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Argument Essay

Demolishing Racial Discrimination

“I don’t understand why there can be a Black Alliance Club, but if we tried to make a White Alliance Club, we’d probably get sued or something – it’s so unfair,” said an ignorant girl named Two-Years-Ago-Me. From a very basic, narrow minded standpoint, it would make sense that this seems unfair to white people. But when you even just barely begin to peel back the layers, you see that conceptions like this are not only ignorant, but are also massive bricks in the wall that has been built up over generations and is there for minorities to attempt to climb.

Today’s society is in an awkward stage where we are edging towards equality, but still have a ways to go and yet most people believe that we are already there. To make it easier for minorities to get over that wall, a staircase needs to be built and one of the first and most important steps pertains to equality and unity in education.

In the United States, it is required for every person to have some sort of education until they are sixteen, seventeen, or eighteen – depending on the state, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures (Bush 1). These years of education are intended to have a variety of benefits for people. Being in school five days out of the week keeps kids busy, thus leaving them with less time to engage in harmful activities such as doing drugs or committing crimes. In addition, the education that someone gets in this part of their life is essential to the furthering of education past high school. A college degree unleashes ample amounts of career opportunities. Based on the Credentialing Theory, depicted by David K. Brown in “The Social Sources of Educational Credentialism: Status Cultures, Labor Markets, and Organizations,” college degrees are thought to “signal” hirers of jobs to hire a person with a degree over someone
without a degree (Brown 25). Obviously, a steady career improves the quality of life for a person. All of this starts with the value of education through high school. Unfortunately, the quality of education is not consistent for everyone and people of color tend to get the least advantages.

Logically, for a problem to begin to be solved, it first needs to be recognized as an issue. Jonathan Kozol’s “Still Separate Still Unequal” brings awareness to the extent of segregation and inequality in schools today. Countless public schools and even entire districts are comprised of an overwhelming majority of minority students whose schools do not have all of the opportunities that a school with mainly white students does. One statistic that Kozol mentions is about a school in New York that is made up over 99.8 percent black students (Kozol 205), which is only one of an astonishing amount of similar statistics that he references throughout “Still Separate Still Unequal.” If you were to ask a typical educated white student in America if there is still segregation in schools today, most would say there isn’t and would probably mention the Brown v. Board of education act from the 50s that was meant to enforce desegregation of schools. The fact, though, is that segregation in schools is still happening and is arguably more prevalent that it was in even the 1960s when this sort of unity was still not a familiar concept.

Oblivion of this separation of races is a sizeable part of why there has been little progress so far in bringing about unity and equality in schools. Awareness must be raised in order to get anywhere. Part of the reason why so many people are so unaware of this issue is because it is either talked about sparingly, or when it is talked about, it is not talked about truthfully. Kozol noted that people use the word “diverse” when speaking of places made up of mainly minorities (Kozol 204). The meaning of “diverse” is showing a great deal of variety, which is quite the contrary from the common use – describing schools that comprised remarkably of only one race.
It is possible that people use the word “diverse” because they think it is more politically correct and are trying to stay away from harming anyone’s feelings, but by sugar coating this seclusion of race, more harm is actually done. It makes people believe that there really isn’t any issue because “diverse” is such a positive word. The only way to start moving in the right direction is to look the problem in the eyes and address it head on.

Of course, I’m not the first person to notice this problem and neither is Jonathan Kozol. There are already people who have been trying to make progress in this area. For instance, upon noticing that the demographics of schools in Hartford, Connecticut are showing more and more isolation of races, the State Department of Education has been working on a way to desegregate them. However, like any big sociological issue, there are a lot of barriers and there it isn’t one simple solution. Hartford’s situation is similar to that of many others in which parents of white students are intentionally enrolling their kids into schools that are primarily white, often times private or charter schools. The state’s first attempt at desegregating the schools was in 1996 when the governor at the time, John Rowland, called for action. A committee was put together to organize a plan and in 1997, the Public Act 97-290 was instigated to reduce the isolation of race and “provide educational opportunities for its students to interact with students and teachers from other racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds,” (O’Neill). Despite these attempts, the demographics have yet to move substantially in the direction that is intended. More obstacles emerged including white families moving further away from Hartford, leaving minorities to stay in Hartford’s public schools, isolated (“Demographics complicate Hartford desegregation”).

Political involvement like Hartford’s err on the side of passive action. A big reason for this is that affirmative action stirs controversy. Compromise is something that is constantly a factor for political actions. However, compromise in situations like this becomes less important
when other options fail to work and the problem at hand is a major issue for the progression and bettering of our country. One example of affirmative action that has been tossed around is the concept of Desegregation Busing. The premise of this is that students from primarily white communities would be bussed to schools that are primarily black or other minorities and vice versa. This idea was implemented in the 1960s and 1970s in Prince George’s County in Maryland (Cozzens). Of course, like any affirmative action, disputes arose. People in opposition of this policy found it to be unsafe for the kids and in general more expensive. Impressively, “during the months following implementation of the busing plan,” despite numerous protests and acts of disapproval, “schools stayed desegregated and standardized test scores rose,” (Cozzens). The drawback was, however, that violence and conflicts among students also rose and eventually the busing system was regarded as a failure. Throughout our lives, we are taught to not let history repeat itself, so instinctually people might not want to try something like this again in fear of repeating a preceding mistake. Though, what must be taken into strong consideration is that this trial of Desegregation Busing was undergone in the late 1960s and into the early 1970s – a time where black people simply drinking out of the same water fountain as white people was still a relatively new and foreign concept. If something like this were attempted again, identical results to these would be greatly unanticipated.

In addition to segregation in schools, there is also inequality; many of the public schools that are made up of mainly minorities do not have all of the opportunities or funding that schools with mainly white students do. These opportunities (or lack thereof) include the quality of teachers, easily accessible help with exploring options past high school such as college, helpful school resources that are obtained by sufficient funding, and prevalence of advanced academic programs. The Annie E. Casey Foundation notes that, “Schools where White students are in the
majority are more than twice as likely to offer a significant number of advanced placement classes as schools where Black and Latino students are in the majority,” (“Unequal Opportunities in Education”). People who are black are consistently under-represented in gifted and advanced programs, as exemplified in Donna Y. Ford and Robert A. King Jr.’s “No Blacks Allowed: Segregated Gifted Education in the Context of Brown v. Board of Education”:

In 2006, Black students comprised 17.13% of school districts but 9.15% of gifted education enrollment, which is 47% under-representation based on the RDCI (In all years, White students are over-represented in gifted education. For example, White students represented 56.42% of schools but 67.69% of gifted education enrollment in 2006. Asian students are also over-represented in gifted education.) In 2009, Black students represented 16.7% of districts but 9.9% of gifted education enrollment, tantamount to 43% underrepresentation. In 2011, Black students were enrolled in 19% of school districts yet only 10% of gifted education (47% under-representation). In all three years, under-representation is roughly 50%—progress is not evident. Under-representation exists in the majority of states and school districts. (Ford and King Jr. 303)

A key aspect of the inequality in schools lies within finances. In fact, “the wealthiest 10 percent of U.S. school districts spend nearly 10 times more than the poorest 10 percent,” (“Unequal Opportunities in Education”) and much of the poorest 10 percent is made up of minorities. Because of the obvious inequalities, it is not enticing for parents to enroll their kids into these schools, so many white parents choose not to. In order for resolution, the government needs to help fund these schools. If more money were put into such schools, we would see that the students currently at these schools would benefit from the extra opportunities and advantages,
edging us closer to equality. In addition, the parents of white students who are sending their kids to other schools would have more incentive to enroll them in these public schools, resulting in more unity.

Clearly, the government does not necessarily have a ton of money to throw around. Some of the funding for schools comes from county or state taxes, but most of it comes from local property taxes. An obvious way to get more aid financially for these schools would be to increase property taxes, but the general population usually doesn’t necessarily jump on the idea of tax increases. Not to mention, the districts that need this money the most tend to be in neighborhoods which don’t have the most money to begin with, so a tax increase would not be favored. Maybe, however, it’s not more money that is needed, but just more careful dispersion of the money that is set aside for education. As of right now, states and counties are more or less on their own for school funding which means that if one county is generating less property tax than the next, they will have less money for schools. If funding for schools was provided through federal taxes rather than state or local, education country-wide could become more cohesive. Lowering property taxes and raising federal taxes likewise would allow the government to spread out the money evenly to all school districts which would make sure that race does not play a role in funding for schools. Granted, this is a rather liberal viewpoint and people with conservative views would presumably not be sold on the idea. As of right now, a lot of people are content with the system the way it is because if you worked hard in order to be able to live in a community with good schools for your kids, you shouldn’t have to share your earnings with the people who haven’t worked as hard as you. To comply with this rationale, individual counties could still have the option to put local property tax money towards education for additional school funding. The main thing, though, is that each school would have a minimum budget that
is substantial and creates all the necessary opportunities. If the money were evenly distributed and spent wisely, then the schools comprised of primarily minorities that are currently lagging would begin to improve and become more alluring to white families who chose to send their kids to other schools.

It is easy to fall under the impression that racial discrimination isn’t a thing anymore. Even I believed that it was nearly dead, yet our society is far from complete equality. The first steps on the long staircase to equality are recognition of the inequality that still exists and practicing equal educational opportunities for every person, regardless of race. By defeating ignorance, intensifying awareness, and incorporating government action, the United States of America would be on its way to the day in which we can say with full confidence that we are as close to pure equality as possible. It would be incredible if this could all happen overnight, but there is still a long fight ahead in order to gain untainted unity and equality in America.
Works Cited


