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Excerpted from Prudence L. Carter, *Stubborn Roots: Race, Culture, and Inequality in U.S. and South African Schools* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

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the law mandates it) and the sociocultural context ("integrated," willingness to be *truly* multicultural and diverse). Indeed, a more holistic meaning of "open" would encompass the school's sociocultural climate. Thus, I appropriate the term and broaden its applicability to both the school's resource and sociocultural contexts. That is, an open, integrated school provides a strong probability that students of disparate backgrounds can attend a school—even if access is determined by lottery. In an open integrated school system, residential segregation does not dictate the socioeconomic profile of the school. Also, an open, integrated school supports academic, social, and cultural exchanges that neither scorn differences nor impose acculturation to the extent that it annihilates the identities and symbols of people-hood for nondominant groups. From a social and cultural standpoint, boundary crossing vis-à-vis efforts toward school desegregation have frequently signified assimilation in which historically disadvantaged students move from one school to another and embrace the school's cultural codes and mores without any real change to an existent racial and cultural hierarchy within it.[12] Open integrated schools, in contrast, would produce flexibility among students and educators to deal with academic and social conflicts in values, cultures, and perspectives.

## *Practices*

The everyday routines, manners, and ways of schooling needed to fully include many groups of students academically, socially, culturally, and politically constitute the "practices" of integration. Of the eight school case studies included in this study that would fall into the "open" category in terms of access to the resource context, North City Tech, a multiracial and multiethnic exam school in North Capital City, comprised mainly of working-class students, is the one that comes closest to this ideal type. The white and black student population at North City Tech nearly mirrors their proportions in the overall public school populations, while the percentages of Asian and Latino students are overrepresented and underrepresented, respectively. Nevertheless, each of these groups is respectably represented.

The school, nonetheless, is challenged ecologically by the low percentage of White families who refuse to send their children to the public schools in North Capital City's district. While more than half of the residents in the metropolitan area identify as "White," less than one-fifth (about 14 percent) of the students in the public schools are White. Other than will and choice, there are no structural reasons that would preclude these families from being

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more heavily represented at the school. Still, North City Tech is a very diverse school, composed of a student population where scores of different home languages are spoken, including Arabic, English, Spanish, French, Italian, and Russian, to name a few.

In terms of access and attendance, most of the other schools in the study would be characterized as either semiopen or semiclosed—the flip side of the same coin. The four white-dominant, multiracial schools in the study would fall into this category since access is primarily determined by either who and which groups live in the surrounding areas (South County High and North Village Prep in the United States), or which students' families can afford to pay the relatively expensive school fees in South Africa (Palmer and Williston High Schools). In the case of the U.S. schools, the doors are open to relatively small percentages of Black and Latino students via the forty-year-old VDP program at North Village Prep, while only one in five students are Black at South County Prep, whereas the Black population in the metropolitan area is over 40 percent. These schools are located within middle- and upper middle-class neighborhoods with low representations of racial minority families.

The mere existence of school desegregation as an educational practice is threatened at the moment in both the United States and South Africa. According to a report produced by Gary Orfield, codirector of the Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles at the University of California, Los Angeles, African American and Latino students were more segregated in public schools by 2006 than they had been over the previous forty years. Moreover, nearly three out of five Black and Latino students attend schools where the average student is poor (using the proxy of eligibility for either free or reduced lunch), which, according to Orfield, creates a "double jeopardy" of the effects of race and class.[13] In comparison, a large percentage of South African youth attend intensely segregated schools, like Montjane, which are located in extremely racially homogeneous communities and poor townships and rural villages around the nation.[14]

In both countries, White families have fled from urban to either suburban and private communities or schools couched in terms of seeking "good schools" and out of a desire to maintain higher status and capital.[15] The problem in U.S. society, particularly, is that the feeble and uneven implementations of diverse schooling over the last fifty-five years appear to correspond more to social closure or exclusive racial and class boundaries than they do to these other values. While attitudes shifted greatly over the course of the twentieth century, so that the favor of racial integration became a normative value in the United States among White Americans, they are still least likely to attend

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racially mixed schools and to reside in integrated neighborhoods.[16] Likewise, the patterns of "white flight" from South African desegregated schools—already primarily a social and educational experience among lower-middle and middle-class South Africans—render racial distrust and racism as the primary culprits for the increasing failure of both of these societies to realize the goal of equality of opportunity through diverse schools. Consequently, a significant number of public school students in both nations attend conspicuously segregated schools, and according to my typology, these educational contexts would be labeled as "closed."

There is the popular saying, "Don't judge a book by its color," which is an appropriate metaphor to distinguish between how a school looks in terms of social composition and what is going on behind its walls to educate youth. Inside a school, the degree of its openness extends beyond which groups constitute its student population. Still, many wonder, reasonably so, why, when students of color and poor students move into well-resourced, white-dominant schools, those students still do not fare as well as their more affluent White (and sometimes affluent Asian) peers. Very likely, one answer pertains to how we believe that these various groups of students are nestled within similar *ecological* structures within education. The ecology of education encompasses multiple dimensions, and various levels of sociological forces exert influence on youths' over educational well-being.

Taking into account the multiple contexts that influence students' ability to learn, adapt, and fully engage in school means to take into account their lives inside and outside of school. Because of macrostructural factors such as racial segregation, past legalized and extant forms of unconstitutional discrimination, economic transformations such as the decline of U.S. central cities, joblessness, and class-linked out-migration from urban communities, the array of social contexts and resources available to students varies significantly across social groups. Consequently, they have ecologically dissimilar educational experiences. "Ecological dissimilarity," according to sociologists Robert Sampson and William Julius Wilson, indicates the degree to which the structural contexts of a social environment are vastly disparate by race and class.[17]

Sampson and Wilson's "ecological dissimilarity" concept is also useful when thinking about schools at an organizational level, when examining the forces and dynamics *within* the new resource context. For example, in the United States, ability grouping continues today as a dominant form of organizing students as families jockey for advantage in the college-access market.[18] Generally, racial and ethnic minority students are not found within the upper echelon courses at multiracial, white-majority schools. The converse pattern

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is rarely, if ever, found at multiracial, majority-minority schools. If anything, White students who are a minority will be overrepresented in such schools. Tracking, therefore, has begun to be referred to as a form of resegregation in the former schools because it has evolved into a type of semiclosed educational practice, frequently excluding on the basis of perceived ability by race or ethnicity.[19]

At North Village Prep, for example, none of the Black and Latino students in the school were enrolled in the advanced math and science classes (English and history were not tracked). Aware of this academic divides and comparing himself to the more privileged students at his school, Judah continued to expound on the boundaries between VDP and non-VDP students, commenting as follows: "[W]hen I got here, looking at kids my age who are taking trigonometry, and I'm here in geometry…I'm here in Algebra 2; I'm looking at kids who are in calculus; and I'm still here in Algebra 2, being where I'm supposed to be. And I feel like I have to catch up to them because if I don't, then thirty years down the line, who is going to be the clerk and who is going to be the one who is leading the company?"

A similar pattern held at South County Prep. Although our research team observed five African American students (out of 302 overall) in several advanced placement and honors courses there, generally, these were the same students across these classes. Mrs. Denise Spann, one of the three Black teachers at South County Prep, gave me her take on the issue of low black representation in the most advanced and demanding classes. I met Mrs. Spann in her first year at South County Prep, and she taught students communications skills. She had no plans to remain at South County Prep long because she was on the administrative track to become a principal. I attended one of her classes at the last period of the day and remained after school to talk to her. When I mentioned the low statistic of very few high achievers among the African American students, Mrs. Spann remarked, "There are many more smart students, but you should notice the color of the skin of those who get classified as 'smart.' You'll notice that some of the students because of the way they look will never get deemed as smart, even though they are quite competent and intelligent," she continued.

Mrs. Spann suggested that actual skin color plays a role. "Yes, Tonya is light. I haven't met Renee (the other African American girl deemed a high achiever) and perhaps, Benson is included because his father is so famous. Some of the kids don't fit the image that the staff prefers," Mrs. Spann claimed. Although Tonya, Renee, and Benson, the son of a local newscaster, would all be classified as light-skinned, the number of cases is too few to prove Mrs.

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Spann's allegations. She confirmed, nonetheless, that very few Black students were mentioned as the prominent star pupils among an entire racial subgroup of students at South County Prep. In comparison, African American students at South City Honors, down the road from South County Prep, as well as at North City Tech, did not encounter so few black student models of high achievement.

Both South County Prep and North Village Prep maintained semiclosed practices of classroom organization by social groups. The placement of Black and Latino students into lower-track classes created ecologically dissimilar school experiences and led to uninviting perceptions about what classes would prepare them to fully realize their aspirations for college and professional lives beyond. These practices may also conveyed messages that are interpreted and symbolized as the turf of one racial/ethnic group or another's. From both parental and policy standpoints, tracking is a practice loaded with political tension, especially when it leads to internal friction among parents in schools, the flight of White and middle-class students, or if it adversely affects the pace of students with advanced academic abilities. Nevertheless, as tracked classes in desegregated schools are perceived as de facto ethnically and racially segregated spaces, many Black and Latino students, especially, may come to view the advanced placement, honors, and international baccalaureate classes as the ones for Asian and White students or the "smart kids."[20]

Tracking is also a practice found at majority-minority schools like South City Honors and North City Tech. Their school practices were not without their critics, either, especially among students who are not enrolled in those classes and experience a status competition between those students enrolled in the premier and in the regular, comprehensive high school courses. When we interviewed a group of African American girls at South City Honors, for example, we heard views about favoritism—which featured in at least three of our group interviews at this school— toward those in an elite academic program, APEX (Academic Performance of Excellence). Janeen remarked explicitly about her discontent:

> I get offended sometimes by some cliques. We have an APEX clique…APEX versus regular and honors. That's the biggest clique here. I used to be an APEX student and I understand…like we [are] better than them regular students. But, when you come to high school, it's some teachers that actually tell some APEX students, "You are above everybody else." It's still going on because it's some people in APEX that do tell you like, "We're better than y'all. Regular classes

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> suck." People don't understand. [W]e're on the same level, just about. Just about. I'm like, how can you say that? I think that's real mean. I take some regular classes, and I don't like it like that.

What I learned from students is that status differences can produce tensions among students with different academic identities, especially if little is done to defuse the messages about one group being "superior" to the other. An additional layer of competition, stereotyping, and potential denigration exists, nonetheless, when race and ethnicity become highly correlated with which students are considered the academic who's who and which are not. When educational practices produce patterns that either preclude or impede the full incorporation of specific groups into school, then those practices signify some form of closure, a semiclosed state of school integration.

Comparatively, educational practices in terms of student organization and curriculum vary between the United States and South Africa. While the United States system can be characterized more as "semiopen" or "semiclosed" (depending on from whose perspective) because of the racialized patterns of ability grouping in its mixed-race schools, South Africa's schools are required by law to practice a relatively more open form of student organization. Educational officials have been tinkering with the national curriculum since 1994 to create an open system and have implemented numerous policies to attempt to equalize opportunities for students across the country. In 2008, the first graduating class (those who were in grade eight when I first began this research) sat for the National Senior Certificate (NSC), the last implementation of policy regarding the restructuring of South African curriculum postapartheid, which began in 1998.[21] For the first time, the exam tested learners on an outcomes-based national curriculum rather than the exams developed individually by each province for previous graduating classes.

Educational researchers, other social scientists, and policy makers now await the long-term outcomes of this type of "open" academic environment in South African multiracial schools. What we do know is that national pass rates declined by nearly 3 percent in 2008, but the percentage of students who earned eligibility for university entrance increased by four percentage points. The results from the first NSC exam also indicated that the well-resourced schools like Williston and Palmer adapted to the new curriculum significantly better than the poorer schools, such as Groveland and Montjane.[22]

Although observations and research on the effects of tracking is virtually nonexistent in the body of South African educational research, American researchers have thoroughly evaluated how tracking and ability grouping correlate to racial and ethnic boundaries. The consequence, as some argue, is a

07_Carter_Ch06.indd 160 2/20/2012 9:04:28 PM

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closed opportunity structure *within* schools.[23] Such organizational practices may impede the school's ability to more fully incorporate different groups of learners. Further, the formation of an unambiguous hierarchy of the social and cultural meanings attached to these practices may neutralize the effects of resourceful schools as a conduit for equal educational opportunities.

## From Within: Is the School's Sociocultural Context Closed or Open?

Jennifer Benson described Palmer's early years, saying that even her own kids had issues with "opening" (desegregation). One of her sons was happy with the idea because then his cricket team could have the Black kids from Loni, the nearest township to Palmer, who had beaten them prior, on the team. Meanwhile, her then six-year-old daughter feared that she would be the only White kid in her class and "not have anyone to eat her sandwich with." Ms. Benson had taken a group of Palmer students to a party in Loni the year prior to bridge the social chasm between students from Palmer's neighborhood and the township. "Though it's in Palmer's backyard, not many [students] know of reality beyond the boundaries of their own homes or streets," Ms. Benson commented and continued as follows:

> One of the Diversity Tripper alums [a Black student] was having a party, and I took a group of [White] kids after assuring their parents that they would be safe. One parent refused to allow his son to go, and on the day when they were supposed to leave, he came up to the school and taunted the kids for going, telling them horror stories about what would happen to them. It turned out to be, in contrast, one of the most moving experiences for my students, who had never seen living conditions as such or realized that these families loved and lived, too. Some cried, having never known what lay beyond them across the tracks.

Undoubtedly, students at Palmer High School attended many celebrations and parties with select friends, building and reinforcing strong connections among themselves in the process. But less often, they would move across social, cultural, and geographic boundaries to engage. As an educator who intentionally aimed to create a deeply inclusive atmosphere for all of Palmer's students, Ms. Benson was willing to go so far as to push her privileged White students beyond their comfort zones to learn something about the realities of their classmates from the townships. Through her influence and the support of the principal and other educators, she was an active agent

07_Carter_Ch06.indd 161 2/20/2012 9:04:28 PM

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for radical inclusion at Palmer, although I cannot say unequivocally whether Palmer was there 100 percent, especially since many teachers and school staff differ in their beliefs and attitudes and further in how they practice inclusion. Palmer's organizational-racial habitus was evolving, nonetheless, and any new visitor would be immediately struck by some of its programmatic emphasis on inclusion.

When sociocultural practices in schools take either semiopen or closed approaches, generally they attend to social and cultural differences at a superficial level. In such instances, educators might have students share some aspect of their cultural heritage—such as sponsoring a cultural fair or having a day when students either wear ethnic garb or bring tasty ethnic foods to school as "show-and-tell"; this is what some would describe as either "symbolic multiculturalism," or even what Peter McLaren refers to as left-liberal multiculturalism, which tends to exoticize "otherness" in a manner that locates difference in numerous forms of cultural authenticity.[24]

Williston High School held an annual "I'm Proud to be a South African Day" in April. I arrived to school one morning observing students who showed up representing multiple ethnoracial groups: Xhosa, Zulu, Pedi, Swazi, Venda, Sotho, Indian, Muslim, Afrikaner, Scottish, Canadian, and Portuguese, to name a few. Principal Billups had asked the teachers to send three of the "best-dressed" kids to the front of the school for pictures, and she asked for variety. I heard several teachers comment beforehand that they felt the Indian girls would be the most beautiful in the saris; still they sent a diverse group of students to the front to represent their class. I watched as the teachers arranged the kids for one mixed-group photo and then broke them down by ethnicity. It was a beautiful array of colors, beadwork, textiles, and weaving, and the kids seemed proud. "We don't get to see them outside of school, so this is nice," commented a teacher, suggesting that this was how she perceived that students may have dressed when not in uniform.

Noticeably, the White learners were all put into one group for a photo, while the African students were allowed to divide into ethnic groups for their picture. Welcome, the son of a major government spokesperson, was dressed as a Zulu warrior in skins, ankle chains, and beads, with a leopard head wrap. Except for the occasional male whom I spotted dressed in khaki short pants, a white shirt, suspenders, and a safari hat—reminiscent of the one that the popular film character Indiana Jones wears atop his head—imitating a conventional costume of an Afrikaner boer (farmer), many White students felt "cultureless." Lindsay, whom I was shadowing that morning, was wearing a Chinese dress, because she believed that she had no "culture." Lindsay's father

07_Carter_Ch06.indd 162 2/20/2012 9:04:28 PM

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is of German heritage, and her mother is Afrikaner, but Lindsay said that her father was an orphan who knows little of his German origins.

Unlike Indian students who wore salwar kameez's, kurtis, and elegant, colorful saris or African students of various ethnic groups whose males regaled themselves in furry Zulu warrior costumes and females in richly textured prints and textiles adorned with intricate beadwork, many mixed-race students and the overwhelming majority of Coloured (especially those who did not identify as Muslim, some whom wore religious attire)could not figure out what garb would accurately capture their ethnoracial identities. Later that afternoon, I sat next to Kai in Mrs. Alicia Silver's eighth-grade biology class. He was dressed in his school uniform. I asked Kai why he chose not to participate, and he said that he wouldn't know what to wear. "I am Indian and White, and I asked them [the teachers] if I could wear a suit, they told me, 'No.'" (When I asked a teacher, Mr. Brad Jefferts, about this later, he denied it and said that he was sure a student would not have been sent home if he wore a suit.)

After school, I met Samaura, who was talking to one of the English and business economics teachers, Mr. Joseph Addy, a Ghanaian. Samaura, the daughter of the head of the school governing body, was in her school uniform, too. She said that Coloureds have no culture and queried what she would wear as a Coloured. Samaura's mother had some Indian in her background, but she knew nothing of her father. Mr. Addy added, "I think that mixed students should have investigated their backgrounds and gone with one of the heritages or have chosen *one* to represent." I asked him how that would have compromised the students' identities to make them choose and if there were another way to express cultural heritage other than through dress. Mr. Addy responded, "This is something to think about." For now, Williston relied on dress of identity as symbols, when a number of students seemed at a loss about what dress would symbolize their ethnicity.

Creating fully open and integrative school contexts is a challenge for many educators. American schools also demonstrate limited knowledge in how to respond to the diversity of their student body. North Village Prep ventured into the practice of multiculturalism, which, at one point, translated into a practice of vulgar cultural tourism. One Saturday morning, in an attempt to grasp an understanding of their students' lives in one day, teachers and administrators hopped aboard a chartered bus and headed into the central areas of North Capital City, where the Black and Latino students in the VDP lived. This "cultural tour" included a vehicular stroll through the neighborhoods, a lunch stop at a soul food restaurant, a quick visit to the local African American

07_Carter_Ch06.indd 163 2/20/2012 9:04:28 PM

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museum with, perhaps, some purchases for souvenirs, and even what a few teachers claimed to have been a sighting of a drug deal on one of the street corners. There was a buzz in the air among the staff about the alleged sighting that following week when our research team arrived, much to the chagrin of a few embarrassed and relatively more enlightened administrators. The latter felt that this claim further reproduced already deeply entrenched stereotypes about the VDP students and their lives.

For this very reason, many thinkers criticize such symbolic multicultural practices. Peter McLaren, for example, argues that an emphasis on difference in this manner as the basis of collective identity makes it appear as if all members who share an identity possess the same experience or traits and consequently ignores the variation within groups.[25] Accordingly, not all of the VDP students lived in the type of neighborhood toured; their communities varied in terms of social composition and socioeconomic makeup. Additionally, not all of the Black or Latino students at North Village were participants in the VDP, and on several occasions, such students mentioned how they were frequently mistaken for VDP participants. It was assumed that students of color did not reside in North Village.

## *Opening Up Resources*

No educational policy or practice is devoid of a particular value or values. Schools have functioned as one of the main sites of socialization for individuals and development in modern society. Schools assist in developing the "glue" that holds a society together, promoting a common agenda of citizenship and patriotism.[26] The great "dilemma" in racialized societies, where discrimination and prejudice have run rampart, however, is how to cultivate a democracy that not only enables the will of the majority but also ensures that those in the minority do not become so deeply dispossessed such that their lifetime realities belie just what a democracy stands for.

At various points in history, especially prior to 1954 and 1994, the moral cores of U.S. and South African societies, respectively, have been in jeopardy, threatened by political values of exclusion to their educational and economic opportunities. The practice of intentional racial and socioeconomic segregation in schools is inherently a morally corrupt and "closed" system, since it violates a democratic society's fundamental values of equality and justice for all. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court began to realize this when it ruled that racial segregation in schooling was unconstitutional because it inherently violated the rights of its non-White citizens. Forty years later, a new democratic

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South African government emerged from its previous incarnation as a morally bankrupt state when it laid the foundation for the realization of equal opportunity. While the courts have considered various material and psychological rationales for *why* school integration is necessary for historically disadvantaged groups, researchers, lawyers, and policy makers have done little to frame the issue more holistically in terms of its benefits all-around for a national society, for its potential for augmenting the "collective spirit" and social cohesion, and for keeping a nation on the track of sustained productivity and innovation from representative segments of its entire population.[27]

"Openness" in schools is a complex, multilayered and multidimensional process. Given the ecological dissimilarities between very poor black schools and middle-class, white-dominant, multiracial schools, the requisite moral conditions needed to attain a greater level of equality of opportunity is one that engenders a deeper concern for the stability and overall well-being of all of their students. And even if schools with predominantly low-income students of color were to spend similar dollars per capita, the power of "intangible" factors—as sociologist Amy Stuart Wells refers to them—such as status, rank, and vast networking resources that follow affluent and/or white communities cannot be underestimated.[28] So, despite what anyone says, "separate can never be fully equal."

If we use the percentage of poor students in a school as a proxy of the type of parental, material support that can be provided for a school, then African American and Latino students in the United States are at a much bigger disadvantage than their White and Asian peers. Based on national data from 2006–2007, the average Black and Latino student attended a school where nearly 60 percent of the students were poor, while White and Asian students attended a school where 31 percent and 36 percent, respectively, were poor.[29] Schools with the greatest concentrations of poor students have the lowest test scores, send the fewest students to college, and are instead affronted by high dropout rates.

Although South Africa's economic, educational, and political structures are different from the United States, limited material resource contexts in schools work similarly. I came to know Montjane Secondary School's highest achieving student in the matric class the year I was there. I'll call him "Sipho," a young man who assisted me with administering my surveys at his school on several afternoons. I compensated Sipho like I would any undergraduate research assistant back at my university, and I recall the day he ran up to me, breathless, smiling, eager to show off his new multifunction calculator. Sipho had wanted the calculator for his math class and had bought it with his

07_Carter_Ch06.indd 165 2/20/2012 9:04:28 PM

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research assistance funds. Until that point, he did not have the money to purchase one, which I know was not an issue for the average student at Williston. Sipho was very bright, so smart that a teacher informed me matter-of-factly that he knew about as much or more than some of his teachers. He had defied the odds and scored well enough on his matric exams to gain admittance to one of South Africa's premier universities, the University of Pretoria (UP). I recall his pride, and even my own, when I learned that he would go to study engineering. We kept in touch via e-mail over the months, and I was kept apprised of his academic and personal comings and goings. Much to my sorrow, however, Sipho, ever desirous to become a chemical engineer, struggled at UP and eventually was dismissed from the chemical engineering program. He was not sufficiently prepared. He could not keep up with his peers who had been exposed to more rigorous teaching and preparation at the former-white schools like Palmer or Williston. Although Sipho has landed on his feet somewhat, having acquired a job, which will help him to continue supporting his family—which he did even on his meager student stipend at UP—he had not regained admittance to the engineering program that he strongly desired the last time I was in touch with him.

For South Africa, the implication is that the socioeconomic integration of schools is a must-do, if the nation is to save a critical mass of its youths from succumbing to a cycle of poverty and limited economic productivity. Realistically, a proliferation of integrated schools with critical masses of White students is not the answer in a black-dominant nation where Whites comprise only 10 percent of the population. Cases like Sipho's, nonetheless, expose the urgency with which South Africa must address the unequal contexts of schooling in that society. The overwhelming majority of non-White students remains segregated in poor township schools, where basic academic equipment such as chalk for teachers to write on boards, paper for printing, wired computers for advancement into this sophisticated technological age, and even a supply of well-trained teachers who can adequately prepare students for university life, are limited.

Furthermore, because of the curricular changes, most likely a township school has already "skimmed the cream" of its brightest students by grade 10, since a very high percentage of students drop out by the end of grade nine, the last year before students' transition into a more difficult secondary curriculum nationally and right around the time where the compulsory age of school attendance is reached. At Groveland and Montjane, only about one-quarter of the students who entered the school in eighth grade made it to twelfth grade as matrics. This turned out to average about one hundred

07_Carter_Ch06.indd 166 2/20/2012 9:04:28 PM

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students in the senior class per school. Even fewer, perhaps less than one-tenth of these students, will actually attend a university. Fewer of those will actually graduate because they were not fully prepared, like Sipho. Why? Three chief explanations arise: poverty, the lack of affordability of higher education and the students' inability to attain the university exemptions, or the requisite scores on the national exam to attain admission to a university due to multiple factors, from limited English abilities, insufficient teacher preparation, and limited human capital among parents, which impeded their ability to assist their children with schoolwork. In short, Groveland and Montjane are schools threatened by the specter of extreme poverty and limited economic resources. Decades of accumulated economic and academic disadvantages for the majority of African and Coloured students in the country limit the pipeline to higher social mobility via the engine of higher education.

## *Broadening the Moral Core*

While we can believe that most people residing in a democratic society believe in a just, open society, if those beliefs are not either deeply wedded to a commitment in *practice* to both protect and insure educational equality, then all we have in our society is another "attitude-behavioral" paradox or values stretch.[30] My survey data of 1,558 students enrolled at the eight schools in the United States and South Africa reveal that the majority subscribe wholly to values of equality of opportunity and the eradication of poverty (see Table 6.2). Mean percentages of those who agreed that a "good education is the key to ending poverty" ranged from 53 percent to 85 percent of the students. However, there is a significant difference among the schools by nation, school type, and race, while some difference in responses appears to exist *within* schools across race and gender. First, South African students were more likely to believe that a good education would lead to the reduction of poverty than U.S. students. Perhaps, because of the recent advent of democracy and opening of educational opportunity, more students steeped in poverty view schooling as the pathway out. American students, though, appear to be more cynical, and it is likely that an awareness of an enduring inequality gap in the United States reinforces that cynicism.

Second, in terms of racial differences, White students in general were more pessimistic and less likely to agree (61 percent) than Black (70 percent), mixed race, including Latinos, (78 percent), and Asian (65 percent) students. American White students were significantly less optimistic about

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education's potential as a solution to poverty than South African White students, also.

Regarding differences by school types, students in the majority-black and coloured schools in South Africa were more likely to believe in education as a solution to poverty than those attending the mixed-race, white-dominant schools. In the United States, students at majority-minority North City Tech were more likely to believe this than students at the other three schools. Table 6.2 shows that students at North City Tech were significantly more likely than their peers at the other U.S. schools to believe that a good education and the eradication of poverty are positively associated, and it is possible that at a school with a critical mass of first- and second-generation immigrant and low-income students—like township schools with disproportionately very poor students—a quality education is a main source of hope of breaking away from the cycle of poverty and moving to the next rung of the mobility ladder.

Sociologists and social psychologists have found over time that part of our human nature is to aspire to the highest abstract value, but when it comes right down to the consideration of how to practice those values vis-à-vis our respective material reality, social location, and self-interests, then we tend to teeter on the fringes of duplicity or insincerity. Yet, "for many people, "including judges," as Kevin Welner writes, the foundation for a just society lies in a set of values that supplant racial (and even class) in equality.[31]

From a values standpoint, the road ahead is a bumpy one in the United States. First, liberal values of individualism, choice, and competition—what I refer to as either "semiopen" or "semiclosed" moral values—undermine the goals of equality of opportunity as affluent parents now jockey for position and advantage for their children in elite public schools and elite tracked courses within those schools.[32] Of course, these families are not acting out of any pure malevolence or disregard for the "other." Rather they are responding to an opportunity system that favors graduates of elite and competitive colleges, which in turn favors students from highly regarded public (and private) schools where students' chances for admission are strongly linked to their test scores and to how well they participate in the high-status classes offered. Then, of course, students' performances on those tests (the proxies for intelligence and ability) and enrollment in honors, advanced placement, and international baccalaureate classes are not completely independent of who attends those schools.[33] Thus, while it may be enticing for a critic (like me) to attribute the looming demise of diverse schooling to individualistic goals that collude in undermining equality of opportunity in schools, the explanation is not that

07_Carter_Ch06.indd 168 2/20/2012 9:04:28 PM

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simple. Parents and students want good schools to improve their chances for good jobs and advancement up the mobility ladders. Paradoxically, the social institutions involved in the steps to making it conspire in the reproduction of both racial and class privilege.

Furthermore, either the U.S. Supreme Court or a lower court case by case, has dismantled one of the main redistributive and justice-oriented educational policies of the twentieth century, most recently in Seattle and Louisville in the "PICS" cases.[34] In the 2007 decision, the justices decided this case highlighting an "American dilemma"—a term coined by the social scientist Gunnar Myrdal and revived later by political scientist Jennifer Hochschild, which signals the contradictions between American democratic ideals, including equality and justice for all, and the reality of the determination of a white and middle-class majority that acts in its own best interests.[35] U.S. national data, for instance, reveal a regression in the efforts made by the nation in the 1970s and 1980s in response to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.[36] For this reason, many scholars and researchers—alongside activist educators, parents, and community members—continue to struggle to ensure that the battles fought by Charles Hamilton Houston, Thurgood Marshall, Charles Thompson (quoted in the epigraph), and other historic figures to equalize educational opportunity across races have not been in vain. We now seek anxiously to figure out how to minimize the powerful impacts of both accumulated disadvantages accrued from attending lower quality schools and the feeblest implementations of desegregated schools, which will keep many historically unequal and poor groups of students wedged at the bottom of the opportunity ladders.

## *What Comes with Cultural Flexibility: The Ethos of Caring for Another*

Without proactive and explicit attention to the sociocultural and sociopolitical domains of schooling, then the attendant results of gross achievement and attainment disparities by race and class can easily be used as evidence that school integration does not work or that people no longer care about it, as my esteemed colleague declared. Few schools have truly attained racial integration, and second, few educators and privileged parent communities either accept or comprehend that either *radical inclusion* or *egalitarianism*, a goal of the South African state, is a requisite condition for it to work.

Open school *types engage* in *practices* that support and sustain *moral conditions* of equity, caring, and sharing. Their organizational-racial and -class

07_Carter_Ch06.indd 170 2/20/2012 9:04:28 PM