

PREFACE

STILL REMEMBER THAT DAY. It was sunny and cold. Irritated by what I thought was a deficient lecture on the politics of education, after class I marched from Ramseyer Hall to Ackerman Library on a mission. My mind wasn't racing. It was dragging with the same, persistent, wearisome internal dialogue I'd had with myself since elementary school. "I'm tired of this!" I thought. "For God's sake, I'm a PhD student, and this is *still* happening! With all the abundant research resources on this campus, my professor can only conceive of Blacks through a lens of pathology and deficit?!"

This professor was typical, not an outlier. Well-meaning as he believed himself to be, he had begun his opening lecture with a roster of statistics. You know the drill: Blacks are 80 percent of this and 90 percent of that.¹ The *this* and *that* were all bad. I remember raising my hand and asking the professor if he thought that by providing naked statistics (without any history or framing), he was reinforcing racist notions about Blacks. It seemed to me that of all places where discussion about the impact of the social-political-economic order would take place, a politics of education course would be among the foremost. At the time, I didn't know (and neither did the professor) that my question was a (very loose) paraphrasing of W. E. B. Du Bois in his study called the *Philadelphia Negro*. "A slum is not a simple fact, it is a *symptom*," Du Bois wrote. "To know the removable causes of the Negro slums of Philadelphia requires a study that takes one far beyond the slum districts."² Du Bois's scholarship forcefully situated and balanced the Black condition in a worldwide context (note his next book, *Africa and the World*) and within America's racially oppressive and capitalist frameworks.

The first three chapters of Du Bois's *Philadelphia Negro* are devoted, in his words, to "a study of the family, of property, and of organizations of all

sorts. It also takes up such phenomena of social maladjustment and individual depravity as crime, pauperism, and alcoholism.”³ Clearly, Du Bois did not barter away examining the functional in the Black community to focus exclusively on the dysfunctional (or behaviors that may be described as responsive to apartheid American society at the time).

Rather than my query to the professor leading to a deep Socratic teaching moment, there was utter silence in this classroom of PhD students. Stiff. Necked. Utter. Silence. And it was that utter silence which hung to me on my march to Ackerman Library. For once and for all, I was going to end this incessant assault on the truth about Black people.

During my childhood schooling, I thought the misrepresentation of Blacks was an oversight by White teachers unfamiliar with the detailed lessons on Black history that I had learned at home from my parents. But that day, as a doctoral student, I concluded that these teaching acts that haunted my classrooms were either evidence of woeful or purposeful miseducation. The perpetrators were culpable and inculpable, captured by and perpetuating their own miseducation and socialization, which were thoroughly embedded with consistent lies reifying Black pathology and inferiority.

In his 1997 book *Black Art and Culture in the 20th Century*, Richard Powell makes a statement about the misrepresentation of Blacks in art that I believe has relevance to the portrayal of Blacks in research. “These images took the form of outrageous characterizations of Blacks, their communities, and their alleged cultural practices,” Powell observed. “These grotesque beings were usually shown in impoverished settings with yard fowl, watermelons, and so on. Alternately backward, shiftless, ridiculous, childish, criminal, these characterizations faithfully appeared in . . . theatrical productions, popular literature, advertisements, children’s toys and other cultural documents.”⁴

The scholarly research community has much to learn from Black artists about “imaging” Blacks. Early Black artists and photographers used their art to lay claim to a position alongside, and yet distinguishable from, accepted categories of the great and the beautiful. For instance, the February 2012 issue of the *American Art Review* describes the work of the artist William Edouard Scott (1884–1964) as follows: “[He] created paintings and murals throughout his life that focused on elevating the stature of African Americans. Generating artwork from Paris, Mexico, Haiti, and the American South, as well as Indiana, his artwork frequently interpreted Blacks in

positions of prominence, a bold and uncommon approach for his time. He rejected the conventional portrayal of African Americans as menial laborers or historical enslaved persons.⁵

The imagery of Scott and Black artists of the Harlem Renaissance demanded that Black painters and photographers refute theories of Negro inferiority and display the bonds of affection and community among Blacks that were rarely acknowledged by White media. Black artists and writers led the way in creating a collective image of Blackness that launched Blacks and their voices into the realm of American public life. By contrast, the contemporary scholarly community has not yet crafted a new renaissance moment.

To be clear, a disproportionate share of Black scholarship (especially in the social sciences) has been devoted to correcting the record by critically reinterpreting history and debunking racist ideations and outright neglect in the research literature. James D. Anderson best critiques this miscasting of Blacks in research literature in his award-winning 1988 book, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935*, where he defeats the oft-repeated sociological conclusion that Blacks really do not place a premium on educational attainment:

Thus, it is ironic that in time a body of historical and social science literature was built up which tended to interpret Blacks' relatively lower levels of educational attainment in the twentieth century as a product of initial differences in attitude or cultural orientation toward learning and self-improvement. [However,] a careful examination of Blacks' enduring beliefs in education and their historic struggle to acquire decent educational opportunities against almost overwhelming odds leaves little room to attribute their relatively low levels of educational attainment to uncongenial cultural values or educational norms. That more was not achieved means little, for the conditions have been appallingly difficult.⁶

Were it not for Black scholars confronting profoundly entrenched (nearly concretized) mythical histories about the Black condition, the myths would remain and inure to the benefit of ignorance (and racial hostilities, misguided policy, and funding interventions). These myths are especially prevalent regarding the traditional history told about the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* legal decision, which established that racial segregation of children in public schools was unconstitutional and harmful to the

development of children, both Black and White. The traditional accounts, as Vanessa Siddle Walker and Ulysses Byas explain in *Hello Professor: A Black Principal and Professional Leadership in the Segregated South*, “reduced all Black schools to unilateral inferiority because of inadequate facilities,” while more recent histories “invite new dimensions into the traditional story.”⁷ These newer histories constitute a myth-breaking, an unmuting and telling of omitted facts and narratives that seek to show what actually happened and how things were in pre-*Brown* segregated Black schools.

Here I must return to that cold afternoon march to Ackerman Library, where I sought data to share with my professor to refute his negative assertions about Blacks. Instead, I happened upon (quite by accident) transcripts from the June 14, 1971, *Hearings before the Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity of the US Senate on the Displacement and Present Status of Black School Principals in Desegregating School Districts*. Since their publication, these transcripts have been cited in numerous books and scholarly articles about the tragic firings and demotions that befell Black teachers and principals during desegregation. Many scholars reference the transcripts in their striking descriptions of Black principals and teachers as critical community leaders and civil rights actors.⁸ With a few exceptions, the seminal research on Black principal and teacher displacement has focused exclusively on segregation-era Black teachers, not principals, presenting the teachers as community uplifters, activist leaders, and tireless foot soldiers “who [bred] dissatisfaction with and opposition to racial discrimination” as they pursued education for the “Black masses with religious zeal.”⁹

Previous research has examined the collective fate of Black principals and teachers, but only in a few states or specific school districts. In 2004, Linda Tillman produced a comprehensive analysis and bibliographic summary about Black principals pre- and post-*Brown*.¹⁰

Though the existing research literature consistently cites the 1971 Senate hearings on displacement of Black principals, none of it presents and deeply analyzes the transcripts’ most predominant and compelling fact: that the Black principals and teachers who were illegally demoted, dismissed, and fired as a result of White resistance to *Brown* almost always possessed academic credentials and professional experiences that exceeded those of their White peers and those who replaced them. Since the early 1900s, in fact, significant numbers of Black principals and teachers had, through a confluence of circumstances, earned master’s and doctoral degrees from some of

the nation's most prestigious universities—Columbia University, the University of Chicago, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Michigan, New York University, and Iowa State University, to name a few. The 1971 Senate hearing transcripts presented state-by-state reports showing that the displaced Black principals and teachers also held higher-level professional certificates and showed higher rates of certification than their White peers and those who replaced them.

Alongside the story of the displacement of this highly credentialed Black workforce is the remarkable and little known history of Black educators who, forced out of their own states by segregation, went on to earn doctoral degrees from nationally prestigious universities such as Harvard University, the University of Chicago, and the University of Pennsylvania in the 1920s.

This 1920s intellectual revolution among Black educators was in large measure (though not exclusively) led by Charles Thompson, the first Black person to earn a PhD in educational psychology from the University of Chicago (in 1925). In addition to being a compatriot of W. E. B. Du Bois (the first Black person to earn a PhD from Harvard, in 1895), Thompson served as dean of the Howard University Department of Education and, in 1932, founded *The Journal of Negro Education* (JNE). JNE is the oldest continuously published, refereed scholarly journal on issues incident to Blacks throughout the diaspora. Thompson served as a collaborator with Charles Hamilton Houston, Thurgood Marshall, and James Nabrit, the attorneys who crafted *Brown*, and he used JNE to document the condition of Black schools and colleges, explore the implications of segregation, and promote desegregation efforts led by the NAACP and other civil rights organizations. Thompson conceived of JNE as a vehicle for disseminating rigorous research aimed at eradicating racism and segregation. He and others purposely crafted an intellectual agenda that resulted in Blacks gaining academic credentials and social experiences at nationally prominent universities, which they then used strategically to go about the work of improving the academic heft of Black segregated schools in the South.

For three important reasons, the *1971 Hearings before the Select Committee on Equal Education Opportunity of the U.S. Senate on the Displacement and Present Status of Black Principals* is the primary resource informing this book. First, the more than one thousand pages of hearing transcripts and supporting documents (state reports, *amicus* briefs, interviews and personal testimonies, letters to state and federal officials, and civil and human rights

reports from the field) are the most comprehensive and robust evidentiary support about the annihilation of the careers of Black principals and teachers. The hearings are especially important because the personal testimonies and interviews were delivered by an array of individuals (some under oath) directly affected by Black educator displacement and/or supportive of their cause, including Black principals and teachers, government officials, civil rights attorneys, university researchers, and executive directors of professional associations.

The Senate hearings represent, first of all, a “pinning down of as much textual evidence” in the “words and works of the people” who lived this history—including both those who were affected by the atrocities described and those perpetuating the acts.¹¹ *Jim Crow's Pink Slip* seeks to reflect what is said about the historians' responsibility: to “teach us a variety of ways to read the past.”¹² This story seeks to present an unconsidered perspective about Black educators with the hope that a constructive tension is created with the telling of this history that moves forward our assumptions, inquiry, and conclusions about Black educators prior to and during the *Brown* era.¹³ Using document analysis and historical policy analysis (the latter, primarily viewed through the lens of relevant court cases), this book reflects a certain notion about history and myth-breaking: “History is a science in collecting, finding, penetrating; it is an art because it recreates and portrays that which it has found and recognized. Other sciences are satisfied simply with recording what has been found; history requires the ability to recreate.”¹⁴

Jim Crow's Pink Slip is another recreating of the story of *Brown* with the intention of forwarding knowledge and a shift in popular sentiment about Black educational excellence, the results of *Brown*, and the quest for a public school system that reflects democratic values.

Second, contained in the hearings are the state-by-state reports, legal briefs, research studies, newspaper articles, and investigative reports from the Black press and White news organs, as well as opinion-editorial articles examining the causes of Black principal and teacher displacement. The nationwide effort to collect and present these reams of data and reports before Congress was led by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Black educators, and the state affiliates of the American Teachers Association (ATA—a professional association of Black teachers and faculty in segregated Black schools and historically Black colleges/universities); civil and human rights organizations such as the Amer-

ican Friends Service Committee (AFSC); and largely White professional associations such as the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and the National Education Association (NEA)—all of which were firsthand witnesses to how desegregation was unfolding in the southern states. Remarkably, as early as 1918, AFT had called for equal pay for African American teachers, the election of African Americans to local school boards, and equal educational opportunity for Black children. This interracial collaboration of organizations to ferret out the truth about what was happening to Black principals and teachers represented a powerful counterpoint to the protracted and often violent White resistance to the *Brown* decision.

Third, the Senate hearing records of personal testimonies, *amicus* briefs, and especially the court cases make it clear that the firings, demotions, and displacements of Black principals and teachers were happening in purposeful and chronological lockstep and that resolution was needed to stop the loss of both. In short, decimation of the ranks of Black educators should not be viewed separately, but as a whole cloth, given the similar tactics used against and the resulting fates of Black principals and teachers in the dual-system states.

Due to their comprehensiveness, the Senate hearings are essential to the twofold purpose this work, which is (1) to tell the untold story of how Blacks strategized to gain exceptional academic credentials in an effort to transform segregated all-Black schools into spaces with intellectual heft; and (2) to upend the often-repeated myth that *Brown* ushered in newly found freedom for Blacks, which led to their abandonment of public school principalships and teaching positions in favor of new and greener employment pastures. Too much research and commentary has erroneously reached this ahistorical conclusion.

Sadly, too, the lie perpetuated by segregationists of the era to keep Black principals and teachers out of desegregating schools has made it into the research literature about *Brown*, as illustrated by an egregious assumption and assertion that most Black teachers were feebly qualified. To the contrary, in 1952, 72 percent of Black teachers were college graduates—an almost 40 percent increase since 1940 and a figure within a few percentage points of White teachers.¹⁵ In fact, in a 1965 study, *White and Non-White Teachers in the United States*, the NEA found that 85 percent of non-White teachers held a college degree, compared with only 75 percent of White teachers.¹⁶

In the literature that reflects this perspective (a perspective proven inaccurate by the 1971 Senate hearing records), there is little to no mention that, despite the injustices and stigma inflicted, Black people constructed a strategy and exercised leadership to make their schools' academic programs superior to Whites'; the primary method of achieving this goal was to build schools populated by exceptionally trained principals and teachers. For instance, in an obscure history of science achievement at all-Black Sumner High School in Kansas City, Kansas, prior to *Brown*, Manheim reports on a resounding theme of this book, the exceptional qualifications of Black educators in segregated Black schools. "In 1939," he writes, "44 percent of Sumner's teachers had master's degrees, and by the late 1950s, there were several PhDs at Sumner and Lincoln [the other Black high school]. Conversely, in White schools of the time, teachers rarely had more than bachelor's degree."¹⁷

In the dominant mythologies, Black principals and teachers who were discarded along with Black schools were inferior and shabby relics of a Jim Crow era. But what does it mean to recognize that these displaced Black educators were, in fact, superior in their academic credentials, professional licensure, attitudinal commitment to democratic ideals, consistent activism against the ideology of racism, and experience with integrated society?

Yes, it is true that Black schools in the South suffered as a result of resource deprivation, and yes, Black principals and teachers managed with what was available, in many cases succeeding against the odds. But let's be clear: the overarching goal of integration was to give principals, teachers, and students the full opportunities that only an open and integrated America could provide.

Jim Crow's Pink Slip's focus on displaced Black educators' credentials is essential, because these credentials stand as evidence against the ubiquitous lie of Black intellectual inferiority. Rather than confirming Black incapacity, these educators' credentials affirm their equality (and superiority) and self-agency. Their credentials affirm their determination not to be stymied by all the odds stacked against them in the Jim Crow South, and to maneuver this evil system to their and their communities' uplift and advantage. Emphasis on this essential fact makes this account historical and truth-telling in a way that other accounts about Black educators to date have suppressed or ignored.

This book is not an analysis of *Brown* or its implementation. Nor is it a panegyric to segregated schools and a romanticizing of Black principals and

teachers. Rather, it is the first book to tell the untold story of two generations of Black educators who, beginning in the early 1900s, accelerated their education credentialing, became the nation's most qualified group of educators, and built schools (literally and figuratively) that nourished Black students, only to be captured by the arc of racism, summarily discarded by the nation's public school systems, and replaced by less-qualified Whites.

I still wonder how and why the prolific citations of the Senate hearings—which from beginning to end focus almost exclusively on the exceptional credentials of displaced Black educators—have not been subject to detailed presentation or analysis in the hundreds of subsequent narratives and books about desegregation. It is as if the segregationists' assertions about Black schools and the professionals who inhabited them have been substantiated—without evidence, or in direct contradiction to the evidence—in the research literature and commentary about *Brown*.

Black principals and teachers of this era were not simply warm nurturers fondly captured in the loving memories of their students (though there are ample accounts of this warmth). This book about Black principals and teachers presents a different story—that of Black educators who were powerful models of intellectual authority and who sought, fought for, and gained exceptional academic credentials as part of their personal and communal fight for unfettered equality and full citizenship in American society. Their fight was against a life and future abridged by the ubiquitous insult that they, as Blacks, were intellectually or in any other way inferior. Their story is exemplified by leaders such as William A. Robinson, who in 1913, after earning a bachelor's degree at Atlanta University, a historically Black college/university (HBCU), went on to earn a master's degree from Columbia University in 1924 and to serve as president of ATA. As a teacher, principal, and state supervisor in segregated Black schools in Washington, DC, Tennessee, Georgia, and North Carolina, Robinson advocated for a progressive education and earned national prominence for his work to expand high school education for Blacks in North Carolina.

Robinson was not the only one of his kind; there were many, many Black women and men like him serving as principals and teachers in segregated Black schools. In fact, Robinson was more the rule than the exception. While there may be stories here and there about an individual Black educational leader who is an exemplar, the collective history of the many "Robinsons" who led Black segregated schools is too often overlooked or unknown. This

is their story: the story of a collective who used education to push against the oppressive arc of “race madness” and second-class citizenship.¹⁸

The history, research, and commentary about Black people is plagued by what I call the *theory of cultural elision*, which I define as an operative lens leading to the purposeful disregard, unseeing, and incomprehension of anything positive, self-determinative, or superior about Blacks. In the telling of history, the conducting of research, and the phrasing of social commentary, application of this operative lens results in valorizing White males and promoting Whiteness as normative and positive. To the contrary, anything positive or superlative about Blacks is reflexively left out—as if it simply could not be so. In most leading research, histories, and commentaries about Blacks, Blacks are seen as striving toward a White ideal and high mark. If, on the odd chance, Black excellence is acknowledged, it is usually tied to a single Black who is then exceptionalized in the research, history, and commentary.

In recent years, this theory of cultural elision played out in news stories about US President Barack Obama’s appointment to the *Harvard Law Review* during his days as a law student there. News accounts exceptionalized Obama for this achievement. To be sure, Obama was the first Black president of the *Review* and had served as one of the editors in years prior. However, the telling of his ascension to the *Review*’s presidency led many in the press to conclude, erroneously, that there had been no Black male editors of the *Review* prior to Obama. In fact, the first Black member of the *Review* was Charles Hamilton Houston, who served as an editor in 1921. (Incidentally, that same year, Jasper A. Atkins became the first Black elected to the *Yale Law Review*). Houston was a graduate of the all-Black Paul Lawrence Dunbar High School in Washington, DC, and a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Amherst College, where he was valedictorian of his class. He earned his law degree *cum laude* from Harvard University in 1923. Houston was followed by two other Black editors of the *Review*—William Henry Hastie and William T. Coleman. Hastie was also a Dunbar graduate and Phi Beta Kappa and *magna cum laude* graduate of Amherst College; he served on the *Harvard Law Review* in 1930 and earned his Harvard Law degree in 1933. Similarly, William T. Coleman was a *summa cum laude* and Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of Pennsylvania who was first in his class at Harvard Law School in 1946.

Ultimately, the purpose of *Jim Crow's Pink Slip* is to rewire the telling of the history of desegregation by focusing on the exceptionally credentialed

generation of Black educators who were purged from public schools in southern and border states during decades of White resistance to the *Brown* decision. I situate this story in the time period directly before *Brown* and through the administration of US President Richard Nixon. This story links the history of *Brown*, the rise of Black educational leadership, and its subsequent (orchestrated) demise after *Brown*. This book seeks to answer the following questions: Who were the fired, dismissed, and displaced Black principals and teachers (by name and circumstance)? How did they become more credentialed than their White peers, especially during the early- to mid-1900s, an era of constricted and legalized racial oppression? Why and how were Black principals and teachers purged from desegregating public schools, how did they fight back, and what were the outcomes of their battles? What implications does this history have for modern-day public schools and diversity in the educator workforce (specifically, in teaching and school leadership)?

In telling this story, I seek to challenge the quaint notions about Black educators of this era. In fact, these principals and teachers were prized by their students because they were learned, intellectual powerhouses who, as a group, understood the science of teaching and learning—because of their exceptional training—in ways their White educational counterparts did not. They necessarily maintained high standards in their teaching, served as mentors to their students modeling a commitment to democratic values and anti-racism, and equipped those students with strategies to fight the discrimination they would encounter when they went into the world, because these educators had fought and were continuing to fight the same fight.

The expulsion of Black principals and teachers was not exclusively a loss to Blacks and the South; it represented the most significant brain drain from the US public education system that the nation has ever seen. It was so pervasive and destabilizing that, even a half-century later, the nation's public schools still have not recovered.