Civics Lessons: The Color and Class of Betrayal

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This article draws from research conducted with poor and working-class youth in California attending schools that suffer from structural disrepair, high rates of unqualified teachers, high teacher turnover rates, and inadequate books and instructional materials. Arguing that such schools accomplish more than simple "reproduction" of class and race/ethnic inequities, the authors detail the penetrating psychological, social, and academic impact of such conditions on youth and educators, accelerating schooling for alienation. The evidence suggests that these schools not only systematically undereducate poor and working-class youth, and youth of color, but they taint pride with shame, convert a yearning for quality education into anger at its denial, and they channel active civic engagement into social cynicism and alienation. The consequences for schools, communities, and the democratic fabric of the nation are considered.

"Every day, every hour, talented students are being sacrificed. . . . They're [the schools] destroying lives." Maritza, college student, speaking about her urban high school stated:

> Obviously there's no there's . . . there are not enough books [and] there's overcrowding . . . I'm expected to teach a class of 48 to 46 students with only 36 books with only 36 chairs. If those conditions don't improve, education can't improve. Again, go to any other school—and of course you're going to see better academic program because more resources for more children, more one on one interaction with student to teacher. And again, I'm only one person. I don't have a TA. I don't have any assistance in the classroom except the other kids. . . . Overcrowding . . . we're expected to perform miracles, part a Red Sea, if you will. (Educator Joel Vaca)

In so many hollowed buildings we call public schools, the spirits and souls of poor and working-class urban youth of color, and their educators, are

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assaulted in ways that bear academic, psychological, social, economic and perhaps, also, criminal justice consequence. We write on the devastation wrought by alienating public schools (Delpit, 1995; Hilliard, 1990; Kohl, 1994; Kohn, 2000; Morris, Hilliard, & Morris, 2002; Woodson, 1977). We write to theorize within and beyond reproduction theory (Anyon, 1997; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; Bowles & Gintis, 1976), to understand the psychological and social devastation incited by buildings that are structurally damaged, educators who are underqualified, and institutions that call themselves schools but have little in the way of books, instructional materials, or rigor to offer.

Poor and working-class youth of color are *reading* these conditions of their schools as evidence of their social disposability and evidence of public betrayal. These young women and men critically analyze social arrangements of class and race stratification and come to understand (but not accept) their "place" in the social hierarchy. Like children who learn to love in homes scarred by violence, these young women and men are being asked to learn in contexts of humiliation, betrayal and disrespect. It would be inaccurate to say that youth are learning nothing in urban schools of concentrated poverty. Neither fully internalizing this evidence nor fully resisting it, these children are learning their perceived worth in the social hierarchy. This profound civics lesson may well burn a hole in their collective souls. In the early part of the 21st century, schools of poverty and alienation transform engaged and enthused youth into young women and men who believe that the nation, adults and the public sphere have abandoned and betrayed them, in the denial of quality education, democracy, the promise of equality. Were that not enough, California marks the "cutting edge state" in which historic commitments to affirmative action in higher education have been retrenched, wrenching even dreams of college and university out the imaginations of generations of African Americans and Latinos. Youth know that the blades of race, class and ethnicity cut the cloth of public resources, to determine who receives, and who is denied, a rich public education.

Many have written eloquently on this perverse realignment of the public sphere to satisfy and engorge elite interests; that is, to gentrify the public sphere. But few have interrogated how poor and working-class youth of color witness, analyze, critique and mobilize in the face of this State realignment. This is the project we set out to explore in this paper, to interrogate how poor and working-class youth of color view both the distributive injustices that now orchestrate the public education system in California, and the procedural injustices by which the State refuses to hear their voices of protest.

Many have written on the ways in which public high schools systematically exile youths of poverty and color, scarring souls and minds in the

process (Fine, 1991; Kozol, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999). This essay may sound like an echo of earlier works. But we are concerned particularly that the stakes for under educated youth, and for drop outs, are today far more severe than they were in the past. In California, in 1998, 11% of California high school graduates were eligible to attend the University of California, but only 3.8% of Latinos and 2.8% of Blacks compared to 12.7% of Whites and 30% of Asians reaching this standard (Hurtado, Haney, & Garcia, 1998). For students of color, and poor students, access is low, and stakes for exclusion are high. Nationally, as in California, the long arm of the prison industrial complex reaches deeply into communities of color, yanking out youths at alarming rates while the economy remains hostile to young people without high school degrees (Haney, 2002). In New York State, for instance, from 1988 to 1998, the budget for the public university system was cut by 29% while state spending on prisons rose by 76% (Schiraldi, Gangi, & Ziedenberg, 1998). In 1994, for the first time in history, New York State expended more of the state budget on prisons than on public higher education (Schiraldi et al., 1998). Young women and men of color, even with high school or some college, fare far worse than their White peers; those without a high school degree have little chance of entering the legitimate economy.

We take the California schools in question to be emblematic of a growing set of public schools, located in communities of poverty, immigration and communities of color, in which facilities are in desperate disrepair, faculty are underqualified and turning over at alarming rates, and instructional materials are fully inadequate to the task of educating for rigor and democracy. These schools are not simply reproducing race and class inequities. Far worse, these schools educate poor and working-class youth, immigrant youth and youth of color, away from academic mastery and democracy, toward academic ignorance and civic alienation. And yet these youth are asking for clean and safe school environments, quality educators, and rigorous instruction. The evidence suggests, however, that the more years they spend in their schools, the greater their sense of being ill prepared, their anger, and their mistrust of the public sphere; the greater the decline in academic engagement; and the more our diverse democratic fabric frays. We can ill afford to have youth, particularly poor and working-class youth of color, so in need of higher education, to decide early in their academic careers, that schools are not designed for them.

READING PROBLEMS

In this work we seek to understand how young people "read" existing race, ethnicity and class stratifications, as these stratifications organize the system we call public schooling (Larson & Ovando, 2001). There are debates within

neo-Marxist, feminist and critical race literatures about, for instance, whether persons on the "bottom" of social hierarchies voice more powerful critique (Collins, 1991; Freire, 1973; Giroux, 1983; Harding, 1987; Willis, 1981; Walkerdine, Melody, & Lucey, 2001) than those who are privileged, or if those most oppressed actually deny injustice, victim blame and mimic dominant ideologies (Jost, 1995; Marx & Engles, 1846). The question is often posed: Can those who have been oppressed really "know" what they haven't seen? If they do, does their critique facilitate hope and/or despair?

The data collected suggest that indeed these youth know, see and speak. And yet they do have "reading problems." Not because of any deficiency in their own literacies, but because the political texts they are asked to read bear brutal consequence for their educational practice, their civic engagements and their economic trajectories. The text of alienation they "read" in their school buildings, in the rapid fire teacher turnover, in the absence of books and materials, in the administrative refusal to listen and remedy, sharpens an acute talent for critical consciousness and, indeed, saddles them with a "reading problem." For this site of development and learning—the school—is even more profoundly a site for betrayal. These conditions both reproduce and exacerbate emotional, civic and academic troubles for youth already least privileged in our nation (see Antonia Darder in Darder, Torres & Gutierrez, 1997).

CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

In the course of the legal preparation of *Williams v. California,* Michelle Fine was asked to testify as an expert witness, on the relation of structural and academic conditions within the plaintiff schools, and youths' psychological well-being. More precisely, Michelle was invited to testify about the psychological and academic impact of structurally deficient facilities, high rates of teacher turnover and uncredentialed/unqualified faculty, and inadequate instructional materials. Michelle agreed to testify on the condition that we (Michelle with doctoral students April Burns, Yasser A. Payne and Maria E. Torre) could come to California and survey as well as interview youth attending plaintiff schools about their educational experiences, aspirations, and the impact of these conditions on their psychological and academic well being. We arranged with the lawyers to set up focus groups of elementary, middle, and high school students from the plaintiff schools, contacted and selected via stratified random digit dialing within feeder neighborhoods. We agreed to tape all focus groups and provide the transcripts to all attorneys involved in the lawsuit. Thus, all raw data were publicly available—with names of students redacted. We promised to review the relevant academic literatures, analyze the data in light of these literatures and produce a final report to the courts. This article derives from that final report.

METHODOLOGY

To collect data from a broad range of students attending schools in the "plaintiff class" of *Williams v. California*, the lawyers contacted survey research and jury research firms to conduct random digit dialing in affected neighborhoods, to generate the survey and focus group samples. Drawing off lists of eligible households, a series of a priori criteria were specified for selection: Respondents need to be current students, not dropouts; respondents need to be reached via neighborhood telephone sampling with no friendship or snowball nominations; respondents should not be connected to, or made explicitly aware of, the litigation until after the interview; respondents should speak English well enough to participate in a group interview; respondents should not have severe cognitive disabilities that would interfere with such an interview, and parental consent was essential.

On average, approximately 400 calls were placed to generate a focus group of 10 to 12 young adults. The focus group sample, therefore, represents students who are educational "survivors" (not dropouts), randomly identified, and not selected from within peer or friendship patterns. Once the samples were established, a multimethod research design was undertaken.

Eleven focus groups were facilitated with 101 youth attending plaintiff schools (one elementary, one middle and nine high schools) in the San Francisco, Oakland, and Los Angeles areas, as well as a group (of peers) in Watsonville; surveys were completed anonymously by the 86 middle and high school focus group members, prior to their involvement in the focus group discussion. The survey items drew from Constance Flanagan's work on civic engagement, Tony Bryk's work on belonging and school climate, as well as a series of items concerning academic aspirations and sense of academic preparedness. Eleven telephone interviews were held with graduates of California schools that fall within the plaintiff class. All of these graduates were, at the time of the interview, in college.

Survey-based gender and race/ethnicity data on 86 students indicated 44 females and 42 males; 4 students who identify as White, 1 as biracial, 25 as Latino/Hispanic, and 56 as Black. Parental and student consent were obtained for all focus group participants. In a few cases in which there was no parental consent, participants were turned away. Participants were reimbursed for their participation. We review the broad sweep conclusions we draw and then dive a bit deeper into the complex scars and resiliencies that young people evidence.

Once the ground rules for the focus group were established (anonymity, confidentiality, respect, take recording, payment, food, etc.), the young people were asked, first, to identify a positive and troubling aspect of their school, each participant in order. They were then given a series of quotes drawn from youth depositions from this lawsuit about structural

conditions, teacher turnover, heat, overcrowding, unqualified faculty, inadequate books, chairs, desks and materials, and asked about the extent to which these comments reflect their experiences and schools, or not. Third, they were shown photos of a well-resourced public school in California and asked to reflect, again, on the extent to which these photos represent and/or contrast with their schools. And finally they were told a bit about the lawsuit (which had not been mentioned prior to that moment) and asked what they would want to tell the judge about their desire for an ideal school. All participants completed a survey prior to the focus group conversation (except for one group, when the surveys arrived late). The elementary students drew pictures of their ideal school prior to the conversation.

CUMULATIVE INEQUITY: SCHOOLING TOWARD ALIENATION

Schools, like other contexts of childhood and adolescence, are not simply the places where development happens (Werner & Altman, 1998; Wolfe & Rivlin, 1987). They are intimate places where youths construct identities, build a sense of self, read how society views them, develop the capacity to sustain relations and forge the skills to initiate change. These are the contexts where youth grow or they shrink (see Thomas & Collier, 2001). Environmental psychologists Werner and Altman (1998) argue "[C]hildren are not separate from their actions or feelings, nor are they separate from other children or the physical, social and temporal circumstances that comprise unfolding events. They are so interconnected that one aspect can not be understood without the others. . . . The street . . . is not separate from its inhabitants" (p. 125).

Buildings in disrepair are not, therefore, merely a distraction; they are identity producing and self-defining. Since the early part of the 20th century, psychologists and sociologists (Cooley, 1998; DuBois, 1935; Fanon, 1967; Goffman, 1961; Mead, 1988) have argued that children and youth develop a sense of self from the messages they gather from adults and peers, structures and institutions, around them. What the culture says about the child, his/her family and community comes to be internalized, in part, by that child. Children who are valued tend to be more positive in self-concept than those who are disparaged (DeLuca & Rosenbaum, 2001). This value may be communicated in what people say about and to them. But as powerful, the quality of the contexts in which they are growing "speaks" to youth about how they are viewed and valued. For better or worse, these "voices" come to form part of the core of how children feel about themselves and/or the extent to which they are valued by others (Maxwell, 2000). If surrounded by decay, disrepair and filth, with a constantly shifting stream of adults "in charge" and no adult

who intervenes to protect, children may come to see themselves as worthy of little more or at least that adults see them as unworthy.

Student Alondra Jones details the corrosive effects of a negative structural context on the developing selves of young students:

> It makes me, you know what, in all honesty, I'm going to break something down to you. It make you feel less about yourself, you know, like you sitting here in a class where you have to stand up because there's not enough chairs and you see rats in the buildings, the bathrooms is nasty, you got to pay. And then you, like I said, I visited Mann Academy, and these students, if they want to sit on the floor, that's because they choose to. And that just makes me feel real less about myself because it's like the State don't care about public schools. If I have to sit there and stand in the class, they can't care about me. It's impossible. So in all honesty, it really makes me feel bad about myself.
>
> Obviously, you probably can't understand where I'm coming from, but it really do. And I'm not the only person who feels that. It really make you feel like you really less than. And I already feel that way because I stay in a group home because of poverty. Why do I have to feel that when I go to school? No, there's some real weak stuff going on.

Counter to stereotype, the poor and working-class youth whom we interviewed want high quality, demanding teachers. They are upset when teachers they consider caring and demanding leave their schools. The cross-sectional evidence from elementary, middle, high school and college students reveals, over time, the developmental implications of losing these educational relationships.

The elementary school children we interviewed were filled with enthusiasm and excitement about their schools, learning, math, journals and the acquisition of knowledge. Asked to draw their ideal schools, they drew pictures of pride and delight, envisioning and documenting a world spread open with possibilities. Periodically, in their focus group, a voice of fear would be spoken. When asked what they would like to change about their schools, the young children responded:

> Bring a lot of security guards and stop the dogs. . . . And no big kids . . . teachers to respect . . . our teacher says we should stop fights because when we go outside, people just walk up to you and starting throwing bottles at you . . . stop the big kids from coming to beat up the little . . . stop grown ups, stop grown men from the little kids, because you never know who's l[ying] out there . . . our teachers to

Table 1. How California students feel about their schools

I think that in my school	High School ($n = 66$) % agree or strongly agree	Middle school ($n = 20$) % agree or strongly agree
Kids feel safe	23%	40%
The building is clean	6%	25%
We are a community	6%	45%
All teachers are well qualified	17%	45%
We have good books to take home	26%	60%
Teachers listen to our ideas	18%	55%
My classes are too crowded	37%	25%
All try to keep school looking good	3%	15%
We're proud to belong to our school	17%	15%

> stop kids from throwing balls at your head . . . good lunches . . . bathrooms more cleaner . . . stop people from cussing, trying to beat you up, people telling lies . . . stop graffiti . . . more books and a bigger library.

Relatively unaware that wealthy or White students receive superior education, young children are, for the most part, delightfully enthusiastic about their own academic prospects. They ask simply for adults to protect.

By middle school, the interviewed children sound somewhat more sophisticated if skeptical. In the middle school focus groups you can hear distress about conditions of schooling and the absence of remedy. Most, nevertheless, believe that *if only* someone knew about the conditions of their schools they would respond appropriately.

As Table 1 suggests, by high school, the students voice a deep, well-articulated, painfully sophisticated analysis suggesting that "no one" cares. The high school students tell us that wealthy and White students are better off educationally. These youth believe that the federal and state governments, the economy and some of their teachers simply embody the interests of the wealthy. While a discourse of possibility and hope survives even here, these older students view educational inequities as simply an extension of social disregard for them.

The longer students stay in schools with structural problems, high levels of unqualified teachers, inappropriate pedagogy, teacher turnover, and inadequate instructional materials, the wider the academic gaps between White children and children of color or wealthy children and poor children, and the more alienated they become (Ancess, 2000; Boyd-Franklin & Franklin, 1999; Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Elliott & Dweck, 1988; Fine, 1991; Meier, 1998; Valenzuela, 1999). We track, in this essay, how schools of alienation incite cumulatively a process that warps educational and civic possibilities.

In preparation of the expert report, and for the purposes of this paper, we analyzed the surveys and read through the focus groups to document a series of psychological reactions to these material conditions of education (e.g., yearning, anger, sense of betrayal, academic motivation, aspirations, relations with educators, civic engagement, speaking out/seeking redress). We analyzed the data within level (elementary, middle, and high) as well as between, tracking the dialectical relations between yearning for quality education and anger at being denied; pride in self and community and growing sense of embarrassment and shame for one's miseducation; desire to speak out and seek remedy; and the experience of being refused an audience. We write through these dynamics as *schooling for alienation*, understanding these youths as strong, resilient, and eager to be educated, at the same time as they are feeling abandoned, neglected, and abused by the state. It is this struggle that produces the power, vibrancy and pain of the material you will read. The students speak for a relentless will to be educated, outraged that they are denied the material conditions for quality education, what Morton Deutsch (1974) would call distributive injustice, and then more outraged that they are refused an audience from the state when they seek remedy, what Deutsch would be procedural injustice.

We turn now to the transcripts; our analysis of the quantitative and qualitative material provided by youth about their schools, generated in conversation with other youth and the Graduate Center researchers. We write toward a sense of collective responsibility—as we witness the (re)production and exacerbation of alienation among poor and working-class youth of color who are dying to be educated.

FROM YEARNING TO ANGER

> I like lab period and algebra teacher . . . he makes you relax, tell you jokes, it kind of calms you off. . . . That's what I like about my teachers, they all basically do that. (middle school boy)

> Right now I have this one teacher that's like, he's my English teacher and he's like really trying to help the students right now. We're looking into colleges and stuff. He's really trying to help us, like learn things, because it's like, he'll pull you out of class for a reason. It will be like to learn the stuff. (high school girl)

The students with whom we spoke are clear and elegant about what constitutes a good education. Quite a few have experienced the joys of teaching and learning for rigor, and with support. A number recall fondly teachers who supported them in hard times. Students from magnet schools and small programs within large schools, in particular, noted that they

appreciate the "teachers, like you can talk to them"; "teachers are always trying to encourage you, some of them."

Across focus groups and surveys, the students were very clear that they want teachers who care and demand rigorous work. We asked the students, "What does a teacher who cares look like?" Students described a "good teacher" as someone who holds high standards and helps students reach those standards, someone who listens, asks questions, and listens to student answers. Students were excited about teachers who want to know what students think. Some praised faculty who assign lots of homework, if they provide support and time to finish.

> *Girl*: Like he said, we got a lot of substitutes right now. . . . Some of them cap [put you down], some of them play football. That's not what we come to school for. So we got our teachers there that are pretty cool. But last year we had all our teachers. I love the good teachers, but the best ones are like . . .
>
> *Boy*: They change the whole school around.
>
> *Girl*: They change the whole school.
>
> *Boy*: My favorite is all the good teachers.

These students know the difference between "substitutes" who "play football" and teachers who "change the whole school around." They appreciate a caring teacher who is responsive when they are confused. A good teacher wants to know the students, and provides lots of red marks on their papers. Trouble is, few of these students encounter and enjoy "good" teachers on a regular basis. Most explain that they have had a range of teachers. Too many, however, have disappeared mid-year, are long term substitutes or don't know their content areas.

In the plaintiff schools, the percentage of fully certified teachers ranges from 13% to 50%. In the state of California, the percent of unqualified teachers is directly related to percent of students of color and students eligible for schools with free/reduced price meals, rising to an average of 24% noncredentialed teachers for schools with 91–100% students eligible for free/reduced lunch. Teacher turnover rates are reported by some principals to be as high as 40% in a matter of two to three years (data drawn from *Williams* brief).

By high school, the desire for quality educators bumps into the realization, by these youth, that they are being denied. At that point, the optimism of youth seems to drain, evident when students describe "teachers only there for a paycheck" or other adults who "know, they know, they just ignorant and don't care about us." By high school, the youth believe that they are being denied a fair share of educational resources for their education (Fine & Burns, 2003), and they express readily their outrage.

> When I ask for help, and there's too many kids and I know the teacher can't pay attention to me, I'm ignored. That makes me mad. They blame kids when they can't fix things. (high school girl)
>
> Well, at Tech it's not really that bad because they like—it is bad but they had like another school system inside of it called like Phi Beta, like all the smart kids, whatever and it's like no minorities in there. And they get all the good instruments and all the other stuff like engineering and they got all this stuff. And they like split them up and the like the rest of Tech, they got their own side of the school. So it's just kind of scandalous how they, you know, put everyone else, you know, on the other side of the school or just different classes. (high school boy)
>
> Younger kids coming up in conditions like this, they can bring the problem of racism because most of the quote unquote good schools are majority Caucasian or whatever, like someone brought up about the pictures. There's so, if they look around they school and they say, "Well we basically all minorities. And they look at other schools and say why they getting treated better than us?" Well we, we all humans and we have been treated worse. So then that could bring some anger and then they just start lashing out at people, Caucasian people for no reasons, for all the wrong reasons. (high school boy)

The structural inadequacies of their schools, combined with the belief that White and wealthy youth receive better, provoke a sense of anger in these students (Boyd-Franklin & Franklin, 1999). Inequities seem "scandalous," targeted at "minorities" or designed to keep "some of us" on the "bottom" (Ward, 2000). Anger is loosely directed at the government, the society or sometimes at "Caucasians," revealing a cumulative sense of what Faye Crosby (Crosby, Muehrer, & Loewenstein, 1986) and Iyer and colleagues (Iyer, Leach, & Pederson, 2004) call *relative deprivation*—a substantial discrepancy between what people believe they deserve and what they actually receive; between what they have and what they want; what they have and what they believe they deserve; what they don't have and others do (Crosby et al., 1986).

One young man, a high school student, explained poignantly his view of teachers' low expectations of him:

> Teachers and just people in general underestimate youth, black youth. And they think I'm supposed to be speaking ebonics, hanging out on the streets, dealing drugs and stuff. But and then when you get in schools and then you go overboard with your assignments because when you first go to school, you really don't know how the teachers grade, even though they give you their rubrics and their plain things

> to tell you how they score and grade you. With me, I always want to do the best I can. . . . So if they tell me to write a three-page essay, I write a fifteen page essay. So I do and then it's like, well, where'd you get this from? Did you copy out of a book? . . . They're always underestimating your ability to work.

This young man is expressing a searing assault on his dignity—imposed, according to him, by teachers' underestimation of his abilities and challenges to the work he has produced. Research by Delpit (1995), McDermott (1987), Merton (1948), Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), Steele (1997) and most recently De Luca and Rosenbaum (2001) conclude that teacher expectations and teacher treatment of youth are critical predictors of academic performance.

It is important to be clear. It is not the case that these youths simply internalize the messages that the broader society and their schools are targeting at them. They do not see themselves as worthless, but they recognize that the state and the broader culture do. This systematic drip feed of deprivation and insult bears academic, civic, and psychological consequences.

With the wisdom of "dual consciousness" (Du Bois, 1990), and through the hazy gauze of meritocratic ideology and false promises, these students speak through dual registers of yearning and anger, pride and shame, engagement and alienation, fear and desire. With the guillotine of high stakes testing overhead, they critically deconstruct the dominant ideologies about urban youth and then reproduce these same sentiments when asked to evaluate other students who are having difficulties.

This mimicry of dominant ideology is perhaps the ultimate sign of their desire to belong, to be citizens of the United States with a place at the table. These students sound, at once, like critics, consumers, and producers of a meritocratic ideology. Despite their willingness to engage, they are denied. They recognize, painfully, that they are being redlined out of the public sphere of public education, and corralled, instead, within the long, stretchy net of the other—better funded—public sphere: the criminal justice system. Drawing on the language and imagery of "carceral consciousness" (Ferguson, 2001; Haney, 1997) these students see themselves being prepared as "inmates" more than "students." Poor and working-class youth embody and speak through a critical consciousness that reveals, with sharp and cutting precision, the ways in which their bodies and minds are being exploited in larger schemes of the global economy and the prison-industrial-complex. A 10th grade girl explains what many alluded to:

> I'm in 10th grade. And what I like about my school, or what I don't like about my school is how they teach us like animals, like they cage us

> up and like they keep putting more gates and more locks and stuff and then they expect us to act like humans and I feel like if you treat us like animals that's how we going to act.

Another student, in another focus group, offered the following: "Yes, that be like putting all the bad kids in one school, that's just like putting, you know, just like putting them in jail. They going to be crazy." In a series of comments, a number of students expressed concern that educators "treat[ ] us like inmates" or think they are "coming in to teach killers."

Even those students who didn't feel assaulted by a prison like environment of schooling, those who have survived and flourished, graduated and are attending college, nevertheless notice the structural and systemic decay around them. We interviewed eleven graduates now in college. Almost all felt academically underprepared and most expressed the ambivalence of what Robert Jay Lifton has called "survivor guilt"—a blending of joy at one's accomplishments, tainted by the sense of the many left behind (Lifton, 1994).

> Leaving my high school was sad but I didn't do enough at [my high school] to make it better. It pains me to see what my younger brothers and sisters go through at [my high school]. I feel guilty about my opportunities, compared to others in my community and seriously considered dropping out of college several times. . . . You know, it's hard to know that I am getting an education while other people I know aren't. I guess I'm the lucky one, given all of the students who couldn't beat the stacked odds. (Chantal, graduate, now in college)

Even academic victories are contaminated by the knowledge that one's achievements sit precariously atop a mountain of others who have been failed by a system unwilling to educate poor and working-class youth. And yet, even with these statements of anger, we heard kernels of pride, hope and a yearning, for something to change.

FROM PRIDE TO SHAME: WANTING TO BELIEVE AS YOU WITNESS YOUR OWN SOUL MURDER

Across the focus groups, with current students, and in individual interviews with graduates, youth expressed evidence of strong, psychologically positive pride in self and community. Most plan to go to college. They envision futures as doctors, pediatricians, surgeons, nurses, lawyers, teachers, preachers, police, firefighters, foster parents, naval officers, engineers, singers, chefs, bartenders, and other colorful occupations. These youth, for

the most part, carry a strong sense of self, family and community. They recognize, proudly, that they have "skills" that other youth don't have, developed, largely, through confrontation with adversity: "I think we have more life experience"; "We have street knowledge"; "We're smarter, we're not just all proper"; "We know about struggling, trying to get to the top, and not just, you know bouncing right up there."

While the students express strong and confident selves *within* their communities and local worlds (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Davidson & Phelan, 1999; Eccles et al., 1993; Goffman, 1961; Lewis, 1992), the high school students also worry that they are academically handicapped by opportunities denied, ill equipped to attend a "real" or "serious" college, embarrassed by limited vocabulary, math skills and exposure. Michael Lewis (1992) argues that the experience of shame requires a self-conscious comparison to others or a recognition of failing to live up to a standard. These students know well the "lacks" that their education has instilled in them. They do not necessarily see themselves as less competent but indeed as less well educated. They are stung by the recognition and the fear that they can't compete academically with students who have had more privileged schooling. As one young woman, now in high school, explained: "[If kids from a wealthy school came in here right now,]I wouldn't talk because they would be more sophisticated or something, and understand words I don't know and I don't want to be embarrassed" (abbreviated quote in Fine's notes).

Echoing Carter Woodson (2000) at the beginning of the 20th century, students of color today still explain that they have been miseducated because people in government, throughout the state and even some of their teachers view poor and working-class youth, or urban youth, as unworthy of quality education. It was painful to listen as some students explained that they believe that schools *want* students to feel ashamed or embarrassed, so that the students will leave and classes will become smaller, with no adult responsibility for the loss of student bodies. These interviews reveal a raw sense of social disposability, and as penetrating, the students' sense of helplessness to change these condition. (Burhans & Dweck, 1995; Elliott & Dweck, 1988; Rholes, Blackwell, Jordan, & Walters, 1980; Seligman, 1991; Stipek & Tannatt, 1984).

The most concrete site of students' sense of their social disposability emerged when the students discussed "filth." Toward the end of each focus group we circled the room, asking each student to suggest one element of their ideal school. It was striking when a young girl whispered, with some initial hesitation but then elegant simplicity: "If I could have my ideal school, I guess I would have seats on the toilets and enough paper in the bathroom to clean yourself" (abbreviated quote in Fine's notes, not transcript). Another young man added, "If you go to a dirty school, you feel like you're dirty, you know, not clean" (young man, focus group).

Those environmental stressors recognized by psychologists and planners as most threatening to instruction and sense of self are the very structural conditions found in the plaintiff class, including facilities in disrepair, overcrowding, temperature problems, filthy bathrooms, mice, vermin, animal feces, and noise (Duran, 2002; Kozol, 1991; Lepore & Evans, 1996; Maxwell, 2000; Spivak, 1973). A number of studies demonstrate the specific psychological and physiological effects of environmental stressors such as crowding, noise, heat and other structural factors on students' capacity to concentrate and produce academic work and heightened the provocation of negative interactions and anger among and within the youth. Robert S. McCord (2002), in a systematic analysis of schools in San Francisco Unified School District concludes, "The findings of my school facility appraisal reported in this Declaration point to a pattern of disparate facility conditions associated with the racial and ethnic identity of SFUSD schools. This pattern of disparate conditions is likely to convey the message of racial inferiority that is implicit in a policy of segregation" (p. 12). A recent study conducted by Valkiria Duran (2002) systematically examines academic performance among children in 95 New York City elementary schools, with architects' assessment of building quality as the predictor of academic achievement. In a sophisticated statistical analysis controlling for race, ethnicity and poverty, Duran found that structural building quality alone predicts students' attendance which, in turn, bears directly on academic achievement. The links are significant. The youth concurred. In one focus group, a series of comments reveals how overcrowding affects learning:

> *Boy*: I just feel like it's deep—right now it's like 5,000 people overcrowded. It's way overcrowded. And it's like, you know, you don't even have to go there [inaudible], because basically they don't know if we go there, you can just come on campus or whatever. Like right now, we got three different tracks, and they don't know, like, if you don't have an ID, you just, like, you can tell them you have to take your ID picture of whatever and just go on in, and they'll believe you, because they don't really know who go there, because they've got so many kids in that school.
>
> *Interviewer*: But how does that affect you as a student?
>
> *Boy*: Because, like, they could let the wrong person on campus or whatever or, like [inaudible], and it's really too many people, just . . . last year, I had 42 kids in my algebra class.
>
> *Girl*: That's a lot.
>
> *Boy*: And people were standing up and . . .

Girl: Sitting on the floor.

Boy: Sitting on the cabinets and stuff and [inaudible]

Krenichyn, Saegert, and Evans (in press) document the psychological and physiological impact of crowding and other environmental stressors on youth. Evans, Kliewan, and Martin (1991) report that youth blood pressure rises, concentration diminishes and errors on difficult tasks multiply in the presence of noise. Educational building conditions can hurt student performance, accounting for 5–11% of student performance on standardized tests.

Andrew Baum, Jerome Singer, and Carlene Baum (1981) conclude that "Perhaps most important among aftereffects [of environmental stress] is the simple effect stress seems to have on the ability to adapt in the future. . . . If the amount of adjustment required is large enough, it may render the individual unable to cope and lead to severe consequences" (p. 26). Stephen Lepore and Gary Evans (1996) document the *cumulative* consequences of multiple environmental stressors on individuals' physiological and psychological resources, over time. They conclude that "Exposure to one stressor, particularly a chronic stressor, can reduce an individual's ability to adapt to another stressor and even increase vulnerability to subsequent stressors" (p. 359).

These schools not only stress youth and educators. The evidence suggests that they also fail to buffer poor and working-class youth from stressors they experience outside of school (Ancess & Ort, 2000; Meier, 1998). As Lepore, Saegert and others have documented, working and learning in conditions of environmental stress undermines the capacity to concentrate and complete difficult tasks, and may compromise students' and educators' abilities to adapt to future stressors. Like other environmental conditions that compromise one's psychological "immunity" system, working or attending a environmentally stressful institution may inhibit youths' and educators' abilities to cope in these and other circumstances.

"IT'S ON ME": REPRODUCING MERITOCRATIC IDEOLOGIES

While these youth were filled with a rich, edgy blend of pride, outrage, desire and embarrassment, the ultimate victory of neoliberal ideology was also voiced: self and victim blame. It would be naïve to imagine that these young people, growing up in the United States, sitting on the bottom of social hierarchies, being assaulted by denial and degradation, would be immune to the lure of meritocratic logic through which the victims of social injustice are positioned as the cause. And so we witness, across the focus groups, a rhythm of contradictory consciousness, a fleeting, infrequent but emotionally powerful discourse of self-blame for past mistakes (Darder et al., 1997; Fanon, 1952, 1961; Janoff-Bulman, 1992). We interpret this

discourse of self/victim blame as further evidence of alienation, the dialectical struggle between wanting to believe and reading the evidence of sustained structural abandonment.

While most of these youth attribute their miseducation to structural inequities, a strong undercurrent of student blame could be heard in the focus group conversations.

> If I sit in that class and choose to talk, then, hey, that's me. That's what I mean, I ain't going to be nothing in life. So if that teacher, even if she teaching a little bit of stuff, I know to sit down and listen to it because I mean, this all I'm going to learn. When I leave high school, I mean what else is there? I mean, on my transcript I'm not going to make it into a university. I could tell that now. I mean, all I got is a two-year college or one of them things that come on TV for computer class or Job Corps or something like that. (young female high school student)

> When I was in middle school, . . . I skipped a grade, went right to the ninth grade from seventh grade. I chose to mess that ninth grade year up. I chose to cut and shoot dice and be doing other things that I'm not supposed to do, you know. So that was my mistake, my fault. You know, in my tenth grade year, I destroyed it, you know. I made nothing of it all, nothing. I passed, I don't know how I passed, you know. So when I look at my transcript, I look at it and say this is where I failed. I know I won't be able to make it into a university because of me, not because of what peer pressure or what this principal said or what this teacher was teaching me. (male, senior)

While the students discussed, in the aggregate, structural problems of teacher turnover, overcrowding, absence of books, ineffective guidance counselors, and so forth, they also accepted much responsibility for their own behaviors. Speaking as critics, consumers and producers of meritocratic ideology, a whispered or shadow discourse flows through the groups, revealing self blame for past behaviors. Students who offered such analyses typically asserted a very punitive, superego-like judgment on their own biographies: Past mistakes do and should dictate a life of impoverished educational, social and economic opportunities (even if they don't for more elite/White students).

Students who view educational difficulties as largely their own fault also tend to be cynical about change. They hold very low expectations for personal transformation and for the effective intervention of adult educators. There is little sense that school can/will/should help them achieve positive educational outcomes (Fine, Freudenberg, Payne, Perkins, Smith, & Wanzer, 2002). Low expectations for adults convert into self-defeating attitudes

by which students hesitate to ask for help they need. One young man expressed it well: "I don't ask the teacher for nothing. I do it all on my own, or ask my friends for help." At just the age, and in just the schools, in which youth desperately need (and want) adult guidance and support, they are learning it is futile (or humiliating) to ask. "I don't ask the teacher for nothing" is of course a defensive posture, rejecting educators' help before educators ignore his request. These students then convert this defense into an internalized and unrealistic belief in personal responsibility. In the end, these students do not learn how to ask for or receive help, do not get the help and, in the likely event of failure, they conclude that it is "my fault."

Further, there is little recognition by these youths that the structural and academic conditions of their schools actually contribute, in large measure, to the disruptive behaviors that they and their peers engage in and witness. The disproportionate success of White and middle class youth is further legitimized, even as the privatized supports that wealthier students are able to enlist are erased from view. By crediting individual elite students with success, and blaming individual poor students for failure, the structural sources of privilege, "merit" and academic problems are "whited out".

Perhaps most damaging with respect to future outcomes, some of the youth have elaborated a very punitive ideology that mistakes they have made in the past will and should predict negative future outcomes. These youths have committed what psychologists would call a "characterological personal attribution" or "fundamental attribution error" for past mistakes. When people attribute bad outcomes to a moral flaw in themselves, it tends to be difficult to shed the shame, change behavior and/or believe yourself entitled to future, positive outcomes. They have internalized the broader societal message about poor youth: that they *deserve* bad outcomes from the time of their "mistakes" forward (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Poor children, especially poor children and youth of color, in contrast, tend to be held personally accountable for "mistakes" for which other children are given "second chances" (see Lefkowitz, 1998; Poe-Yagamata & Jones, 2000), with potentially dire consequences (see Ayers, Ayers, Dohrn, & Jackson, 2001).

LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR WHOM? FROM LOCAL ENGAGEMENTS TO CIVIC ALIENATION

In focus groups and surveys, the California youths express refreshing, deep, strong and committed social engagements *toward* family, community, and cultural groups. As Bowen and Bok (1998) demonstrate with youth of color who graduate from elite colleges, these are the very young adults most likely to display a commitment to give back to the community, to serve and model an ethic of community spirit. The poor and working-class youth who were interviewed described vividly just such a spirit of citizenship.

Table 2. What's important to you? Percentage who indicate that these goals are "very important"

How important is	High School ($n = 66$)	Middle School ($n = 20$)
Helping my family?	92%	100%
Getting more education?	89%	95%
Improving race relations?	58%	71%
Helping those less fortunate?	56%	70%
Being active in religion?	48%	32%
Being the best?	48%	40%
Working to stop prejudice?	46%	50%
Making my community better?	41%	75%
Leaving my community?	30%	21%
Serving my country?	23%	55%

Note: Choices were "not at all important" "somewhat important" "very important". These percentages indicate number who said "very important" divided by total responses for that item (which may, at times, be smaller than the overall *N*).

When asked about their future goals on the survey, the California high school students rated the following goals as very important: 92% helping family, 89% getting more education, 58% improving race relations, 56% helping those less fortunate and 41% making the community better. As their conversations suggest, and Table 2 confirms, these youth exhibit a strong desire and capacity to care, connect and be responsible.

Constance Flanagan and colleagues (1998) studied youths' political attitudes in seven countries:

> [S]chools are like mini polities where children can explore what it means to be a member of a community beyond their families, where they learn they are the equal of other citizens, and where they can learn how to negotiate their differences in a civil fashion. . . . [S]chools are settings where children develop ideas about the rights and obligations of citizenship. (p. 462; see also, Boyd-Franklin & Franklin 1999; Fallis & Opotow, 2002; Fine et al., 2002; Haney & Zimbardo, 1973; Miller, 2001)

We, too, were interested in the attitudes of these youths as citizens of a democracy, and so we interrogated their commitments to kin and social issues.

While voicing strong commitments to family, community, those less fortunate and race relations, the young men and women from California simultaneously reveal a stinging anger at schools that spreads outward toward other governmental institutions and the nation. While 92% consider it "very important" to help family, only 23% consider it "very important" to serve "my country." Their willingness to extend their caring and

commitments to the country, to beliefs in democracy and to a broad moral community called America, has been jeopardized (Flanagan, Bowes, Jonsson, Csapo, & Sheblanova, 1998; Yates & Youniss, 1998). Their alienation seems to stretch from schooling denied, to governments that betray and democratic promises that remain unfulfilled.

> It's like what is the Board [of Education] getting paid for and they can't even come fix our bathroom. They can't even mop our halls. So what they doing with that money? (ninth grade girl)

> They [government] fake like they are [trying to change things]. Because they go to the board meetings and they talk to Willie Brown and everything. And one of my friends is on the committee. And all the [inaudible], Willie Brown says oh, this is what, we're going to do this and everything and he's always talking about how San Francisco is one of the cleanest cities. And he's a wolf ticket seller. I mean, he lies, sorry. (11th grade boy)

As these comments reveal, the youth want nothing more than what most adults ask for today: public accountability. They want someone to assure that the state and the adults will fulfill their legal obligations to educate. They want someone to monitor inequities, intervene and remedy. The focus group and survey data suggest that poor and working-class youth and youth of color in California's most disadvantaged schools are being educated away from these "obligations of citizenship" and toward civic alienation. They are learning that their needs are irrelevant to policy makers and government leaders.

Table 3 reveals the suspicions these youths also hold of the economy and the government. Forty two percent of the surveyed high school students and 25% of those interviewed from middle school believe that labor market prospects will *always* be hard for them and their families. Forty percent of the high school students, and half of the middle school students believe that government is designed to serve the "rich." Only one third of the high school students and 20% of the middle school students think they can make a change in the workings of government. Finally, while 65% of the middle school youth view America as "basically fair and everyone has an equal chance to get ahead," this figure drops to 23% by high school.

There is a distressing wisdom in these data witnessed before; a dynamic of youth "learning their place" at the bottom of a race and class stratified society; learning that the government and public institutions will "not respond" to "us." And it worsens from middle to high school.

These youth reveal a broad based, sophisticated and critical understanding of social structures, the stability of inequity, and their "place."

Table 3. Attitudes about California and the United States government and society: Percentage who agree or strongly agree

	High School ($n = 66$)	Middle School ($n = 20$)
Getting an education helps you get a job	86%	85%
It makes me mad when I think of how some people have to live	71%	80%
No matter how well educated I am it will be hard for me to get a good job	42%	25%
The state government is for the rich and not for the average person	40%	50%
The government does not really care about what people like me and my family think	38%	15%
I have the ability to change the government	34%	20%
My school is as good as any in the state	26%	45%
America is basically fair and everyone has an equal chance to get ahead	23%	65%

Note: Percent indicating agree to strongly agree on a 5-point scale (from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*).

Researchers have documented how youth across race, ethnicity and class learn in schools about social stratifications and their place within social hierarchies (Cookson & Persell, 1985; Fine, 1991; Fine, Weis, Powell Pruitt, & Burns, 2004). What is remarkable in the California youth, however, was the combination of their strong commitments to give back and engage as citizens in local contexts, and their systematic recoiling from, and refusal to engage as citizens in the state and nation. Eager to participate actively and generously with family, neighborhood and those less fortunate, many of these young women and men refuse to serve as neglected or disrespected citizens of the state.

HEARING PROBLEMS

Poor and working-class youth, immigrant youth and youth of color who attend inadequate public schools routinely say that some teachers who don't care, that schools don't educate, and that they feel resultant anger, stress and anxiety (Fine, 1990, 1991, 1994; Fine & Powell, 2001; Fine & Somerville, 1998; Valenzuela, 1999; Wasley, Fine, King, & Powell, 1999). These California youth were no exception. As one young man in high school described his concern:

> Because before we had a teacher for like the first three weeks of our multi-culture class and then the teacher didn't have all her credentials so she couldn't continue to teach. And since then we've had like ten different substitutes. And none of them have taught us anything. We

> just basically do what we wanted in class. We wrote letters, all the class wrote letters to people and they never responded. We still don't have a teacher.

What was striking and distinct about the California youth, however, was the powerful sense of betrayal that these youths expressed about those audiences who refused to listen. It was not simply the case that these youth, like so many youth across America in under—resourced schools, were denied adequate education and felt helpless. Many of the youth had, in the face of overwhelming odds, tried to secure help. They had spoken up, protested, asked for a "real" teacher or raised an academic concern. In the face of organized resistance, what broke their spirits was that few adults listened and even fewer acted.

One young woman in a focus group offered:

> The teachers, they are there and then they are not there. One minute they're there, they're there for a while week, and then they gone next week. And you try to find out where the teacher, and they say, 'We don't have a teacher.' We outside the whole day, you just sit outside because there ain't nobody going to come through. We ask the security guards to bring us the principal over there. They tell us to wait and they leave. And don't come back. They forget about us. We ain't getting no education by sitting outside."

Students in another high school focus group were most agitated as they contrasted how their schools ignored their requests for quality education, but responded (if superficially) when the state investigated school policies and practices:

> We all walked out, 'cause of the conditions, but they didn't care. They didn't even come out. They sent the police. The police made a line and pushed us back in. Don't you think the principal should have come out to hear what we were upset over? But when the state is coming in, they paint, they fix up the building. They don't care about us, the students, just the state or the city."

These youth describe a doubled experience of disappointment and betrayal. Disappointed by the relative absence of quality faculty and materials, they feel helpless to master rigorous academic material and powerless to solicit effective help. Were that not enough, when these youth do complain, grieve or challenge the educational inequities they endure, they confront a wall of silence, an institutional "hearing problem." On surveys, only 34% agreed or strongly agreed, "People like me have the ability to change

government if we don't like what is happening." These schools are preparing a generation of youth who sustain ethical commitments to family, kin and community but believe that the government and the nation view them as unworthy and disposable. In such settings, youth report high levels of perceived betrayal by, resistance to, and withdrawal from persons in positions and institutions of public authority (Fine et al., 2002). These schools are helping to blunt civic engagement and produce, instead, civic alienation.

GOING TO COLLEGE?

Researchers Hanson (1994) and Trusty and Colvin (1999) suggest that adverse educational conditions produce cohorts of "lost talent." In the California data, the "lost talent" is operationalized in schools' dropout rates, percentage of graduates ineligible for the UC/CSU system and in students' rightful concerns about academic underpreparation.

As the surveys reveal, almost all of these youth expect to graduate from high school and attend college. A full 85% of surveyed high school students consider it likely that they will graduate from their present school, and 91% indicate that they would like to attend college after graduation. However, a full 50% feel that they are "less well" prepared for college than peers throughout the state of California. This represents a serious rise from the 15% of middle school students who report that they feel "less well prepared for college" than peers. As Table 4 suggests, the high school students appear to hold high aspirations for college, but are filled with anxiety about inadequate preparation.

In addition to the high school students who worried about under-preparation, a small group of graduates from these schools who are now attending college were interviewed. Given the high drop out rates of these schools and the few who go onto college, this sample of college going students represents some of the most academically successful graduates of their schools. And yet, most were surprised that they felt less competent than peers once in college. A number admitted to thoughts of dropping a course or dropping out of college.

Table 4. Percentage of students who expect to graduate and percent who feel less well, as well, and better prepared for college than their California State peers

	High School ($n = 66$)	Middle School ($n = 20$)
How likely is it that you will graduate from your school?	85%	53%
How prepared are you for college: less well than others, as well, better?	Less well: 50% As well: 39% Better: 13%	Less well: 15% As well: 70% Better: 15%

> I kept thinking they know more than I do. It seems like I had to do more than them, like I have to go to a lot of tutorial classes. What [my school] has offered me has made my transition to college really difficult. I'm pretty much intimidated in college. . . . I keep thinking, "Am I going to make it?" (female graduate, now at UC Berkeley)

The reflections of these graduates reveal the academic and psychological consequences of academic under-preparation, even for the "stars" of these schools:

> High school didn't provide me with any AP or honors classes so I was never exposed to college level work. When I took calculus my first year in college, I couldn't compete. I ended up having to drop the class and take an easier math course. The expectations and standards at [school] were too low. Many students felt like they weren't being exposed to the education they needed. We could see what students at Lowell High were getting, all the AP classes and textbooks. But we had to share most of our books and some we couldn't even take home. (male Graduate, Class of 2000, at UC Berkeley)

A high school graduate, now in college, explains:

> I just wasn't at all prepared, like compared to my sister. She's at UC Berkeley now but she went to Lowell. She was really prepared for college. Her school had lots of AP classes, she took 5 AP exams and passed 4. My school only had two that I could take . . . I didn't know what to expect or about picking majors or anything. I got really discouraged when everyone around me was doing so well and knew what was going on. It was really hard for me. I had to drop out of more than half of my classes my first year. I thought about dropping out of school all together. Luckily I had the support of my friends—other students who graduated from [my school] who told me to stick it out, to just try to go slower . . . I was feeling like everyone else was doing so well-why did Berkeley accept me?

These young women and men *thought* they were top students at their California high schools. Reflecting back on their high school years, these college students all admit that they were underchallenged. While they credit individual teachers and counselors who "really pushed me . . . taught me to keep an open mind and not to quit," they agree that teachers "could have given more work, they could have been harder on us." When asked, "What did you get from your high schools?" these young women and men report that high school was a context in which they developed a sense of

persistence, learning to beat the odds, to struggle, even when no one was in their corner. One young woman, now attending community college, explains: "In high school, I didn't feel any support, especially in terms of college going. I got some basics . . . but I don't feel prepared for college."

Another young woman was clear about what she learned in high school: that her school was not designed to help poor, immigrant children. When asked, at the end of the interview, "What would you want to tell a judge about your high school experiences?" this young woman, a graduate of a plaintiff school, currently attending community college, spoke eloquently: "Every day, every hour, talented students are being sacrificed. . . . They're [the schools] destroying lives."

CIVICS LESSONS

The schools in question are educating youth toward intellectual mediocrity and alienation, and away from academic mastery and democracy. The youth we surveyed and interviewed are the academic "success stories" of impoverished neighborhoods. These are not young women or men who have dropped out. They have not been selected for their critique, alienation or their knowledge of the lawsuit.

The youth are asking, desperately, for quality educators and rigorous curriculum. The evidence suggests that the more years these youth spend in plaintiff schools, the more shame, anger, and mistrust they develop; the fewer academic skills they acquire; and the more our diverse democratic fabric frays.

Given the political economy of the United States, the racial stratifications and the broad base of social inequities that confront poor and working-class youth, and youth of color, the question for this case asks to what extent do these schools reproduce broad social inequities, worsen them or reduce their adverse impact (cf. Anyon, 1997)? The evidence presented here suggests that these California schools substantially worsen already existent social inequities with psychological, academic and ultimately economic consequence. One may ask, further, isn't it the case that *all* public schools serving poor and working-class youth, and youth of color, suffer these conditions and produce these outcomes?

There is now a well established body of evidence, drawn from systematic studies of small schools in Philadelphia, New York City, Chicago and elsewhere, that demonstrates that public schools can be effectively organized for poor and working-class youth of color, to open opportunities, support their pride, satisfy their yearnings for quality education, prepare for higher education and cultivate a strong ethic of community engagement. Alienation is neither natural nor healthy. There is substantial evidence that

schools can interrupt, if not erase, the damage of the broader political economy (see Ancess, 2000; Cook, Cunningham, & Tashlik, 2000; Fine & Powell, 2001; Haycock, 2001; Meier, 1998). In the last 10 years we have conducted research with series of small public schools in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago and New Jersey with quality faculty and instructional materials, dedicated to rigorous education for students, including poor and working-class youth and youth of color. In these schools, all students are exposed to high quality educators and rigorous instructional materials. These schools work hard to create intellectual contexts of equity and excellence. Students learn about social stratification by researching history, economics and social movements. In contrast to the interviewed students in California, students in these schools learn about the possibilities and movements for social change and their responsibilities to participate in creating change (see Anand, Fine, Perkins, & Surrey, 2002; Ancess, 2000; Fine et al., 2002). Their social critique moves to hope and action, not despair and alienation.

In the California schools in the plaintiff class, students are indeed getting a "civics lesson" in which they are learning to feel powerless, alienated, shameful, angry and betrayed. The likelihood of democratic engagement by these youths and young adults is fundamentally threatened by their experiences in these schools (Flanagan et al., 1998). Even so, some have tried to speak out about these educational inequities, only to be ignored again. With this lawsuit, they are asking adults to be allies in the struggle for racial and class justice.

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