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9-15-2021

# Zero Tolerance Policies are Anti-Black: Protecting Racially Profiled Students from Educational Injustice

Jonathan Lightfoot
*Hofstra University*, edajdl@hofstra.edu

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## Abstract

When students are tracked from their schools into the juvenile and adult criminal justice system, primarily because of zero-tolerance policies, they fall victim to a practice that is now widely known as the school-to-prison pipeline. President Obama urged educators to abandon severe disciplinary policies that criminalize students for offenses that could be handled without law enforcement (Du, 2015). A review of the literature indicates a disproportionate number of Black students are at a greater risk of being adversely impacted by such policies thus increasing their chances of having a negative educational experience. Research shows that Black students receive higher rates of suspension, harsher discipline, and more special education referrals than do their similarly situated white counterparts. Policies that adopt positions of zero tolerance to justify colorblindness work against the academic achievement and persistence of Black students. Anti-Blackness Theory and Critical Race Theory are used to establish a connection between the Black K-12 student experience and the application of zero-tolerance disciplinary policies. To supplement this examination of how school disciplinary polices operate in school settings, I draw from a recent qualitative study of public-school leaders and teachers in the New York City metropolitan area.

## Keywords

Anti-racism, Black mattering (or lack thereof) in K-12 schooling; violence; policing of Black children; spirit murdering; Afro-Pessimism; Anti-Blackness; and Critical Race Theory

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## Cover Page Footnote

### Introduction/Background

The George Floyd murder at the knee of a racist white Minneapolis police officer catalyzed Black Lives Matter protesters throughout the nation to re-introduce their call to defund the police. The call emerged as a rallying cry to remind us of the blatant racialized double standard that defines policing in America whereby marginalized low-resource communities stand in stark contrast to privileged and high-resource communities. Anti-Blackness permeates school policy, especially with regard to discipline. Our K-12 schools are where children learn that their value to society is often determined by "race," class, and other socially and politically constructed identity markers. Lines are drawn between urban and suburban school experiences, the former characterized by high security with metal detectors and school resource officers/police (SROs) and the latter characterized by minimal security with officer friendly types. The law-and-order philosophy produces school budgets that direct money towards corrupt juvenile and criminal justice systems at the expense of much needed counselors, nurses, social workers, and curriculum specialists.

With the Reagan administration's 1980s war on drugs (Alexander, 2010) came a campaign to get tough on crime. Initially developed as way to deter crime among adult offenders in larger society, zero-tolerance policies eventually made their way to our K-12 school system. Draconian measures for breaking the rules resulted in increased suspensions and expulsions with less regard for context.

The school-to-prison pipeline refers to the tracking of students from their schools into the juvenile and adult criminal justice system, primarily due to zero-tolerance policies (Heitzeg, 2016). Research shows that Black males receive higher rates of suspension, harsher discipline, and more special education referrals than do their similarly situated white counterparts (Howard, 2014). Policies that adopt positions of zero tolerance to justify colorblindness work against the academic achievement and persistence of Black students, Black males in particular (Lynch, 2017).

The proposed legislation introduced by representative Ayanna Pressley from Massachusetts would prohibit the use of federal funds to maintain police in schools and instead divert that funding to help schools hire counselors, social workers, and other trauma-informed support personnel needed to promote safe and inclusive teaching and learning environments. Waldon (2021) acknowledges the multiple murders of Black people at the hands of the police

and describes it as racial terrorism and anti-Black police violence that extends beyond the pain of individual victims and contributes to the trauma felt by the larger Black community. Such collective trauma must ultimately be understood as an urgent public health crisis (Gonzalez, 2021).

Paradoxically, although the Constitution of the United States delegates education as a state function, the federal government has been playing an increasing role in the arming and weaponizing of school police. The Department of Defense's 1033 program allows school police to acquire excess military-grade weapons, such as armored vehicles, grenade launchers and M-16 rifles (Advancement Project, 2018). What is not so clear is the funding process for police officers in schools, which often lacks the transparency needed for communities to hold them accountable (Advancement Project, 2018). Advocacy groups cite hidden data as one of the major hurdles they encounter in their search for school policing data, which makes it difficult to determine the extent of harm generated when police are allowed to influence school climate and culture. There appears to be little difference in the challenges civilians face in holding police accountable for their actions on the streets as it is in schools. School police officers enjoy the same qualified immunity as regular beat officers despite credible evidence of intimidation, abuse, harassment, and trauma inflicted upon school-age children (Driver, 2021). A review of the literature indicates a disproportionate number of Black students are at a greater risk of being inequitably impacted by such policies and thus increasing their chances of having a negative educational experience. Furthermore, the empirical and anecdotal evidence is overwhelming in support of the notion that police are not in schools to keep children in urban school settings safe but often traumatize them and prepare them for the carceral system that will surveil, restrict, and control their bodies for life.

**Literature Review**

### Zero-Tolerance Policies in Schools
School districts adopt zero tolerance practices and policies that frame student discipline in ways that require predetermined consequences with few questions asked. The student behavioral response is typically severe, draconian, punitive, and exclusionary and often requires expulsion or out-of-school suspension. Unfortunately, minimal regard is given to context or rationale that could explain behavior (Zero Tolerance, 2020). As early as the 1940s, school districts around the country began to form alliances with local police units to

suppress the burgeoning movement against Jim Crow segregation and the racial violence that ensued. In 1953, just a year prior to the monumental 1954 Brown v. Board decision, which overturned Plessy v. Ferguson's (1898) "separate but equal" doctrine and called for public school desegregation, Flint, Michigan created its first SRO positions (Lindberg, 2015). The program was ostensibly designed to improve community relations by connecting the city's youth with local police. Many school districts soon followed Flint's lead by creating similar programs with different names such as "Security Services Division," "School Safety Division," School Security Force," and "Special Watchmen," to name a few (Lindberg, 2015). By 1972, many urban school districts across 40 states had developed an infrastructure that embedded school policing in some form. In 1975 only 1% of schools reported a police presence on site and that percentage steadily grew until 2018 when nearly 70% of schools reported some form of police presence (Advancement Project, 2018; Connery, 2020).

Heise and Nance (2021) note the importance of how schools report student discipline issues and the degree to which law enforcement is involved due to the increasing concerns that police fuel the school-to-prison pipeline. They identify two general claims that frame the debate between how public schools approach student discipline and related calls to defund SRO/police programs. The first one is centered around legality (criminal law) and policy (zero-tolerance, three strikes) and the likelihood of schools surrendering their children to the criminal justice system. The second distributional claim exposes the disparate impact this adherence to "law and order" has upon Black and Brown students. The unequal consequences, which include the stigma of suspension for violent and non-violent offenses, disrupt their academic progress in the short term, limit postsecondary opportunities, and set them up for further entanglement with law enforcement in the future. Other students of color, boys, low-income groups, and marginalized students suffer similar negative consequences (Heise & Nance, 2021).

The expenses associated with school safety personnel have increasingly become fixed budgetary items with little regard for transparency or necessity, further exacerbating the problem of policing in schools. Participatory budgeting is a process of democratic decision-making and deliberation in which community members help decide how to allocate part of a public or municipal budget. In New York City, for example, progressive teacher groups are demanding an end to the $500 million contract the school district has with the NYPD to handle school safety (Advancement Project, 2018). Jacobs, et al (2021) addresses social work's place in the movement to "defund the police." They argue that "carceral social work" is a product of collaborations with police when "coercive and punitive

practices are used to manage Black, Indigenous, other people of color, and poor communities across four social work areas: gender-based violence, child welfare, schools, and health and mental health" (p. 1). In contrast, anti-carceral social work is presented as an alternative whereby traditional police collaborations are dismantled in favor of directing activity towards more life-affirming, community-centered, and mutual aid structures.

Many advocates who work to end school policing argue that schools are the best place to cut SROs out of the budget. A major victory came when the second largest school district in the country, Los Angeles Unified, voted 4 to 3 to cut the L.A. School Police Department budget by $25 million, or 35% (Advancement Project, 2018). The school board plans to redirect funds to serve Black students by hiring social workers, counselors, and safety aides as they form a task force to assess and reimagine alternative approaches to school safety. Similarly, the Phoenix Union High School District recently voted to end their contract with the Phoenix Police Department for School Resource Officers allowing redistribution of the 1.2 million in savings through participatory processes (Doyle & Sakala, 2021).

**Critical Race Theory**

It is imperative that those in academia recognize how police presence, funding, and zero tolerance policies in education intersect. These inherently racist structures in education are evident and can be explained when examined under the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT). As a theoretical framework that was developed out of a movement among progressive legal scholars during the mid to late 1980s, CRT builds on the shortcomings of critical legal studies and critical theory in that it centers "race" as a primary feature of academic inquiry (Crenshaw, et al 1995; Delgado, et al 2017). It further seeks to reflectively assess and critique United States society and American culture to illuminate and challenge its power structures. Several tenets combine to form the CRT framework and inform the experience of Black folks in dominant spaces. Critical educators draw relevance from the notion that race and racism are pervasive features in American society and promote the value that storytelling and counter-storytelling offers the racially marginalized and oppressed to tell their story and reclaim the narrative from the dominant perspective.

Legal historians often note the 1954 Brown v. Board decision as one of the first few times when qualitative social scientific research was allowed in a court proceeding to tell the story of how school segregation conferred a badge of inferiority on Black children causing them to experience low self-esteem and impaired cognitive functioning (Bergner, 2009). Further, the import of CRT in

education was acknowledged in a seminal article by eminent scholars, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate IV, titled *Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education* (1995) where they argued for its use as an analytical tool for understanding inequity in education. Ladson-Billings (1998) continued this line of inquiry when she argued for a critique of some of the pivotal legal victories that emerged from the civil rights and educational reform movements, including curriculum inclusion and multiculturalism, in an article satirically titled *Just What is Critical Race Theory and What's it Doing in a Nice Field Like Education?*

As educators, it is important that we work to disrupt this system of social marginalization and cultural oppression. CRT is designed to address the social justice needs of racially marginalized and oppressed people regardless of their individual history with various European colonial powers and white supremacy. When carefully considered, CRT can help to establish the connection between the racist laws and systems embedded in society and how we treat Black and Brown children in schools. Zero-tolerance policies in schools have a similar impact as does segregation and Jim Crow Laws. Disciplinary actions ascribed to zero-tolerance policies practiced by teachers and administrators only further perpetuate anti-Black sentiments deeply rooted in the structure of schooling and education. Black children suffer disproportionately from these policies, and their negative experiences have resulted in the manifestation of anti-Blackness in K-12 schools.

## Anti-Blackness

Anti-Blackness theorizes the historical, contemporary, and future reality of Black life in America and abroad to help explain the structural exclusion, hatred, and violence we suffer as a result of white supremacy. The educational and schooling experience formalizes this message through an open and hidden curriculum. Love (2019) offers that "school practices and police officers are slowly killing Black children by murdering their spirits through intentional actions, physical assaults, and verbal stabbings" (as cited in Webster & Knaus, p.69). Understanding anti-Blackness is key in the struggle to restore Black humanity in institutional structures that often fail to recognize Black humanity, specifically in education. Anti-Blackness illuminates the insidious ways in which European whiteness specifically targets Black folks for torture and destruction, primarily due to the legacy of chattel slavery and the fact that its perpetrators have not found a way to substantiate its humanity and existence without continuing to deny the humanity and existence of the descendants of African blackness. Lewis Miles (2019) quotes author Saidiya Hartman (2016) who observed how "slavery

established a 'racial calculus' that devalues Black lives and remains in the 'afterlife of slavery' which includes skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment" (p. 1).

Theories of Anti-Blackness are challenged by Afro-Pessimists who interpret blackness in ontological terms, whereby Black people are deemed to lack agency because they lack humanity. Olaloku-Teriba (2016) states:

> Curiously, while the framework has become pervasive in structuring thought on the question of race, no concerted effort has been made to establish what 'anti-blackness' means. Embedded in the vagueness of this ethical critique of racism is a set of myths and mystifications around the nature of race. Crucial to this is the absence of a coherent and historically informed definition of 'black'. In many ways, the recent theoretical interventions of the 'movement of thought' termed Afro-pessimism have both shaped, and been shaped by these developments (Olaloku-Teriba, 2016, p. 8)

As progeny of the once enslaved, Blacks are never allowed to escape their ancestral past. Violent annihilation can thus be justified under chattel slavery systems because the constructs of property ownership is expanded to include human beings. Prior to progressive legislation that includes custodial care for the environment, protection of animal cruelty rights and abolition of human bondage, capitalist owners of property enjoyed broad legal rights to dispose of their property as they pleased. In fact, former owners of human chattel were paid reparations for their losses post emancipation, a benefit that was denied to the formerly enslaved and continues to elude their descendants to this day. It is this disregard, lack of humanity, and devaluing of black lives that appear in K-12 policing policies of Black and Brown students that can be traced back to slavery.

In the preface of *Who Needs the Negro* (Willhelm, 1970), Staughton Lynd reviews the author's thinking about the structural nature of white American racism by first acknowledging its economic roots and then noting its evolution to becoming a "dominant and autonomous value." (Hilliard in Watkins et al, 2001, p. 14) America cannot solve its problem with racism by instituting ineffective economic reform measures, as anti-Black racism is baked in the cake and woven in the fabric. The blood is on the leaves and the blood is in the root (*Strange Fruit*, 1939 in Degruy, 2017). Although anti-black racism has historically operated within the parameters of a capitalist economy in need of Black labor, the end of white America's need for Black labor would not necessarily mean the end to America's need to be racist towards Black folks. This need to be racist is

pervasive in the structure of disciplinary school policies and the effect is detrimental as schools are perhaps our greatest socializing institutional structure through which children learn their value, worth, and place in society. Schools are at the same time both reflective of and contributors to the propagation of anti-Black racism in American society.

It was the 2009 incident where a white Milwaukee, WI teacher became annoyed with a 7-year-old Black child who was playing with her beaded and braided hair (Kane, 2009). When the child continued to play with hair after being told to stop, the teacher brought her to the front of the class, took out a pair of scissors and proceeded to cut one of the child's braids off and threatened to cut off more if she continued to play with her hair during class. News of the child's humiliation and abuse went beyond the local Milwaukee news to appear on several national news sites. In the years since the news is regularly filled with reports of incidents where a Black school age child has been harassed, bullied, or traumatized by a school administrator, teacher, or police officer. In Maryland police placed a 5-year-old boy in handcuffs at school. Police scolded the student for wandering away from campus after allegedly breaking a computer. The parent was later admonished to beat the child, furthering the ideology that bad behavior in Blacks must be met with physical restraint and violence as the only corrective measures regardless of age (Allen, 2021).

In the last 18 months during the pandemic and subsequent shut down, policing and anti-Blackness followed children from school buildings to invading their private spaces at home. In California, a teacher was caught making racist remarks over Zoom, "I mean these parents, that's what kind of pieces of (expletive) they are. Black. He's Black. They're a Black family," the former teacher is heard saying. "Your son has learned to lie to everybody and make excuses. Cause you taught him to make excuses that nothing is his fault. This is what Black people do. This is what Black people do." She continues, "These parents are such (expletive) liars, absolute (expletive) liars" (Linly, 2021). Similarly, in Louisiana a nine-year-old student was suspended after a teacher reported seeing a gun in the boy's bedroom during a virtual class. The attorney representing the child's family said it was a BB gun and the school went too far. Teachers ignored the privacy of the child and his family and thought it necessary to apply its on-campus weapons policy to the child while off-campus (Crespo, 2020).

These instances represent only a small fraction of the many challenges Black school age children must grapple with daily, whether during face-to-face learning in the school building or by virtual remote learning at off-campus sites.

The contextual circumstances that precipitated such disciplinary responses from these authority figures may get lost in the media frenzy that follow. The common denominator, however, appears to be the frustrated attempts of white adults trying to get Black children to conform to white, Eurocentric norms and expectations of behavior and decorum. Another news phenomenon has emerged regarding white people's obsession with natural Black hair and their need to penalize Black folks for it. There are also punitive responses when Black students choose not to conform to white supremacist dress codes and policies that dictate what is or what is not appropriate to wear in schools. For example, Texas teen, DeAndre Arnold, was banned from attending high school graduation after refusing to cut dreadlocks. He has faced in-school suspension, a policy that bars him from the classroom, again illustrating how racist policies can have direct consequences on academic progress and can limit postsecondary opportunities (Cox, 2020).

The recurrent themes present in these recent incidents include 1) white folks' issue with natural Black hair and other cultural expressions of blackness; 2) lack of empathy and the inability of white folks to recognize and acknowledge indicators of Black pain and suffering; 3) implicit and explicit bias, racism, and discrimination; 4) desire to snitch on Black children and expose them to administrative discipline authorities or law enforcement officials; and 5) seemingly baseless infliction of random cruelty and inhumane treatment. The shame and humiliation suffered by Black students when they are told they cannot compete in an athletic event or attend their prom or graduation ceremony is devastating and sure to leave indelible psychological and emotional scars. Such conditions not only adversely affect the recipients of these acts but also injure and impact the lives of their peers who are made to observe these spectacles of abuse. A pall of fear is cast in the school environment that is not conducive to creating a safe space for teaching and learning to occur. The social and emotional growth needed to instill confidence and trust among young people is lost when the continual threat of violence looms over everyone in the school.

## Data Collection

To supplement my conceptual and critical examination of how school disciplinary policies operate in school settings, I considered the findings of a recent study of several current school leaders and classroom teachers (Jones-Oliver, 2021). They shared their understanding of the racial climate in their schools with respect to zero tolerance policies, police presence in schools, and school suspensions, and the impact each has on the academic progress of Black and Brown students. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were used as a

method to encourage dialogue between and among the interviewer and study participants. Information was elicited by asking leading and open-ended questions via several zoom conference sessions. Although there was an established protocol with a list of thoughtful questions, the interview sessions unfolded in a conversational manner and gave the participants a chance to explore issues they felt were important and went beyond the established protocol (Dunn, 2005).

The participant group number was 14, which included six classroom teachers, three assistant principals, three principals, one assistant superintendent, and one superintendent. Ten of the study participants identified as Black or of color and four identified as white. As to gender, they were evenly divided, seven identified as male and seven identified as female. All the classroom teachers were interviewed as part of two separate focus group sessions with three participants in each one. However, the administrators were all interviewed individually. Qualitative interview data were coded to identify and frame analytic and conceptual themes.

## Results/Discussion

Most of the teachers who were interviewed in the focus groups viewed their classrooms as the first line of defense needed to protect their students from exposure to harsh administrative discipline and potential interaction with law enforcement. They believed their job was to establish classroom rules and regulations that were easy to understand and follow by the students. Only students who repeatedly broke the rules and disrupted the teaching and learning process or committed egregious violations of the rules would be referred to an authority outside of the classroom. Several teachers noted that their experience on the job was a factor in better classroom management. They realized that good teacher relationships with students and parents were also beneficial to helping them to manage their classrooms and teach well.

All expressed disdain for zero-tolerance policy approaches to discipline and indicated that their jobs could be made easier if the school districts budgeted for more counselors and social workers and more professional development that addressed alternative strategies such as those offered by restorative justice programs to reduce behavioral issues and suspensions in the schools. One participant stated, "I think zero tolerance is terrible for minorities. It's bad for students with disabilities based on racism. It's just no good…I think structures need to be in place to deal with discipline on a case-by-case basis. Every situation is not a zero-tolerance situation."

Collectively, the district and building level administrators expressed a similar attitude about zero-tolerance policies. One stating, "A lot of school

districts think zero tolerance policies are the best measure for ensuring a safe, sound and secure instructional environment." They were not great fans of the policies, but also were not willing to abolish them entirely; instead, they seemed more willing to keep them as part of their arsenal against criminal elements inside and outside of the school. For example, one participant spoke of the very real threat of gang violence, "We had a gang issue whereby different gangs [Bloods, Crips, MS-13] who were rivals in and around the school…it creates a lot of hostility."

All seem to agree that it is the school leader's job to keep everyone safe and not allow negative influences from outside of the campus to interfere with their mission. However, they could not afford to be naïve about what was going on in the communities where their schools were located. Gang and drug activity, sex trafficking, homelessness, violent crime, hunger, poverty, and any other social ills must be acknowledged along with a plan to minimize the impact these problems can potentially have on their students. Another participant who was a school principal discussed how they try to implement alternative measures, "We would do mediations with parents and tried to resolve conflict internally without involving the police. Although we have SROs in the building, I would not include them in mediations."

All study participants were asked about the presence of SROs, their use of metal detectors and whether they conducted regular random weapons and drug searches. Some indicated that SROs were not involved in administrative decisions about student disciplinary matters and were primarily employed to surveil the outside campus perimeter. One administrator noted that they felt safer knowing that an SRO was available and on call if needed saying, "We have County police officers at our disposal who monitor the area surrounding the campus during school hours. They can be in the building within minutes if we call them." Another administrator thought the visibility of police officers on campus served as a deterrent and an intimidating presence that worked to keep students in line, stating "Only students who have been suspended for weapons or drug possession get searched when entering the school."

Upon examination, it is apparent that some school administrators bought into the notion that the presence of SROs equates to a safe school and do not consider the larger ramifications of their presence on student's discomfort at the sight of armed officers. Ultimately, administrators knew that their job success depended on keeping students in school and providing a safe campus environment for everyone. They carefully monitored the volume of student suspensions and expulsions to prevent disruptions to student learning and the negative impact this

can have on their test scores, which help determine a school's rating and reputation. School leaders are responsible for balancing academic progress with school safety.

Overall, the results of the school administrator and classroom teacher interviews and focus groups indicated a clear racial divide among study participants whereby the Black and Brown participants were eager to address the notion that zero tolerance policies disadvantaged Black students. One Black teacher was emphatic: "Zero tolerance policies are inherently racist and discriminatory. They single out students of color without knowing their situation. Very punitive." Whereas a white teacher participant seemed more tentative in their assessment of the way zero tolerance policies influence school climate. Without answering the question, they replied, "Every white person, male or female, does not think the same. They want to see change, but it's just…what do you do? I mean, I don't know. I don't know."

The white participants appeared to adopt a colorblind defense of the policies and were even reluctant to acknowledge "race" as a factor in disciplinary dispensation. There was an exchange between two white participants who became visibly uncomfortable when issues of race were raised. This interview occurred soon after the murder of George Floyd and one participant attributed the heightened racial tensions to the contemporary times we live in as if in the past, things were not as bad as they are now. The other one seemed to agree and believed a satisfactory solution was to have a national conversation about race. She could not even say the very word that she claimed needed a national dialogue: race. Lisa Delpit (2012) writes about how to fix the black/white achievement gap in America's public schools, which primarily involves determining how our majority white teaching force needs to become more culturally competent and raise its expectations for "other" people's children. Delpit is discouraged when she hears teachers say they do not see color in their classroom, when in fact they do see color. The message of explicitly stating that a clearly visible aspect of a person—their color—should be ignored is operationally anti-Black and destructive to the person's self-esteem. It reminds me of an old saying I heard while growing up: Black students were told to act their age and not their color, which perpetuated the stereotypical thinking that Black behavior is bad, white behavior is good, and the consequences of not heeding that message could result in some type of disciplinary action.

The results appear to give a nod to the times of de jure school segregation when Black students had no choice but to attend schools led by Black superintendents and principals and were taught by Black teachers and nurtured by

Black professional staff, all of whom lived in the same communities. The price we have paid post-segregation has been immense, including an unfortunate loss of many Black educators, who were not absorbed into the desegregated system. Since then, there has also been a noted increase in racial violence and punishment directed towards Black students. The Jim Crow era was, indeed, an abhorrent time in history, I remain concerned about educators, Black or any other color, who because of racist policies are unable to protect vulnerable Black students from falling victim to the carceral state.

**Conclusion**

The argument presented here is for school leaders and teachers of Black students to raise their level of awareness about the confederate plan to mis-educate, dehumanize, and ultimately destroy Black life as we know it. Carter G. Woodson (1933, 1998) wondered why supposedly freedom-loving Black people would send their most precious assets—their children—to white oppressors to be mis-educated by them. He observed that the mis-educated youth often returned to their Black communities emotionally unstable, self-hating and hopelessly dependent upon their oppressors for their survival. In her passionate rebuke to the Kansas City Board of Police Commissioners for using photo opportunities with Black children for PR purposes, activist Keiajah Brooks poignantly said, "Y'all can't and won't be both my savior and my oppressor."

As a professor who teaches in a teacher and school leadership preparation program, I find this conceptual and critical examination instructive, which leads me to offer suggestions that I hope aspiring and in-service teachers and school leaders would follow. First, teachers and school administrators from all backgrounds should commit to lifelong learning and professional development. Second, each should also strive to make critical connections between school and society, which requires staying abreast of current events and being mindful of the sources they use for information. Finally, I would hope that they draw from a deep well of love, honor, care, and respect for their students, parents, and colleagues as they perform their professional duties and responsibilities. This analysis contributes to the understanding of the issues of policing, discipline, race, gender, and class from various professional and personal perspectives. All these issues connect with the politics of education at certain levels, which helps us to recognize how the power dynamics of racism, sexism, and classism manifest in school settings.

This critical and conceptual examination of the impact of anti-Black school policies and practices is rooted in the Social and Cultural Foundations of

Education (SCFE), which seeks to help educators make critical connections between school and society. Teacher and leadership preparation programs fail their students when they disregard the importance of including the intersectional study of history, philosophy, sociology, and politics in their core curriculum. A curriculum that includes social foundations is the ideal place to teach school leaders about anti-Blackness and how to disrupt its influence. While content methods courses are essential, they must not supersede social foundations courses. It is unreasonable to expect an educator to protect a student from bias when they have never interrogated their own biases. It is equally unreasonable to expect educators to protect young Black students from entering the juvenile justice system when, in fact, they may believe them to be criminal menaces to society. Peter McLaren (2016) noted Moyers and Alexander's (2013) observation that "there are more African Americans under correctional control today – in prison or jail, on probation or parole – than were enslaved in 1850, a decade before the Civil War began" (p. 207). Alexander (2010) calls for a movement in our schools to rigorously challenge the carceral state's contract on our Black children.

The findings revealed teachers who were protective of the students in their classrooms and expressed reluctance when faced with the possible need for outside intervention to handle discipline issues. Administrators also revealed a protective side regarding students and were too, reluctant to quickly turn students over to the authority of law enforcement officials. More certified and licensed mental health counselors and therapists along with competent social workers could form a strong network of support for vulnerable students. Unfortunately, there was a racial divide among the participants: the white educators appeared to take a colorblind route to the use of discipline policies.

Recent news of black children encountering anti-Blackness at the hands of educational leaders and/or law enforcement demonstrates a critical connection between schools and society. I recommend educators of marginalized Black youth be required to take antiracist education and training during the pre-service phase of their professional programs and commit to ongoing in-service professional development in antiracist culturally relevant pedagogy. These courses and trainings should be conducted by qualified individuals who are equipped with the requisite knowledge, application skills, and dispositions that are rooted in and representative of anti-Blackness theory and critical race theory. Taking a holistic approach to education and students' psychological and emotional development would shift the investment balance from prisons to schools. Youthful indiscretions should be met with teachable moments, not prison sentences or death.

Protecting children from the hidden and overt aspects of schooling that can lead to the carceral state requires keen and committed vigilance. Revolution beats reform. Dr. Joy DeGruy (2017) outlines her plan to address America's legacy of enduring injury and healing in her popular book, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*. We have endured enslavement, Jim Crow segregation, and now mass incarceration without reparations or therapy. We all stand to benefit from professional psychological counseling and therapy as Black, Brown, and Indigenous survivors of European colonization and white supremacy. Scholarly research is needed to build on the insights of Anti-Blackness Theory (Wilderson, 2010; Sexton, 2012; Dumas, 2016; Sorentino, 2019), Critical Race Theory (Crenshaw et al, 1995; Delgado et al, 2017), Afropessimism (Gordon et al, 2017; Ray et al, 2017), and Afro-optimism (Onwudiwe, 2003). A fitting synthesis research of these theories could coalesce around a new theory, Afro-existentialism, to champion the values of Black freedom, Black agency, and the restoration of Black humanity.

## Notes On The Contributor

***JONATHAN LIGHTFOOT*** serves as the Founding Director of the Center for "Race," Culture and Social Justice and is faculty in the Teaching, Literacy & Leadership Department at Hofstra University. He received his Ph.D. in Policy Studies from the University of Illinois at Chicago, Master's degree from Harvard University's Graduate School of Education and Baccalaureate degree in Economics from Cornell University. His research agenda focuses on anti-racist/anti-oppression education and schooling, civil rights education, and critical review of legal and public policy. He enjoys empowering young adults and teaching about the many revolutionary ways to critically connect schools and society.

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