



# Why Shefi Still Matters

## New Research on Poverty, Diversity & Achievement

Susan Eaton and Gina Chirichigno, April 2009

*Charles  
Hamilton  
Houston*

INSTITUTE FOR  
RACE & JUSTICE

HARVARD LAW SCHOOL



# Why Pursue Racial Diversity?

*What does the most recent and highest quality social science research tell us about diversity and racial integration in schools?*



# The Benefits of Racial Diversity

*Social science evidence consistently supports racial diversity in schools.*

- Rigorous studies conducted since 2000 on “desegregation” and “diversity” use more sophisticated statistical techniques.
- Researchers are now better able to parse out effects of peer, family, and neighborhood influences than they were in the past.
- Having more advantaged peers consistently results in better outcomes for African American and Latino students.



# Overview of Presentation

- **How Individual Students Benefit from Diversity**
  - in the Short Term
  - in the Long Term
- **How Society Benefits from Diversity**
- **Context: Why Race Still Matters**



# How Do Students Benefit from Racial Diversity?

*We often set up excellence in competition with integration.*

**Diversity is associated with:**

- improved math achievement;
- improved reading achievement;
- improved critical thinking; and
- reduced racial stereotyping.

***Educators in diverse schools have an increased capacity to intervene and counteract non school-related challenges.***



# Impact of Racial Diversity Later in Life

**Diversity is associated with:**

- college success;
- job performance and/or professional success; and
- the “perpetuation” of desegregation.



# How Does Society Benefit from Racially Diverse Schools?

Diversity is also associated with:

- lower dropout rates;
- some research suggests lower crime rates; and
- potential for increased social cohesion.



***What does this social science research tell us about the short-term benefits of racial diversity?***

# Diversity and Math Achievement

## Math: National Studies

- In the largest study of its kind, Professor Douglas Harris used data from 22,000 schools to consider the effects of segregation on achievement test scores.
- After controlling for other factors, Harris found that Latino and African American gains in math were far greater in diverse schools than in segregated ones.



# Diversity and Math Achievement



## Math: A Synthesis

- A forthcoming synthesis of 46 high-quality studies published since 1990 show that racial diversity is associated with improved math achievement in nearly all of the 46 studies considered.
- ALL of the 46 studies show that economic diversity is associated math achievement.

# Diversity and Math Achievement

## Math: National Studies

- A forthcoming national longitudinal study finds that increases in the Black-white and Latino-white achievement gap correspond to increases in racial segregation.
- Another national study shows that the higher percent minority in a high school, the lower the students' gained in math and the fewer math courses they took.



# Diversity and Math Achievement



## Math: State Level Studies

**State-level studies that control for competing variables tend to show similar relationships:**

- Segregation in Texas explains “a significant portion” of the Black-white achievement gap in math.
- In Florida, Professor Kathryn Borman found that racial isolation has a negative effect on a school’s math and reading scores.

# Diversity and Reading

## Reading: National Studies

- Diverse high schools (25-54% students of color) have smaller racial gaps in reading than do schools with extremely high portions of students of color or extremely small portions of students of color.



# Diversity and Reading

## Reading: State Level Studies

- Kathryn Borman's study shows that, independent of other factors, racial segregation of black students in Florida had a negative impact on test scores in reading.
- Racial segregation did not affect reading scores in kindergarten, but by first grade there were "significant negative side effects" of segregation on reading.





***What does this social science research tell us about racial diversity in relation to critical thinking skills and reduced stereotypes?***



# What Types of Students Do We Seek to Produce?

*Assuming that one function of schools is to develop students into problem solvers, schools that are able to harness the power of diversity will produce more effective students.*

**“With only a saw or a hammer, we cannot build anything interesting. With both, we can build homes, tree forts, and fences.”**

**—Scott Page**

# Critical Thinking and Problem Solving Skills



## Diversity and Problem Solving

- In The Difference: How The Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools and Societies (2007), Scott Page explores the “pragmatic, bottom-line contributions of diversity” by attaching empirical, logic-based data to the concept of diversity.
- He finds that **when solving difficult problems, diverse groups of problem solvers— groups of people with diverse tools— consistently outperform a group of “the best and the brightest” problem solvers by a substantial margin.**



In other words:  
*“diversity trumps ability.”*



# Who Wants Critical Thinkers?



*Page has found that “Although promoting identity diversity in groups... has long been the concern of the political left (usually for reasons of justice and fairness), the people who brought up this connection more often than not came from the corporate sector.”*

**Two fundamental changes have caused business leaders to embrace a pro-diversity mentality:**

- 1. Increasing globalization; and**
- 2. Work has become more team-focused.**

*The cognitive skills required to be brilliant at one task often overlap little with the skills required for another.*



## Implications of Page's Work

- Page acknowledges that his finding—that diversity trumps ability—is “outside the mainstream in a society that prizes individual talent and achievement.”
- “Rather than being on the defensive about diversity, we should go on the offensive. We should look at difference as something that can improve performance.”

***“Our toolboxes define us, constrain us, and guide us.”***

# Miracle (2004)



*“You’re missing  
the best players.”*



***“I’m not looking for  
the best players,  
Craig, I’m looking for  
the right ones.”***

# Critical Thinking and Problem Solving Skills



## *How Racial Integration Improves Critical Thinking :*

- Students of different races and ethnic backgrounds often bring **different cultural knowledge and social perspectives** into school.
- Therefore, diverse classrooms are more likely to enhance critical thinking by **exposing students to new information and perspectives.**

# Critical Thinking and Problem Solving Skills



## *Diversity Helps Students Grow.*

Evidence suggests that students in diverse classrooms “showed the greatest engagement in active thinking processes, growth in intellectual engagement and motivation, and growth in intellectual and academic skills.”

# Challenging Racial Stereotypes



## *The Harm of Stereotyping*

Research confirms that stereotypes and prejudicial thinking undermine academic success, social cohesion, and community stability.

# Challenging Racial Stereotypes



## *Why is Interracial Interaction So Important?*

*It puts theory into practice.*

Interaction with members of other groups can:

- break down stereotypes
- promote understanding
- foster mutual respect

*These benefits of diversity were recognized in 1954 in Gordon Allport's "The Nature of Prejudice."*

# Challenging Racial Stereotypes



## *Theory in Action:*

- A recent study compared racial biases held by students in racially homogenous schools and students in racially diverse schools.
- The students were presented with an ambiguous situation involving characters of different races.
  - White children in racially homogenous schools rated African American characters more negatively than white characters.
  - Students in racially diverse schools displayed no bias or minimal bias.



## *Reflections on Desegregation*

*“[R]ace is such a hugely visible thing that I think it makes it so much easier for people to generalize based on [one incident] when that may very well be unfair.”*

*“By knowing not just one person but by knowing a base of people, it was easier not to generalize.”*

*—A Jewish woman reflecting on her high school experience in Shaker Heights, OH*

*She reported being determined to educate her children in a racially diverse environment.*

# Challenging Racial Stereotypes



## *Why Desegregate K-12 Schools? Early intervention works.*

- Racial classification and stereotypical thinking are developed early in life, making intervention in elementary and secondary education key.
- Cross-racial interaction during childhood and adolescence helps not only to break down racial stereotypes, but to **prevent the development of stereotypical thinking.**

# Challenging Racial Stereotypes



## *The Desegregated School Experience*

*Former students of desegregated schools acknowledge the benefits of diversity.*

- Researchers carried out two in-depth case studies of graduates of desegregated schools nationwide:
  - 242 graduates were interviewed between 1999 and 2004; and
  - 42 adults who graduated from Seattle and Louisville in the mid 1980s.
- Those interviewed reported benefits such as open-mindedness, reduced prejudice, and reduced fearfulness of other races.



## *Reflections on Desegregation*

The graduates of these [desegregated] schools were quite certain that what they had learned about race had to be learned through daily interactions and experiences within a school setting.

*“I think that I learned something there that you can’t teach anybody...”*

*—A white graduate of Dwight Morrow High School  
Englewood, NJ*



***What does this social science research tell us about the long-term benefits of racial diversity?***



# Long-Term Benefits of Racial Diversity

The weight of social science evidence strongly suggests that students of color in majority white schools are far more likely to gain the necessary:

- Confidence
- Networking skills
- Opportunities for relationship-building

*These skills and attributes will increase a student's chances for long-term success.*



## Professional Implications

- African American students who had attended desegregated schools were more likely than their previously segregated counterparts to benefit in the job market from their networks, their learned confidence and their association with a predominantly white high school.
- Previously desegregated African American students were more likely than their counterparts to earn white-collar jobs and enter professions previously closed to African Americans.



# Long-Term Benefits of Racial Diversity

*Students who attended desegregated schools are more likely to “perpetuate” desegregation.*

- In other words, students of color are more likely to enter and persist in predominantly white environments when they perceive opportunity there.
- Statistical research and intensive interviews and ethnographic studies of high schools have demonstrated this tendency in college, neighborhoods and workplaces.



# Is “Perpetuation Theory” Valid?

*Some research on perpetuation theory has been criticized for its lack of adequate controls...*

*but, on the whole,*

*the National Academy of Education concluded in 2007: “the body of research. . . stands up to scrutiny.”*



# What's at Stake? The Harms of Racial Isolation

*We shouldn't continue to look at these challenges separately. Educational equity, segregation, and student achievement are interconnected.*

- Students from all racial minority groups are far less likely to graduate if they attend highly segregated schools.
- Segregation has a negative impact upon later college achievement.

# Segregation and Dropouts



## What the Research Says:

- An examination of more than 13,000 public high schools demonstrates that *schools with a higher concentration of African American and Latino students have lower graduation rates than more integrated high schools.*
- “Racial composition” was a “significant factor” in dropout rates even after controlling for other plausible variables.

# Segregation and Dropouts



## What the Research Says:

- New, rigorous, well-controlled, longitudinal studies demonstrate that segregated high schools are far less able than desegregated ones to counteract out of school challenges such as poverty and neighborhood violence.
- This shows up particularly clearly when examining dropout rates.
- Desegregation could not counteract all the challenges outside schools, especially as poverty and neighborhood violence increased, but segregated schools actually exacerbated the dropout problem.
- Resegregation “reversed” the benefits of previous attendance at a desegregated school.



# Social Benefits of Racial Diversity

*What does the research  
tell us about diversity  
and crime?*

# School Desegregation and Crime



**Forthcoming research investigates the impact of desegregation on crime.**

**Research Method:** Within the set of districts ever subject to desegregation orders, researchers (David A. Weiner, Byron F. Lutz, and Jens Ludwig) examined crime trends before and after these orders went into effect using data on homicide victimizations from the Vital Statistics (VS), and on offending from the FBI's Supplemental Homicide Reports (SHR).

# School Desegregation and Crime

## Why is this important?

- Research since *Brown* has attempted to inform our understanding of the effects of court-ordered school desegregation, with most studies focused on the consequences for *academic outcomes*.
- *Non-academic outcomes* might be at least as important for social welfare.
- One of the most important non-academic outcomes is **crime**, given the enormous social costs (perhaps as much as \$1 or \$2 trillion per year).



# School Desegregation and Crime

Within the set of districts ever subject to court order (between the late 1960s through the early 1980s), they found:

- Black homicide victimization rates decline by around 25 percent;
- Black homicide arrest rates for blacks decline by about 15 percent in the long-run;
- White homicide victimizations also decline (due perhaps in part to a decline in the rate at which blacks kill whites and an increase in school and police spending in response to these school desegregation orders).



# School Desegregation and Crime

## Summary of Findings:

- Evidence suggests that court-ordered *school desegregation generates significant reductions in homicide offending and victimization for blacks, and reductions in victimizations for whites as well.*
- The effects on blacks were largest in those districts where school systems desegregated the most.
- In general, voluntary plans have similar impacts to involuntary plans.



# School Desegregation and Crime

## Additional findings:

- Desegregation orders reduce homicide by almost as much over the summer months as during the school year;
- Decreases in homicide offending seem to persist well into adulthood for birth cohorts exposed to school desegregation;
- In contrast, cohorts not exposed to desegregation orders while they were of school age show no signs of having been affected.



# School Desegregation and Crime

## Potential explanations:

- Desegregation plans seem to improve schooling outcomes for blacks, which could be a large factor in why homicides seem to decline among blacks who have attended desegregated schools;
- Better school environments could improve:
  - self control
  - anger management
  - patience
  - self-esteem
  - perceptions about the opportunities for blacks to succeed in America
- Increased exposure to less criminally involved peers;
- Increased opportunity costs of criminal behavior;



# Segregation's Effect on Social Cohesion



## The “Public” Function of Public Education:

- Segregation makes it very difficult to develop effective citizens and maintain social cohesion.
- Bringing together students of different backgrounds to learn from one another should remain a central objective of American education, especially as we move toward a majority minority society in a globalizing world.



# Why Does This Matter?

*Putting Segregation in Context*

# Why Race Still Matters



**Research shows that segregation is detrimental to educational quality and opportunity in part because 9 times out of 10, a school that is “hyper-segregated” will also be a “high poverty” school with an overwhelming concentration of social problems, serving the most disenfranchised members of society.**

# Why Race Still Matters



*“Discrimination continues to be endemic, intertwined into the very fabric of our lives.”*

Fair Housing Commission 2008

# Why Race Still Matters



The 2008 Fair Housing Commission hearings exposed the fact that, despite strong legislation, **past and ongoing discriminatory practices in the nation's housing and lending markets continue to produce extreme levels of residential segregation that result in significant disparities between minority and non-minority households**, in access to good jobs, *quality education*, homeownership attainment and asset accumulation.

**In other words, *race still matters.***

# Why Race Still Matters

## Layers of Disadvantage:

**76% of all Black children**

**-and-**

**70% of all Latino children**

**live in neighborhoods with poverty rates  
higher than in neighborhoods of the  
worst-off white children.**



# Why Race Still Matters



## “Typical” Poor Children:

- The “typical” **poor white child** lives in a neighborhood that is 13.6% poor;
- The “typical” **poor Black child** lives in a neighborhood that is 30% poor;
- The “typical” **poor Latino child** lives in a neighborhood that is 30% poor.



***How Do These  
Dynamics Play Out  
in Our Schools?***

# Why Race Still Matters



## Who Goes to the Schools with the Highest Levels of Poverty?

- 40% of Black students;
  - 40% of Latino students; and
  - 6% of white students
- attend schools that are 70-100% poor.

# Why Race Still Matters

## Teacher Turnover

*Research shows that teachers are more likely to leave segregated black and Latino schools.*

- Studies show that race is the driving factor in predicting teacher mobility in segregated minority schools, more so than working conditions or student poverty.
- White teachers – who comprise 85% of the teaching force – often transfer to schools with a lower minority percentage.
- These patterns exist even when teacher salary is held constant.





***Why Is  
Desegregation  
So Effective?***





# Why Does Desegregation Work?

## *One Theory*

- It reduces the concentration of social “non-school” challenges related to poverty and neighborhood inequality that impede learning.
- Institutions will not become “overwhelmed” with such challenges. Advantaged students are also more evenly distributed.

**All students benefit from diversity and school systems become more effective overall if challenges are more evenly distributed.**



# Does This Theory Hold?

*A new and growing body of research says YES*

- This idea was put forth decades ago in the Coleman report.
- Segregated, high-poverty schools are not as effective as desegregated ones in counteracting non-school challenges that impede learning.
- This is manifest in an examination of test scores and dropout rates.



***“Overall, desegregated high schools played a more effective role in counterbalancing student-level nonschool problems than did segregated ones, especially when Blacks and Hispanics (had) attended integrated elementary and middle schools.”***

***“There was no evidence of White harm... Whites appeared to have benefited from desegregated schools in similar ways, but to a lesser degree...”***

**Argun Saatcioglu, *Non School Problems and School Desegregation*, Teacher’s College Record (forthcoming 2010)**



***But Don't Some  
Schools  
Successfully  
"Beat the Odds?"***



# The Myth of “Separate But Equal”

*Professor Douglas Harris looked for schools serving low-income students that recorded high scores in two subjects, in two grades for two consecutive years.*

*The percentage of such schools in the U.S.?*



**1.1%**



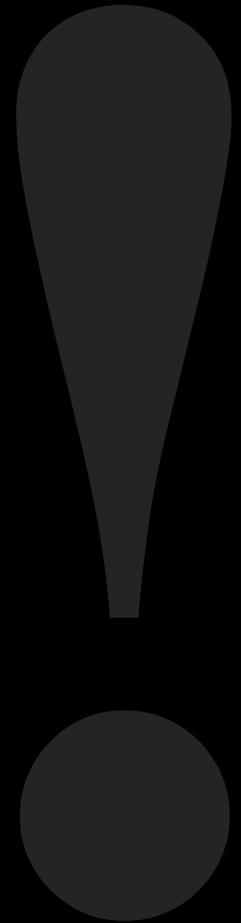


# The Myth of “Separate But Equal”

*Harris also found that, if the schools have both high levels of poverty and enroll high numbers of students of color, the percentage of "high flyers" falls to...*



**.3%**





# What Does the Research Tell Us To Do?

- Sustain and create desegregated schooling opportunities;
- Avoid concentrated poverty and racial isolation;
- Don't expect school desegregation to "solve" all academic challenges. It is, however, more effective than segregation, which is actively harmful;
- Support and enact policies and programs that attack out-of-school problems that affect children's learning:
  - food availability
  - mental health issues
  - neighborhood violence
  - poor housing choices