students from attending these predominantly white schools. The increasing concentration of segregated and impoverished schools that these justices predicted in 1974 has become a reality today in Detroit, Syracuse, and much of urban America.

In 2005 nearly eight of ten students who entered ninth grade in Detroit dropped out before graduation—the highest dropout rate of any city in the country.[30] If the Supreme Court had not struck down the Detroit plan in its 1974 *Milliken v. Bradley* decision, metropolitan desegregation would have been widely adopted throughout the rest of urban America, and cities like Syracuse would be stunningly different today. But the odds are heavily against a reversal of the *Milliken* decision, given the present composition of the Supreme Court. However, throughout our nation's history, minority opinions have later become majority opinions. It took sixty years for the Court to reverse the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision that declared "separate but

equal" schools for blacks constitutional. Perhaps one day the mounting evidence of the damage done by the Detroit decision may bring some future Court to reverse it. However, it would most likely do so not by trying to address the issue of racial diversity head-on but by upholding the principle of economic balance adopted in Raleigh.

The No Child Left Behind legislation enacted by Congress in 2001—and coming up for renewal in 2009–2010—required testing of all children in reading and mathematics in grades three through eight each year, with the aim of reaching proficiency in both subjects for all children by 2014. It was not a national test—each state designed its own tests tailored to the curriculum teachers must follow in that state. Schools were expected to make "adequate yearly progress" toward the proficiency goal not only for the school as a whole but for groups of students defined by race, poverty, language, and disability. Schools that failed for three years in a row were required to offer pupils free tutoring and the option to transfer to a school where most pupils were passing. But these were limited to within-district transfers, and in most major cities there were few seats for the thousands of poor pupils in failing schools. Nationally, only a fifth of failing students received any tutoring, and what they got was so limited as to show no significant gains in learning. The law's requirement that pupils in urban schools be taught by qualified teachers—those who were fully certified and prepared in the subjects they were assigned to teach—was largely ignored.[31]

In California alone, more than a thousand of its 9,500 schools were branded chronic failures in 2007. Most of these schools had high poverty enrollments. Nationally, more than a quarter of all public schools (25,000 of 90,000 total) failed some tests. After five years of failing, a school could be shut down under provisions of the NCLB law. About 5,000 failing schools enrolling about 2.5 million children were estimated to qualify for a shutdown as of 2008.[32]

Carmen Schroeder, the superintendent of a high-poverty district in Los Angeles, would like to close some of the worst-performing schools—59 of the 91 schools in her district have consistently failed. But she has no place to send these needy pupils.[33] Her problem is one faced by urban educators throughout America. Nationwide, 411 school districts faced sanctions for failing schools in 2008.[34] So why not offer to send children from failing schools to places where most of the successful schools are located—in the suburbs? Such a remedy would have the best political and practical chance of success if it operated as a voluntary public school voucher plan. Children in failing schools in districts where there are no available places in a successful school (or where successful schools would themselves become high-poverty schools if more classrooms were added for these children) would be offered vouchers to buy themselves a seat in a successful public school in another district.

The vouchers would need to be ample enough to provide a genuine incentive for suburban schools. They should cover the costs not only of busing but of additional teachers, counseling, tutoring, and even construction of some new schools. Each suburban school system might be offered a bonus for participation to ensure that local school taxes do not rise as a result of their accepting voucher students. And conversely, state and federal funds could be withheld from successful districts that refuse to accept vouchers from the "children left behind." If a such a carrot-and-stick approach was able to desegregate schools in the South in the 1960s and 1970s, why wouldn't it work in Syracuse and many other cities in the North today?

As in Raleigh, vouchers should offer parents from failing schools a "controlled choice." They would list their preferred

schools, and the accepting districts would allocate pupils so that no school went beyond the tipping point of low-income students. Even if only 10 percent of eligible parents sought voucher transfers for their children, the benefits would be considerable. On the other hand, if massive numbers applied, the system should give priority to the neediest children, or else a lottery should be held giving an equal chance to all applicants from failing schools. The legal grounds for such a remedy would seem unassailable—they flow from the requirements set forth in existing law. It would not be a race-based program, though many minority children as well as poor white children in failing schools would be the beneficiaries. It would be a voluntary plan that does not rely on "forced" busing. It would be grounded in strong evidence from the social sciences that economically balanced schools benefit the poor without harming middle-class students.

It is important to remember that the merger of Raleigh's city schools with those in its suburbs was accomplished voluntarily, without a court order. Merger did, however, require political organization to pass enabling legislation in the state legislature, followed by approval of the county and city school boards. That could still be accomplished in Syracuse, and for the same reasons: the realization that a declining inner-city core will eventually damage the health of the suburbs and the regional economy, and the recognition of the moral imperative to provide equal educational opportunity for all children.

There has been more discussion of such matters in Syracuse in the last decade, though most of it has been limited to cost-cutting consolidation of policing, purchasing, and other services. No candidate for major political office has dared to mention merging school districts on a metropolitan basis. Existing state law is less friendly to merger in New York, and obtaining the cooperation of a multitude of suburban school districts would

require extraordinary courage and political leadership. Merger and redistricting could be achieved more easily in other states, though even in Syracuse it is not impossible—if the political will could be summoned to do so.

Even without a new federal law, what could and should happen in more cities would be the kind of voluntary transfer program in which poor and minority inner-city students are bused to participating suburban districts, as Boston has done for over four decades with considerable success in its METCO program. Though such a plan was rejected when Syracuse's first black school superintendent suggested it in the mid-1970s, a voluntary one-way busing program is more likely to win acceptance today in the wake of research documenting the strong positive effects on the lives of Boston children who got on the buses for suburban schools more than forty years ago. The METCO system is still alive and well today.[35]

In the mid-1980s when I taught for two years at Hamilton High, the school had survived riots and was beginning to show some success.[36] Although white flight had taken a toll, the school retained a core of middle-class students, and grades and discipline among both black and white students had improved under a strong principal. Hamilton was Syracuse's leading high school, much like Broughton High in Raleigh. But when I went back to the school twenty years later to help teach a course in urban anthropology for two years, it was nothing like Broughton. The high school, like the city, had become increasingly poor and minority.[37]

In the years 2003 to 2005 I performed an experiment like the one I had conducted at Broughton: I asked students at Hamilton High to write a letter describing their school to a cousin who was about to move to Syracuse. The letters were devastating. Although some students felt it was still possible to get a good

education if you worked hard and got the right teachers, they lamented that many of the neediest students were poorly taught. They described their school as one that was "expected to be low quality and trashy." Nearly all students mentioned the degrading metal detectors they passed through each morning, although the searches offered little real protection. "They are more of a thing so that the administration can tell people they're doing it."

Such cynicism was pervasive, especially about the school's sloganeering. As one student wrote to his cousin: "As soon as you get here you will see signs all over the place with 'Community of Caring' on them. It's supposed to symbolize respect, trust, caring and responsibility. You don't find much of that here. Many aren't respectful. They talk back to teachers or bad mouth other students. There is garbage all over the halls and the bathrooms are filthy with pee all over the floors and graffiti on the walls." The school had had three principals in four years, and most teachers were afraid to discipline students or to expect much of them. One student wrote: "Well, now let's get down to business. You got it, the rules. We have rules but no one follows them. If a kid comes in drunk or high the administration doesn't care." Another offered this explanation: "Teachers come to a place like Hamilton with ambitions but once they get here they get lost in the disruptiveness of the students. Hamilton is filled with low expectations . . . If you don't expect excellence from your students they will turn in crap."

As part of their research, some students in the class made visits to suburban schools. Most had never been to such a place and could hardly believe the contrast: "As I walked through the halls of this suburban school I was in total awe of the immaculate classrooms. Everything seemed to be new and shiny. The school wasn't dark and outdated. Teachers used new technology

to teach their classes and there wasn't a lack of anything. I felt a sense of jealousy, like I was being gypped." Another wrote: "White flight is no fiction. The city has been abandoned wholesale. It has had a profound effect. It has taken a pool of human potential away, and also drained money away."

A minority boy in the class had arranged to visit one of the most affluent high schools in the suburbs. But when the principal saw him interviewing students in the cafeteria about why they thought their nearly all-white school was so much better equipped than Hamilton High, he was asked to leave. He told his classmates: "I felt like I was in another country and was being expelled." The "expelled" student put the question America faces in its starkest form. In places like Syracuse, an invisible wall between city and suburbs has created two countries defined most clearly by separate educational systems—one primarily for the poor, and the other for the middle and upper classes. Many students on one side of that wall have come to believe they are losers, while those on the other side have been taught to believe they are destined for success. The choice between Raleigh and Syracuse is the choice between hope and despair, the choice between one America and two Americas.

The United States has been shaped by the twin values of liberty and equality. But for the most part liberty has trumped equality in "the land of the free and the home of the brave." In America, you can become as rich as you want, say what you want, and live as you please with fewer restrictions than any other country on earth. The power of the private purse is very great, for those who have one. We have never sought equality of condition or enforced equality of outcomes. But we have believed in the principles of equal access and equal opportunity, especially equal educational opportunity. According to the American creed, wealth does not need to be forcibly equalized be-

cause over time, if all children are provided equal educational opportunities and a chance to compete for their share of the good life, wealth will redistribute itself in a meritocratic way. Equal educational opportunity keeps the gates of promise open and prevents America from establishing impassable walls of social class and privilege.

During the colonial period, this principle was enshrined in the founding of the New England common school open to children of all social classes. It sharply differentiated America from its mother country. At the time that the common school was spreading westward across the United States, England passed its 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, which decreed that workhouses for the poor should punish them for their debts and other failures, by separating husbands from wives, parents from children. A conservative English newspaper denounced the act, writing that it set the poor "apart like beasts in a cage, staked off from their fellow men, and regarded as beings of a different caste."[38]

It is not enough just to throw money over the wall to children in a different caste of schools. And indeed, in New York State as elsewhere, judicial decisions to remedy inequalities in funding between rich and poor districts have seldom achieved that aim once they landed in suburban-controlled state legislatures. The greatest resource for ensuring equal educational opportunity is the kind of economically balanced common school that characterizes the Raleigh–Wake County school district. The goal is not just to close the gap in test scores between black and white, rich and poor, important as that is. The goal is to provide more opportunities for people to freely associate across racial, ethnic, and economic lines. The diverse social networks that children form in the Raleigh schools promise benefits not just for themselves but, in the long run, for the nation.

All children, not just the poor, benefit from diverse perspectives and a more complex sense of what evidence and frames of analysis are useful in solving complex problems. It took courage and a bold transformation of conventional political arrangements to nourish that diversity and provide genuine equal educational opportunity in Raleigh. But merging the city and county school systems saved the city from rotting at its core and enabled a strong regional economy to thrive. A flourishing metropolitan center of arts and culture, along with world-class talent drawn to universities within Research Triangle, has made Raleigh a city of hope. Instead of turning its back on the basic promise of equal educational opportunity that America made to its poor and minority children, Raleigh embraced it. The rest of America defaults on that promise at its peril.

Epilogue

While the 1976 merger of city and county schools was a great egalitarian moment in Raleigh's history, sustaining it required creative energy and political resolve. The initial challenge was to raise achievement levels for all children and reduce the gap between black and white pupils. The second challenge was to continuously build a political coalition in favor of the busing required to maintain economically balanced and diverse schools in a rapidly expanding system.

The newly merged Wake County schools enrolled 53,000 children in 1976. By 2008 the school district had become the nineteenth largest in the nation, expanding by 6,000 pupils a year and enrolling more than 134,000 students. Raleigh's population growth was driven not only by the continued southward movement of many people from the northeastern United States but also by a rapid influx of Latino families. All of these new students, rich and poor, had to be assigned to schools, and this meant that many students who were already established in their schools had to be reassigned to keep the system in balance.

Each spring, when assignments for the following school year were announced, letters flooded into the Raleigh *News and Observer* filled with protests from disgruntled parents. A mother from the affluent suburb of Cary wrote, "Wake County citizens need to rise up and say in no uncertain terms that this reassignment madness has got to stop. Why does the school system continue to interfere with the already established success of many existing schools?" She described her child's Davis Drive Elementary School as a "jewel in the crown of Wake County," despite being chronically overcrowded. "Busing in children from elsewhere" meant that Davis would "not be the same school with different children; it will be an entirely different school. No one will benefit [from] the change. Isn't excellence the goal? . . . Far more would be gained by focusing resources and attention on how best to support other schools rather than messing with success."[1]

Another Cary parent whose child was being reassigned wrote a letter along the same lines: "I am more than furious with Rosa Gill's comments about our neighborhood schools." Gill, chair of the Wake School Board, had recently noted that while the board tried to assign children to schools that were close to their homes, public schools did not legally or in any other way belong to a particular group of parents or a neighborhood but to all citizens of the county. In rebutting this point, the parent wrote, "We do not have to homogenize our schools to have excellent schools . . . Neighborhood schools worked for us, and will work for our children." Another Cary resident protested that Wake was "wasting millions on busing" because it was "fixated to the highest possible degree with the bottom 15 percent or so of students."[2]

These protests by Cary parents—objecting to the fact that low-income students at Davis Elementary would rise from 9 to 22 percent in fall 2008—got big play in the newspapers. But in fact, only a fifth of the 6,400 students reassigned throughout the

county were moved to keep schools economically balanced. More than half were moved to schools closer to home, while others chose to move to magnet schools.[3]

Most parents continued to support the policy of balanced public schools. Better than nine out of ten agreed that their child was getting a "superior education" in Wake County, including voters in Cary. One of them disagreed with the mother who had complained "that students reassigned to Davis Drive Elementary will be a detriment to her jewel. Rather than welcoming families to the school, she has already counted them out . . . More disturbing is her statement that Davis Drive will not be the same school with different children . . . Excellence can be found in all schools. Unfortunately, so can prejudice." Yet another Cary parent wrote: "Bravo to the Wake County school board for addressing inequities" through its balance policies. She wished the "board members courage as they weather the complaints from a group of wealthy, lawyered-up parents."[4] The protesters turned out to be a small vocal minority, but their letters to the Raleigh *News and Observer* and the responses of those who disagreed proved that democracy was alive and well in Wake County, North Carolina.

The School Board was reelected in 2007 with little opposition and a strong majority in favor of continuing its diversity policies. Yet it struggled to maintain its previous successes in the face of spiraling growth, as more and more mobile classrooms were hauled into schoolyards. In 2008, protesting parents called for a study to determine whether busing to achieve diversity had actually helped poor students. The board was in an awkward position because the rapid increase in poor students meant that more than 30 percent of its 150 schools exceeded the 40 percent cap on poor children in any given school. Most of these schools were just over the guideline, in the 40–50 percent range, but a

few had gone to 60 percent or higher, well past the tipping point of what Wake County had defined as a healthy school. Teachers in those schools faced a far greater challenge in raising achievement levels.

The board refused to raise the poverty cap, however, arguing that it would only accelerate the spread of more high-poverty schools. Instead, it attempted to bring all schools back into balance by reassigning students, despite the risk of sparking even more protests in some schools.[5] Wake County also had to face the unwelcome possibility of a tax hike to pay for services to its growing segment of needy children and for salary increases that would attract and retain the kind of teachers that had made the merger work.

As poor students, many of them Hispanic immigrants, increased from 1999 to 2007, test scores dropped. As measured by eligibility for subsidized lunches, the percentage of poor students in Wake County rose from 19 percent to 32 percent during this period, while the percentage of students passing state math and reading tests in grades three to eight fell by 9 percentage points from its high of 91 percent in 2003. The dropout rate also rose slightly.[6] But Raleigh's refusal to segregate its poor and minority students still paid big dividends. In Syracuse, where nearly three fourths of students qualified for subsidized lunches, only 29 percent of all students passed eighth grade reading. In Wake County's schools, 75 percent of poor blacks and 87 percent of blacks above the poverty line passed reading in grades 3 through 8. For Hispanics, 72 percent of poor students and 88 percent of others passed. This is especially impressive in light of the reality that some rural Latino children not only did not speak English when they came to Raleigh but also had never learned to read in their native language.

The gaps between poor and nonpoor in math were greater

than in reading, but better than 80 percent of all students in grades 3 through 8 passed math in Wake County, compared with 31 percent of eighth graders in Syracuse although there was some improvement in lower grades. In Blodgett Middle School, one of the poorest Syracuse schools, only 8 percent of eighth graders passed math and 14 percent passed reading.[7] Countywide scores in Wake were comparable to scores attained by students in the suburbs of Syracuse, where the percentage of students qualifying for subsidized lunches was less than a fourth that in Wake County. This finding suggests that a merger between Syracuse and its suburbs could have produced similar results—it could have raised the scores of the poorest students without diminishing the achievement of the affluent.

But there was no merger or any effective metropolitan approach to the problem in Syracuse. Indeed, the invisible wall between city and suburb has grown even higher in recent years. A 2006 study of Syracuse by a team from the American Institute of Architects pointed bluntly to the lack of any effective dialogue across that wall: "Urban planning policies are overlapping, inconsistent, and not enforced. Effective cooperation between city and county does not exist." As the chasm grew between affluent suburbs and an impoverished city, no one wanted to talk about, and many did not even know about, the shameful gap in test scores.[8]

Yet, this tale of two American cities is not just about test scores. It's about the kind of nation we hope to become. We should not want, nor shall we ever achieve, a nation of equal test scores or equal incomes. But we do need to decide whether we want schools segregated by race and class, or schools that provide equal educational opportunity for all children—schools where students are enriched by relationships and ways of thinking that help them break out of the boxes of race and class that

our flawed history has constructed. Do we believe in a nation that welcomes all comers, provides a level playing field in all its public schools, relishes the clash of ideas, and, as a consequence, enjoys one of the highest rates of upward social mobility in the world? Raleigh's reinvention of the ideals of the American common school made it an exemplar of those dreams and hopes.

Hope and Despair in the American City

Why there are no bad schools in Raleigh

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