

Still Separate and Unequal:

Segregation and the Future of Urban School Reform

Book Review by Susan Schooler, Indiana

Barry A. Gold's title seems to say it all: schools in this country are *Still Separate and Unequal*. What is compelling about the book is that Gold has conducted an extensive field study of perhaps the greatest single experiment attempting to create equity for poor segregated urban schools. Gold's documentation that the experiment failed dismally, and his assessment of what that failure means, are the real contributions of the book.

The schools Gold studied were four "Abbott" schools, so-called because of the 1998 New Jersey Supreme Court case *Abbott v. Burke V*. The ruling in this case mandated unprecedented reforms for "isolated, racially segregated urban elementary schools" and the funds to carry them out. Using ethnographic methods of collecting data, Gold focused on two schools each in Elizabeth and Newark, New Jersey, over seven years, from 1998 through 2005. In 2002, the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) took effect, so Gold was also able to observe the effects of NCLB implementation in the four schools.

Gold devotes his initial chapters to a history of the *Abbott V* decision and the NCLB Act as well as the changes that produced the economically depressed and highly segregated residential urban areas where the *Abbott* schools are located. After explaining his theoretical frameworks, he presents detailed records of his observations in the four schools. These sections are slow reading, but they are necessary to support Gold's conclusions in his final two chapters.

Throughout the book, Gold uses the word "equality," echoing the language of *Brown v. Board of Education*, though he appears to mean "equity" rather than "sameness." As a result of his observations, he concludes that separate schools cannot be equal, no matter how much money is poured into them. Not only did the major reforms of *Abbott V* and NCLB fail to close the achievement gap, but in some cases, the gap widened. Gold concludes that a major reason for this is that in implementing the *Abbott* reforms, "administrators and teachers ignored, rejected, or modified [proposed new programs] and reproduced existing education practices." This resistance to change in many cases

stemmed from the convictions of well-intentioned teachers and/or administrators that the appropriate methods for teaching "these kids" are different from methods that work in suburban schools.

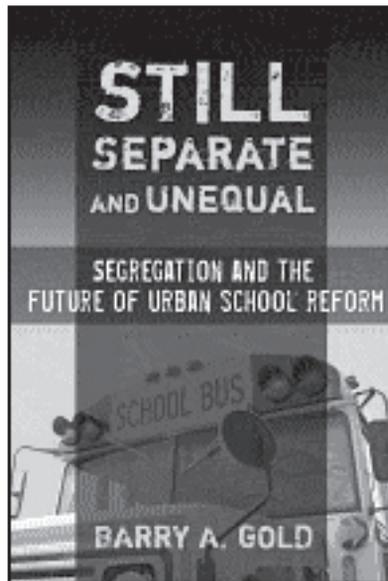
Thus, we see in one school, "I don't care if you don't know what you're doing. I just want you to get the right answer," and in others the conviction that their students "needed discipline, structure, and 'the basics,'" rather than methods which were perceived as "too child-centered." Gold refers to

this attitude as the "eco-cognitive framework," and laments how, because of it, the "administrators and faculty of these schools managed to reshape or resist the most powerful interventions to improve student learning that American society has developed." He concludes that "integration ... is the only way to reconfigure the deep structure of urban education by delegitimizing the eco-cognitive framework."

Unlike *Abbott V*, the NCLB Act had the power of external intervention behind it, and did succeed in making significant changes, but Gold asserts that those changes "further increase[d] the inequality of separate schools" by narrowing the curriculum as the schools focused on standardized test scores.

Even without the rest of the book, I believe Gold's last chapter is essential reading for anyone concerned with urban education reform. Gold considers a number of possibilities for change and evaluates them based on the conclusions from his research. Many of his ideas are not new. What is new is the weight of well-designed and well-documented research behind the conclusions. The book thus provides a major contribution to the research literature on educational reform.

I find two major weaknesses in Gold's conclusions. First, I would not be so quick to give up on the possibility of changing the eco-cognitive framework. Perhaps it is a major contribution of Gold's research to point out that we must work on that, first of all, before any reform has a chance to succeed. I believe well-intentioned teachers can unlearn the stereotypical beliefs they hold about their students. We at the NSRF have the tools to help them do that, and Gold's discoveries make *(continued on page 19)*



was the question "What is equity?" I had to ask in our debrief- how is it that "equity" is placed at the end, remotely hanging away from the other questions, as an afterthought? Is it coincidence, or is it symbolic of how equity itself is usually attended to? After the other definitions were unpacked, equity was tacked on to the tail end of our days or added as a secondary or lesser component of our agendas. It is the topic we think we should discuss, but because we feel less competent addressing it, because of the messiness, difficulty, and lack of confidence that we sometimes feel when holding space for this volatile dialogue, it goes at the very end, sometimes in the hope that time will not allow us to get to it.

That needed to change, and so I changed it. Taking a strategic and more proactive approach, sometimes I will place it as the middle question, and at other times I reserve changing its location until later in the week to emphasize or punctuate the importance of equity as the missing puzzle piece that can move us from "too much schooling, too little education" (See *Too Much Schooling, Too Little Education: A Paradox of Black Life in White Societies* by Mwalimu J. Shujaa) to what is required to meet the needs of each student in order to improve academic achievement.

Therefore, the sequence of questioning toward the end of the seminar (and hopefully, participants arrive at this conclusion themselves) becomes: if we operate from the premise that schools are designed to "school" students (see *The Historic Timeline of Public Education*, www.arc.com), and if we truly embrace equity, then it is our responsibility and hopefully our passion to create the conditions and circumstances in our educational environments to give each student what he/she needs by providing the essential and crucial inputs...i.e equity in human, capital and financial resources needed to teach them well, empower them and liberate them so that they can achieve at high levels. If we choose to, we can truly educate them and enable them to make positive contributions to our local, national and global communities. In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks says that education is the practice of freedom. How else can we become a truly democratic society? ■

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parenting raises black boys the same way white boys are raised. Gray parenting challenges institutions regarding the treatment of black boys. Black parenting sees systems as inherently out of touch with black boys' life goals.

There are many useful and many far-too-familiar statistics on black boys throughout the book. The statistic that was new to me is that the only age at which a black male statistically outperforms a white male is after age 85. If a black male lives to be 85, he will statistically outlive his white counterpart.

Dr. Winbush challenges any adult wanting to nourish and successfully engage black boys to know and practice the 4 C's: Consciousness, Commitment, Cooperation, and Community. The book includes an annotated bibliography of books for black boys grades 1-6 and 7-12. I recommend *The Warrior Method* to anyone, whether he or she be a parent, grandparent, educator or concerned citizen, who wants to read a thoughtful guide to developing the fullest capacity of each black boy. ■

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me more convinced than ever that this is critical work for us to do.

Second, after arguing so strongly that integrated schools are essential, Gold offers very little about how we should get there. He discusses a few possibilities, then asserts that "an approach that can succeed ... is small-scale voluntary integration of schools in working- and middle-class suburbs near cities." I wish I thought that were realistic, but I don't. So for me, the mandate of this book is to pick up where Gold leaves off. He's stated the problem well, but offers no easy answers. Where we go from there is up to us. ■

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