Race and Power in the American Education System

Demonstrating the relevance of race and the ramifications of white privilege in the American education system

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Introduction

Former President Barack Obama claimed that in the American education system "we don't promise equal outcomes, but we were founded on the idea [that] everybody should have an equal opportunity to succeed…. That's an essential promise of America. Where you start should not determine where you end up" (Obama, par. 20). This promise, however, has never been fulfilled. The failure of the American education system to address inequality in a systematic way denies equal opportunity to many, particularly to students of colour. African Americans and other students of colour are being deprived of the basic civil rights that the nation was founded on – the right to equal opportunity. For even though America might have come a long way in being true to its creed of equal opportunity for all its citizens, data show that there is still a long way to go.

American society is still rife with racial discrimination and inequality. In education, "[s]tudents of color are being shortchanged across the country when compared to their white peers" when it comes to per-pupil spending in public schools and they dominate the lists of suspensions and drop-out-rates (Spatig-Amerikaner 2). The same problem manifests itself in employment as well. "In 2013…12.4 percent of black college graduates between the ages of 22 and 27 were unemployed. For all college graduates in the same age range, the unemployment rate stood at just 5.6 percent" (Jones and Schmitt 1). As the number of students of colour is increasing, America faces an education system failing to fulfil the constitutional right to equal opportunity for what will be the majority of its students in the foreseeable future.

When looking at the problems of the past, unjust treatment of the African American population is striking. African Americans have had to be treated as second-class citizens by a brutal system for centuries and still have to abide a system that in many cases favours those whose skin is white. The failure to fully implement the Reconstruction Amendments, the opposition towards African American progress and the relentless, brutal and violent treatment of people of colour all reveal a dark side of American history. To assume that systemic discrimination is all part of the past would be naïve and wrong. While the Unites States has worked towards becoming an inclusive society, in many realms – among them education – African Americans are still often treated as second-class citizens today.

However, the reality of discrimination is not universally recognised. A survey conducted by Pew Research Center found "that black and white adults have widely different perceptions about what life is like for blacks in the U.S." ("On Views of Race and Inequality…", par. 5). The survey reveals that "[b]lacks, far more than whites, say black people are treated unfairly across different realms of life" and whereas only 11% of whites are sceptical of the necessary changes ever being made, over 43% of blacks are express doubt on the same matter ("On Views of Race and Inequality…", par. 1). The survey focuses on the treatment of African Americans in the U.S., and the African American participants list racial discrimination, poor job opportunities and low-quality schools as "major reasons that blacks may have a harder time getting ahead than whites" ("On Views of Race and Inequality…", par. 5). The reasons for these discrepancies can be many. However, in order to solve the problem of racial inequality in today´s society it must first be acknowledged.

In the last forty decades social inequality and racial disparities in multiple spheres have been highly debated and researched. Increased focus on the relevance of race during the Civil Rights Movement gave rise to several theories on the prevailing racial disparities in society. Among these theories was Critical Race Theory (CRT). As most other theories, CRT is debated and deemed by some to have a radical perspective on the relevance of race. According to Gloria Ladson-Billings, "Whites know they possess a property that people of color do not and that to possess it confers, aspects of citizenship not available to others" (15). Ladson-Billings further explains that this tenet of whiteness as property and other main tenets of CRT can help us better understand the inequity in the education system and states that "[i]f we look at the way that public education is currently configured, it is possible to see the ways that CRT can be a powerful explanatory tool for the sustained inequity that people of color experience" (18). CRT might thus shed some light on the devastating reality we are currently facing.

By examining the history of African American education through the eyes of Carter G. Woodson, Carol Anderson and more, this paper will demonstrate that African Americans have systematically been oppressed in favour of whites throughout history in relation to educational opportunities and in other areas of society. Recent data and research on the disparities in educational opportunities will demonstrate that African Americans are too often excluded from full participation in a system rife with inequality. In the conclusion, potential remedies and promising initiatives will be described. The

unequal access to educational opportunities creates knock-on effects that pervade society. Briefly, the thesis will mention the intersection of race and education in Norway.

Critical Race Theory

As many of the arguments that are to be made in this thesis are influenced by Critical Race Theory (CRT), an initial discussion of the history and tenets of CRT appears useful. Marvin Lynn from the University at Maryland explains that "CRT begins with the notion that racism is a natural and, in fact, necessary part of a society" (116). *Natural* because the foundation of American society is based on principles of white supremacy and *necessary* in order to maintain a system that favours "whiteness". This is further supported by Monica E. Allen at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte who argues that "[r]acism is so ingrained in American culture that it appears to be normal and natural" (Allen 35). Ladson-Billings and Tate from the University of Wisconsin explain the theory as "a radical critique of both the status quo and the purported reforms" in relation to education (Ladson-Billings and Tate 62). Thus,"[a] critical race analysis of Black education starts from the notion that education, as we know it, was never intended to have liberatory consequences for African Americans", but has rather been used as another tool to maintain the inequality in society (Lynn 116). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the validity of CRT as an explanatory tool for educational inequality has been debated and deemed by some to be too narrow to grasp the complexity of the inequity. Others deem the theory to be nihilistic and merely depressing. Nevertheless, the theory might still make important contributions to the discussion of how to better the situation.

As with most complicated theories, definitions are elusive and contested. Allen explains that "[i]n the past, educators focused on critical race research, particularly in the effort to identify and challenge the macro- and micro-aggressions that have been experienced by students of color" (Allen 33). However, recent research on CRT "is based on the premise that CRT challenges the experience of Whites, in society, as the standard to follow" (Allen 34). More focus has been placed on curriculum, policy and pedagogy (Allen 33-34). This is in line with Colleen A. Capper´s view of CRT as a dynamic and ever-changing theory or framework – and not something static. In her 2015 paper on CRT, Capper sought to investigate how CRT might help inform teachers about how to eliminate or reduce racism in education. Through analysis of various CRT literary works,

Capper lists six tenets of CRT that might help us better understand the theory. Since the selection of tenets listed by Capper is based on a plethora of research, Capper´s list appears to cover a large part of the theoretic field of CRT. Thus, the tenets of CRT will be addressed below.

Firstly, Capper claims that the primary tenet of CRT is the "permanence of racism", meaning that racism is, has been and will always be a permanent part of American society (Capper 795). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) state that even though "the world of biology has found the concept of race virtually useless", "race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States" (49 and 48 respectively". Consequently, for CRT "the strategy becomes one of unmasking and exposing racism in its various permutations" (Ladson-Billings 1998 11). Moreover, Capper argues that racism can be found both consciously and unconsciously in society and people´s minds. Because "[t]he pervasiveness of societal racism remains true even with seeming societal racial gains and persons of color occupying positions of power and prestige in U.S. society", Capper stresses the importance of taking action now (800).

Furthermore, the second tenet of CRT is, according to Capper, whiteness as property. This tenet "refers to U.S. history where property rights were and are more important than human rights" (Capper 803). During slavery the ability to own property was "based simply on skin color. Put simply, to be White meant something then, means something now, and will always mean something—an automatic affordance of rights and privileges—that Whiteness is property" (Capper 803). Capper goes on to explain how awareness of this tenet is vital for leaders working for equality in order to "help [them] anticipate, understand, and respond to the fierce backlash they will experience from White middle-/upper-class families... protecting their property interests" (807). This tenet focuses on how the curriculum silences students of colour and how the school system helps keep the curriculum as white property.

Moreover, the third tenet of CRT includes counternarratives and majoritarian narratives. Counternarratives reveal a different side of the majoritarian narratives that are told. For while the latter aims to maintain the racial gap in society, counternarratives convey "the importance of personal experience shared via narratives of people of color" (Capper 807). Barbara J. Love from the University of Massachusetts explains majoritarian narratives as "told by members of dominant/majority groups, accompanied by the values and beliefs that justify the actions taken by dominants to insure their

dominant position"(Love 228-229). CRT thus urges leaders and educators to tell counternarratives and to "seek the perspectives of students, families, and communities of color and make public their stories" (Capper 810). Ladson-Billings explains this phenomenon of counternarration by stating that "[counternarratives] add necessary contextual contours" to myths and presuppositions (1998, 11). Counternarratives might thus provide more nuance and perhaps also make it easier for students to relate to and understand their peers.

The fourth tenet focuses on interest convergence. Capper explains this tenet as the belief that "progress for Blacks is achieved only when the goals of Blacks are consistent with the needs of Whites" (795). In order to achieve equity in the education system and society, CRT suggests that efforts "must be framed in such a way that middle- and upper-class Whites in the community will also benefit; otherwise, White families will believe the racial equity work is not worth doing" (Capper 814). Thus the focus should be on how everyone would benefit from equity, not just African Americans.

Furthermore, the fifth tenet of CRT deals with the concept of colour blindness. Capper claims that this concept manifests in two ways, where the first is when teachers "claim to not see a student's color or claim that race does not matter, and [the second is] when educators do not realize the ways their school is not race neutral and reflects White culture" (816). This is supported by Allen who states that "CRT challenges … the concepts of objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity" (35). Jeff Zorn from the Santa Clara University claims that "[e]ducators may think they sound enlightened in saying, ´I don't see race; I treat all the children the same, ´ but according to CRT, avoiding race means systematically underserving students of color" (Zorn 204). Claiming to not notice the colour of a person´s skin is, according to CRT, naïve and not true. Awareness of the racial injustice in the education system and the impact it has on students´ lives is necessary in order to deal with the problems at hand.

Lastly, CRT crosses racial binaries – e.g. black and white – as it encompasses the concept of intersectionality. Allen explains this as "[involving] the assumption that People of Color not only experience oppression because of race, but also because of other identities" (36). Because people can be discriminated against and oppressed based on gender, religion, sexuality, disabilities etc., CRT research "address race across races" and "race its intersections with other identities" (Capper 818 and 819 respectively). CRT

thus emphasizes the importance of researching and addressing several aspects of human identity, not solely race.

Since it first emerged in the 1970s, CRT has faced criticism. As it became a prominent theory on education at the time, an increasing number of articles were written on the theory. According to Zorn, there "has come a plethora of publications taking CRT tenets—which range from overstated to dead wrong—as unquestioned first principles". Zorn is one of the many who claim that CRT is a "reductive" theory that "depicts children of color as perpetual victims [and] their learning problems of interest only as markers of white supremacist conspiracy" (Zorn 204). Zorn further points out that "[i]f CRT were correct, ´White privilege´ should lead to uniform advantage and "non-White" oppression to uniform deficit. Instead, all racial groups exhibit huge ranges of accomplishment" (208). Data supporting this can be found when looking at the educational attainment, particularly participation in AP courses, of Asian Americans. According to the College Board, "[a]mong students with high potential for success in AP science course work 6 out of 10 Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander students took any such AP science course" (The College Board 29). In comparison, only 4 out of 10 white students did the same (The College Board 29). In other words, if CRT and its beliefs about white privilege were entirely correct, Zorn claims that whites should surpass any accomplishment made by any other race. However, this is not the case.

Nevertheless, connections to CRT will be made throughout this work in an attempt to gain a new perspective on the problems at hand. Much like other theories on education and race, CRT can be deemed by some to be extreme or perhaps radical. However, it is easy to read data on the educational situation for African Americans and the history of gruesome oppression by whites and fail to see the bigger picture and that the problems in the education system are merely part of a plethora of problems relating to inequality. Thus, the purpose of incorporating CRT throughout this work is to connect different spheres in society and demonstrate that all of these spheres are pervaded by unequal and unjust treatment of marginalized groups, e.g. African Americans.

A CRT analysis of this thesis

When researching CRT and its tenet about majoritarian narratives, the author of this essay was faced with a series of considerations that needed to be made when shaping the narrative of this thesis. Zorn´s article and the idea of depicting African Americans as merely victims of a brutal system and Love´s argument about how the debate about the educational attainment gap is just another majoritarian story really challenged the perspective of this thesis. Awareness of the issue of majoritarian narratives suddenly had me question and examine the very idea behind this thesis and more importantly emphasized what I desperately wanted to avoid – namely depicting African Americans as passive, incapable of change, submissive and hopeless.

There are several factors complicating the narrative of this thesis. First and foremost, the author of this essay is not an African American student experiencing the racial disparities demonstrated here – but rather a white Norwegian student who has felt the privileged side of racial disparities. Simply put, one can easily argue that this is not my story to share. Or even more daringly put – that the fact that I am creating this narrative makes this into another majoritarian story where whites are to save the poor African Americans from the situation they are in. However, this is *not* the aim of this thesis. The colour of my skin does not make me blind to racial discrimination and unjust treatment of people whose skin is darker than mine. The borders of my country do not set the limit for my humanity. And hopefully, my own experience with racism, white privilege and discrimination does not degrade my ability to think critically about the situation at hand.

History of African American education

Carter G. Woodson on The Mis-education of the Negro

In his book *The Mis-education of the Negro,* Carter G. Woodson argues that African Americans have been indoctrinated to submission throughout history. This classic study of African American education was first published in 1933. After working as a coal miner in West Virginia for the better part of his youth, Woodson studied for several years and ended up being the second black man to ever achieve a doctorate degree from Harvard

University. However, his rise in the academic world is not his only accomplishment. Woodson also founded the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, and has been referred to as the father of black history by the famous historian Lerone Bennett Jr. and many more. The unstudied history of African Americans is one of the major concerns for Woodson in his book *The Mis-education of the Negro* and would be a topic of interest for the remainder of his career.

According to Woodson, "[t]he idea of educating the Negroes after the Civil War was largely a prompting of philanthropy… [T]he freedmen could not expect much sympathy or cooperation in the effort to prepare themselves to figure as citizens of a modern republic" (Woodson 23). This is further supported by Levine and Levine from the State University of New York at Buffalo, who state that "[u]nderstanding that former slaves had to be assisted to become self-sufficient, and that education would be an important priority, the Union Army first looked to private philanthropy" (448-449). The success of these initiatives varied greatly, and most of the responsibility regarding education was on African Americans themselves.

Furthermore, Woodson claims that African Americans are being culturally indoctrinated and convinced of their inferiority. He states that "…in most of the Negro colleges and universities where the Negro is thought of, the race is studied only as a problem or dismissed as of little consequence" (19). African Americans are either studied as a group that needs help in building themselves up or as a group that entails a lot of problems such as unemployment or homelessness. This is closely linked to the lack of African American representation and presence in books and the curriculum in schools. The students read history written by mostly white people about the white race´s accomplishments and enslavement of the African American race. Thus, "[t]he thought of the inferiority of the Negro is drilled into him in almost every class he enters and in almost every book he studies" (Woodson 19).

This feeling of inferiority is further established through the teaching of history. Woodson claims that the teaching of white man´s history has made "the Negro feel that he had always been a failure and that the subjection of his will to some other race is necessary the freedman, then, would still be a slave" (57). In the eyes of Woodson, this need for submission is so deeply rooted in the minds of African Americans that if others do not oppress them, they will still submit. This becomes clear when reading one of the most compelling parts of the book; "[i]f you can control a man´s thinking you do not

have to worry about his action… If you make a man feel that he is inferior, you do not have to compel him to accept an inferior status, for he will seek it himself" (57). Thus, after centuries of slavery, discrimination, segregation and oppression, the very nature of African Americans is that of an inferior. This is further supported by others who claim that the history of African Americans "[has] been ignored or told only through a white filter" (Genzlinger, par. 3). Also in line with this argument, is critical race theory and its tenet of whiteness of property which argues that "the curriculum remains the most valued property in schools" (Capper 804). According to CRT, whites will fiercely protect a curriculum that upholds stereotypes such as ignorant people of colour in desperate need of the white man´s help in order to thrive.

Consequently, the thoughts of submission and inferiority that have been indoctrinated into African American for years and years become self-fulfilling prophecies. This is evident when African Americans have "learned from their oppressors to say to their children that there were certain spheres into which they should not go because they would have no change therein for development" (Woodson 53). African Americans have, according to Woodson, settled for the fact that they will never have equal opportunity and thus bestow this idea upon their children. They "[accept] this as final and contends for such meagre consideration as the bosses may begrudgingly grant him" (Woodson 65).

Additionally, Woodson claims that the education that African Americans gained did in fact *not* equip them for employment or self-sufficiency or "bring their minds into harmony with life as they must face it" (37). Woodson thought that the meaning of education was "to inspire people to live more abundantly, to learn to begin with life as they find it and make it better" (32). However, the education of African Americans at the time did no such thing. This manifested in employment, where African Americans "[learn] to follow the line of least resistance rather than battle against odds for what real history has shown to be the right course" (Woodson 63). Not only then were African Americans unequipped to make it on their own, they were also not aware of the situation at hand. Referring to this, Woodson claims that "[n]o Negro thus submerged in the ghetto, then, will have a clear conception of the present status of the race or sufficient foresight to plan for the future…" (63).

Not only does the education of African Americans not equip them for real life, but history has shown that they have been deprived of professional education when they

needed it the most. One example of this, as described by Woodson, is when "law schools... closed during the wave of legislation against the Negro, at the very time the largest possible number of Negroes needed to know the law for the protection of their civil and political rights" (54). When they needed to learn about political and civil rights, they were robbed of that opportunity. "In other words, the thing which the patient needed most to pass the crisis was taken from him that he might more easily die" (Woodson 54). In the eyes of Woodson, "[th]is one act among many others is an outstanding monument to the stupidity or malevolence of those in charge of Negro schools, and it serves as a striking demonstration of the miseducation of the race" (54). When looking at these actions through the lens of CRT, they can be seen as efforts to protect the whiteness of property (Capper 804).

Woodson also goes a long way in his explanation as to how segregation has been made possible. When explaining segregation as being "the most far-reaching development in the history of the Negro since the enslavement of the race", he refers to it as "a sequel of slavery" (65). Woodson argues that many African Americans have accepted a Jim Crow-America that "stamp[s] upon him... the badge of his ´inferiority´" (65). He claims that the miseducation has made the segregation possible, and that at times "[it was] so subtle that men [had] participated in promoting it without knowing what they were doing" (65). In turn, segregation destroys the opportunity for development for African Americans and keeps them in the ghetto. For "[i]f the Negro in the ghetto must eternally be fed by the hand that pushes him into the ghetto, he will never become strong enough to get out of the ghetto" (Woodson 68). This is also in line with CRTs tenet of majoritarian narratives that "make racial achievement inequities and racial segregation and stratification in...normal, acceptable, and in no need of change" (Capper 809). As explained by the discussion of majoritarian narratives above, majoritarian narratives are so subtle that they "obscure the ways people of color are subordinated by the rules, policies, and everyday procedures of organizational and institutional life" (Love 229).

What, then, is the solution to this indoctrination? How can the African American race advance beyond the limitations that have been set for them? Woodson stresses the fact that "[n]o one else can accomplish this task for the race" and that if they "persist in permitting themselves to be handled in this fashion they will always find some one at hand to impose upon them" (72). According to Woodson, "[h]istory shows that...those

who have not learned to do for themselves and have to depend solely on others never obtain any more rights privileges in the end than they had in the beginning" (104). He insists that African Americans "have been taught facts of history, but never learned to think" and that "the Negro has never been educated… [but] merely been informed about other things which he has not been permitted to do" (82 and 85). Woodson then goes on to request an education system that exposes its students to African literature, teaches them economics in order to better their own financial situation and "stud[ies] also the history of races and nations which have been purposely ignored" (89).

Conclusively, Woodson profess that "the most important task to which all people must give attention" is how to teach African Americans how to make a living (91). He claims that one of the main problems of the education system, and hence the progress of the race, is that the schools are teaching the students things they are unable to apply to their own lives. They do not need to be taught what others have accomplished if they do not learn to accomplish anything for themselves. Many African Americans are settling for jobs that barely pay their expenses, and do not search for other opportunities. Woodson then argues that "[i]f the Negroes of this country are to escape starvation and rise out of poverty unto comfort and ease, they must change their way of thinking and living" (94). Will it be difficult? Surely. But "like all other oppressed people, [African Americans] must learn to do the ´impossible´" and rise above the circumstances (Woodson 39). After all, "[n]o man knows what he can do until he tries" (Woodson 104).

Carol Anderson on *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide*

Whilst Woodson claims that cultural indoctrination of African American students into inferiority is one of the main reasons as to why the race has not progressed further, Carol Anderson looks at the problem from a different perspective. Anderson, the Charles Howard Candler Professor and Chair of African American Studies at Emory University, argues that white rage towards the advancement for African Americans is a key factor hindering progress. She claims that "[w]ith so much attention focused on the flames, everyone had ignored the logs, the kindling" (Anderson 3). Everyone had ignored the white rage "[working] its way through the courts, the legislatures, and a range of government bureaucracies" (Anderson 3). Through the course of the book, Anderson

connects important events in the history of African Americans to the reactions fuelled by white rage that followed in their wake.

In the eyes of Anderson, "the trigger for white rage…is black advancement" (3). "[B]lackness with ambition, with drive, with purpose, with aspirations, and with demands for full and equal citizenship" fuels the rage and resentment towards a group who is evidently asking for too much (Anderson 3). Ever since the first slave ships arrived to America, African Americans have had to face unfathomable obstacles in their quest for equality. Not only were there unequal access to quality education at the time – to say the least – but we are still "[g]rappling with America´s trenchant refusal to open up the doors to quality education" for all its citizens today (Anderson 91). Throughout her book, Anderson highlights five major movements towards black advancement and their respective setbacks.

In the first part of the book, Anderson demonstrates how the failure to implement the Reconstruction Amendments was fuelled by white rage. Instead of acknowledging the history and seeking to atone the pain bestowed upon African Americans during slavery, president Lincoln "had neither the clarity, the humanity, nor the resolve necessary to fix what was so fundamentally broken" (Anderson 9). Even though "African Americans had received nothing but rape, whippings, murder, the dismemberment of families, and forced subjugation, illiteracy, and abject poverty", "[e]very state admitted to the Union since 1819…embedded in their constitutions discrimination against blacks" (Anderson 11 and 12). Especially detrimental was the disenfranchisement of African Americans. Consequently, "[i]n this reconstruction of the Reconstruction… African Americans now had neither citizenship, the vote, nor land" (Anderson 18).

Furthermore, Anderson claims the derailing of the Great Migration to be the second opposition towards black advancement. "[M]ore than one million African Americans who were determined to leave the stultifying air of Jim Crow" and headed North (Anderson 40). Anderson argues that despite "´freedom of movement´ [being] a treasured right in the nation´s political lexicon", "an array of obstacles and laws to stop African Americans…from exercising [that] right" (41 and 42). African Americans were tired of the brutal and unjust treatment they received from white Southerners. Additionally, the lack of education for African Americans in the South was also one of the reasons as to why many escaped to the North. As a response to the Great Migration, "the

white South took full advantage of the fog of war to keep African Americans from migrating north" (Anderson 53).

Suffering from the destructive legacy of chattel slavery, African Americans left the antebellum South. The North, however, was not Promised Land, and African Americans experienced discrimination and wage slavery in the factories of the North. They were crammed into tight neighbourhoods with poor living conditions, as racially discriminative housing restrictions was passed in order to prevent the value of houses in all white neighbourhoods of decreasing. When African Americans attempted to cross the neighbourhood border lines and move in to white residential areas, their houses were often rampaged and they were attacked. Once again, African Americans with aspirations and hopes for the future were met with blatant opposition.

Thirdly, Anderson demonstrates that the opposition of *Brown v. Board of Education* was also fuelled by white rage. As long as African Americans had lived in America, the land of the free had failed to provide equal educational opportunities regardless of race. The ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* "upheld the constitutionality of racial segregation under the "separate but equal" doctrine" (History.com Editors, par. 1). It might not come as a surprise that these segregated schools, both in the North and South, were unequal in regards to their quality of education. When discussing these disparities, Levine and Levine note that "[b]lack schools were frequently overcrowded, poorly built, and minimally equipped" (450). Black schools struggled to find teachers, and the school supplies and books were usually second-hand materials that the white schools no longer needed. Sadly, segregated schools and unequal conditions would remain until 1954.

The legal team of the NAACP aimed to "force the states to equalize educational opportunities, as *Plessy* required, insisting they finance, create, and maintain black law schools and doctoral programs of the same calibre as the ones labelled ´whites only´" (Anderson 67). Then, in 1954, The Supreme Court unanimously ruled racial segregation to be unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education.* This ruling was, according to Anderson, "but a declaration of war" (75). White opposition to the ruling took many forms, and "the respected elements in white society…condoned complete defiance of and comtempt for" across the country (Anderson 75-76). Integration opponents engaged in a movement referred to as "Massive Resistance" and "[b]lack children were spat upon, cursed, and assaulted on the way to school by white teenagers and

housewives" (Ifill, par. 7). Once again, the white opposition to African American advancement was brutal and vicious.

More recently, the *Grutter v. Bollinger*-case incorporated questions of discrimination, rights and education. A white Michigan-resident named Barbara Grutter was denied access to the University of Michigan Law School in 1997. The Law School admitted to using "race as a factor in making admissions decisions" and based this on an interest in establishing a diverse student body ("Grutter v. Bollinger", sec. 1). The question at hand was thus whether or not the Law School had violated Grutter´s 14th amendment rights, i.e. the Equal Protection Clause, "or Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964" ("Grutter v. Bollinger", sec. 2). The Supreme Court ruled that no violations had been made, and that race could be one of many factors influencing admissions. Based on the fact that the intention of the Law School was to establish diversity, Justice Sandra Day O´Connor wrote that "the Law School's race-conscious admissions program does not unduly harm nonminority applicants" ("Grutter v. Bollinger", sec. 2).

Anderson goes on to demonstrate how "[o]nce again, the United States moved from the threshold of democracy to the betrayal of it" by two tasks executed by presidents Nixon and Reagan (99). Due to the persistence and courage of many African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement, "[i]nequality had begun to lessen" (Anderson 99). The Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 significantly improved the conditions for African Americans at the time. However, through "redefin[ing] what the movement was really ´about´" people falsely believed inequality to be gone as long as "whites only" signs were removed (Anderson 99). Also, the "multigenerational devastation that African Americans had suffered" had apparently vanished. By creating a different narrative and minimizing the need for the movement, white rage manifested itself. The significance of the Civil Rights Movement was also met by a "second key manoeuvre" (Anderson 100). This manoeuvre involved redefining racism and "isolating [it] to only its most virulent and visible form" (Anderson 100). By doing this, people were able to clear their conscience of any lesser forms of racism. An image was created of a country of equal opportunity and that was colour blind. Thus, history was rewritten and the narrative of the Civil Rights Movement was altered. A CRT analysis of these turn of events would focus on how the narrative became a majoritarian one and how "colorblindness is a way to insist that race does not matter and to dispute

and deny the experience of African Americans, while preserving the privilege of white people to be surprised when race is mentioned" (Love 230).

Finally, Anderson claims that the election of the United States´ first African American president to be "the ultimate advancement, and thus [required] the ultimate affront" (5). She claims that at the time of Obamas inauguration "the mirage of hope hung in the air" (138). By trying to prove that Obama´s victory was "the sordid outcome of a brazenly stolen election tied directly to… new voters" (Anderson 141). In the 2008 election, Obama´s opponent Sen. John McCain "embraced the theory that ACORN, a community organizing group previously embraced by Democrats and Republicans, was helping to rig the election for Barack Obama by filing fake voter registration forms" (Weigel, par. 2). These allegations have yet to be proven. However, the allegation of voter fraud fuelled the implementation of a series of "´protect-the-ballot-box´ initiatives" (Anderson 143).

These initiatives proved that "disfranchisement [had] become more subtle, more palatable, and more sophisticated" (Anderson 143). Ranging from requiring "government-issued photo IDs in order to vote" to "eliminate or greatly curtail early voting", the initiatives made it more difficult for minorities, the poor and elderly to vote (Anderson 144 and 146). Whilst framing the initiatives as being about protecting the ballot box, Anderson claims that "the goal has been to intimidate and harass key populations to keep them away from the polls" (143). In addition to the attempt to keep people away from the ballot box, an unfathomable amount of hatred towards Obama and allegations of the latter not being American but rather a Kenyan Muslim arose. Tragically, "the ascent of a black man to the presidency of the United States did not … signal progress. Instead, it has led to a situation, not unlike the era of Jim Crow" and advancements for the African American population are "constructed as direct threats" (Anderson 158 and 159).

Consequently, while Woodson regards the history of African American education to be a systemic indoctrination of African American students into inferiority, Anderson focuses on the white rage and opposition to African American advancement as the main reasons for the unjust inequality we are still facing today. Anderson ends her book stressing the need to "rethink America" and imagine a country where efforts "[do not go] into subverting and undermining the right to education [but rather are] used to uphold and ensure that right (176-177). Thus, even though Woodson and Anderson focus on

different aspects of the American education system in order to explain the racial disparities, they both hope for a better future and stress the need for change.

The situation today

Education

When investigating the gap between educational opportunity for whites and African Americans in the U.S. today, there are a number of different areas that one could examine. According to Distinguished Professor in political science Kenneth Meier and assistant professor in the School of Public and Environmental Affairs Amanda Rutherford, "[r]acial inequities in access to quality education are one of the most persistent issues in American politics" (1). In their book called *The Politics of African-American Education: Representation, Partisanship and Educational Equity*, the authors stress four major factors influencing the inequality based on "a major national study focused on the local politics of education" (1). These factors are, in short; political inequities, representation, biases created by electoral and governance structures and lastly, partisanship. Throughout the book, the authors point to data and statistics showing some of the reasons as to why African American students "persistently [perform] at lower levels than their peers" (4). These findings will be addressed in more detail below and in relation to other sources.

Associate Professor in Human Development at Hunter College, Roseanne L. Flores, explains that "we are encouraging the development of an uneducated labor force who will not know enough to ask the tough questions or challenge the status quo. In essence we are producing the next generation of low-wage workers " (Flores, sec. 5). Is this true? If so, how has this come about? In order to gain broader insight to the situation at hand and further demonstrate the disparities in educational opportunity, this work will focus mainly on data related to educational attainment, government spending and quality of education, and statistics related to dropouts and suspensions. The at-home situations of students impact their movement through the educational system, and the following section will also address the relationship between the home lives of students and their educational trajectory.

Still separate and unequal

Although *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled "separate and equal" to be unconstitutional, American students across the country are still attending segregated schools over sixty years since the verdict. When explaining how this is so, Ulrik Boser and Perpetual Baffour at the Center for American Progress state that for the last few years "a growing number of schools and districts have integrated based on students' socioeconomic status rather than by race or ethnicity" (Boser, par. 8). One of the reasons for this, according to Boser and Baffour, is that the Supreme Court has found it to be unconstitutional to integrate schools "solely based on students' race or ethnicity" (Boser, par. 8). "In other words, most students in the district attend schools with students of similar income backgrounds" (Boser, par. 19). Thus, schools are usually integrated based on economy rather than race today.

However, "schools that are economically integrated are also usually racially integrated" (Boser, par. 9). This is due to the fact that "school district boundary lines are drawn so that students for the most part attend schools in close proximity to where they live" (Wilson 627). For several reasons, residential patterns in the U.S. reveal that African American neighbourhoods – or black ghettoes – have been a part of American society for years and years. In general, "poor and minority citizens populate central cities while more middle class and white citizens populate the suburbs" (Wilson 629-630). Discrimination during the Great Migration in relation to housing policies has undoubtedly shaped residential patterns. Political correspondent and analyst for the CBS News, Jamelle Bouie explains that "[r]edlining – ...the practice of denying key services (like home loans or insurance).. was almost exclusively a tool to force blacks... into particular geographic areas" (Bouie, par. 5). This, and other practices, created neighbourhoods heavily populated by African Americans and in turn school districts that are largely white.

Moreover, the relation between residential patterns and educational outcome also appears relevant. Associate Professor Odis Johnson Jr. claims that a pivotal question after *Brown* is "how consequential is the current racial make-up of neighbourhoods and schools to the distribution of achievement among African Americans and their racial/ethnic counterparts?" (Johnson 200). When analysing test-scores in maths and sciences for 3rd-grade students across several neighbourhoods, Johnson found that

"residential segregation appears unassociated with learning in low and high minority schools, but neighbourhood income" can be seen in relation to learning outcome. I.e. even though which neighbourhood you live in does not necessarily determine your learning outcome, the socioeconomic factors do (200). Johnson concludes by stating that until we "disrupt residential systems of racial stratification and reproduction through schools… our schools will continue to represent the unfulfilled promise of *Brown*" (212-213).

Charles T. Clotfelter claims that whites had mainly "three avoidance options" in order to escape interracial contact (8). The first of these options was to move to suburban school districts which were predominantly white. There, one could live in close proximity to the city without having to face "the rising proportions of minority students" (Clotfelter 8). Secondly, one could attend expensive private schools. Whilst other factors might be valid explanations as to why white parents chose to send their children to private schools, the fact of the matter is that "private schools had smaller shares of minority students than the public schools" (Clotfelter 9). Thirdly, Clotfelter argues that government officials were willing to "accommodate white parents´ wishes to minimize interracial contact" (9). Thus, the ways in which to remain segregated in schools were many and complex.

Government spending and quality of education

Former President Barack Obama argued that the very foundation on which the nation was build is the promise of equal opportunity. Yet, the very system meant to realise this promise – i.e. the education system, is one of the main institutions enabling the continued inequality. In fact, "many students of color… still have to fight for their constitutional right to a high-quality public education in what has emerged as a system of de facto school segregation" (Quezada, par. 3). In 2015, U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan said that "23 states [spend] more per pupil in affluent school districts than they do in high-poverty districts" (Klein, par. 1). Furthermore, Duncan declared that the "disparities are worse than they were at the turn of the century" as those "who need the most seem to be getting less and less, and the children who need the least are getting more and more" (Klein, par. 14).

The disparities in government spending are reflected in the quality of the education received by student in high-poverty schools. According to data editor in U.S.

News, Lindsey Cook, "[o]n average, schools serving more minority populations have less-experienced, lower-paid teachers who are less likely to be certified" (Cook, par. 15). This is further supported by Mechele Dickerson who claims that in general high-minority schools "have relatively fewer educational resources and overall lower test scores, rank lower on outcome-based assessments, and are less desirable than schools in white neighborhoods" (211). Additionally, high-poverty and high-minority schools are also not able to provide the same range of courses to their students, creating a vast difference in academic results. Why? The annual report from OECD explains that "[t]he willingness of policy makers to expand access to educational opportunities and to provide high- quality education can translate into higher costs per student" (OECD 168). Thus, increasing the quality of the education for those who are not receiving a high-quality education today will increase the need for financial investment.

However, data show that the U.S. is spending less and less on education while other OECD countries are increasing their financial investments in education. According to the annual report by OECD, the U.S. financial investment in its education system "declined 3 percent from 2010 to 2014 even as its economy prospered and its student population grew slightly by 1 percent, boiling down to a 4 percent decrease in spending per student" (Barshay, par. 3). Even though the U.S. is spending more than the OECD average on education per student in total, this amount is decreasing whilst other countries are increasing their investments (OECD 168). The report explains that a number of factors influence the per pupil spending, e.g. "teacher salaries, pension systems…, the cost of teaching materials and facilities [and] the programme provided" (OECD 169). A focused investigation of the American education system might also reveal that institutionalized discrimination and disfavouring of high-poverty schools with high percentages of minority students also influence the per pupil spending.

A common explanation to the disparities in government spending is that it "stems almost entirely from different property-tax bases between school districts" (Spatig-Amerikaner 2). However, this is not the case. A report published by American Progress, revealed that "approximately 40 percent of variation in per-pupil spending occurs within school districts" (Spatig-Amerikaner 2). Spatig-Amerikaner explains that disparities in per pupil can be found at three different levels; between states, between districts or within districts (11). Because the disparities are often explained by variations in property taxation rates, the focus has been on "reducing spending

inequities between school districts in the same states by redistributing education spending from wealthier to poorer districts" (Spatig-Amerikaner 14). However, data shows "41 percent of the variation in spending between schools happens within districts; the remaining 50 percent falls between districts in a state" (Spatig-Amerikaner 16). Thus, much of the responsibility for the inequality in per pupil spending can be placed on the individual school districts.

Additionally, there is a vast difference in the students´ possibility of attending so called gifted classes. The "racial disparities in the access to gifted classes … [indicate] limits of access to quality education for African-American students" (Meier 132-133). When investigating the disparities in gifted class assignments, Meier and Rutherford found "that both school board representation and teacher representation matter … but the substantive impact of teachers is more than six times the impact of school board members" (120). Also, they found huge differences between Democratic and Republican school districts. As a matter of fact, "the impact of teachers is three times larger in Democratic districts than in Republican ones" (Meier 120). All in all, data analysed by Meier et. al reveals how "the simple fact of whether an African-American child attends school in a jurisdiction with a Democratic or a Republican majority profoundly shapes the education experience of that child" (134). Thus, partisan politics vastly influence the education provided.

Furthermore, the presence of relatable role models during childhood is important. Therefore, the paucity of African American teachers in high-poverty schools is highly relevant when discussing the quality of the education provided for the students. Cook notes that "only 6.2 percent of high school public school teachers across all subject areas are black" (par. 18). In relation to this, Meier and Rutherford found that "[m]inority teachers can theoretically benefit minority students through four different but often overlapping processes" (112). Firstly, they might apply different teaching methods due to "cultural sensitivity" (112). Secondly, there is a possibility that they might also "influence other teachers to change how the interact with minority students" (112). Thirdly, they might "generate discussions that lead to changes in policy that benefit minority students" (112). Finally, the student might regard the teacher as a role model and seek to improve his or her own behaviour without the teacher having to do anything specific for that to happen. Thus, the presence of African American teachers in schools can be pivotal for the students and their quality of education.

Regarding this, Katy Reckdahl at the Hechinger Report notes that African American men "make up roughly 2 percent of the nation´s teaching force" (Reckdahl, par. 7). Reckdahl writes about a new program at the University at New Orleans for "young African American men who show promise despite unremarkable transcripts" (par. 5). The participants are studying to become teachers, and are given a full scholarship "each [participant] is given a loan that is forgiven if he teaches in public school for at least two years" (Reckdahl, par. 14). The belief fuelling this program is that the men enrolled in the program are "uniquely equipped" when it comes to connecting with and relating to other African American students. Moreover, Reckdahl quotes Lt. Gen. Russel Honoré´s claim that "the only difference between these young men and some kid going through prep school off his endowment and driving a new Mustang is money and opportunity" (Reckdahl, par. 16). Hopefully, this program and similar programs will increase the presence of African American teachers nationwide.

In relation to the disparities in government spending, Clotfelter argues that interracial contact and desegregation is the key to equality. "If whites and nonwhites tend to be in different schools, the possibility exists that students in these racial groups will be exposed to different levels of resources or teachers of different quality" (Clotfelter 4). However, if schools are desegregated disparities in resources and quality of education cannot exist. Clotfelter thus advocates desegregation and the importance of contact between different cultures and ethnicities.

Educational attainment

The disparities between whites and African Americans are clear when it comes to educational attainment. Meier and Rutherford demonstrate that African Americans "have both the lowest high school graduation and college enrolment rates" (5). Pew Research Center found that in relation to education, "[h]igh school completion rates have converged since the 1960s… [but] [t]he trend in college completion rates tell a more nuanced story" (Taylor, et al. 3). Additionally, disparities "across all socioeconomic levels show that there is a gap in achievement levels" (Quezada, par. 7). This is further supported by Levine and Levine, as they state that despite numerous attempts to better the situation, "[a]n attainment gap remains, but it has narrowed dramatically over time" (454). Levine and Levine further claim that "[t]he relationship between socioeconomic status and educational attainment…is stronger even than race" (454). As income

inequality increases, so does the attainment gap between students who come from high-income and low-income families.

Furthermore, when discussing African American education *affirmative action* needs to be addressed. The concept was first introduced in relation to race by former president John F. Kennedy during the 1960s, and according to African American studies Professor Mike Naison, "affirmative action refers to policies that give students from underrepresented racial groups an advantage in the college admissions process" (Hsu, par. 14 and Rozen, par. 4). Senior Research Fellow at the Centre d' etudes et de recherches internationales, Daniel Sabbagh notes that under affirmative actions "individuals are not required to provide evidence of discrimination to benefit from affirmative action" (Sabbagh 109). In the already mentioned *Grutter v. Bollinger* case, the Supreme Court upheld affirmative action as a legal admissions policy. The defendant in the case and president at the University of Michigan at the time, Lee Bollinger is now warning other universities of the "potential end to race-conscious admissions processes" (Nadig, par. 1). This is much due to a federal trial against Harvard University´s process of admissions, where plaintiffs "accused Harvard of discriminating against Asian American students" (Nadig, 3). As an increasing number of similar cases arise, Bollinger argues that "the inability to see affirmative action as a societal necessity is evident of a greater failure of educational institutions in this country" (Nadig, par. 10). However, the discourse surrounding affirmative action toady does not seem to solely echo Bollinger´s thoughts on the matter.

The disparities in educational attainment can be explained in numerous ways. Lynn states that "explanations for the gaps in achievement … range from genetic deficiency explanations to those that directly or indirectly point to the inadequacy of African American parents" (107). Lynn emphasizes the importance of not just studying the history of African American education, but also to remember to ask *why* there are such disparities in educational attainment between African Americans and whites. He questions what would really change if the attainment gap narrowed or no longer existed, and wonders "[if it would] significantly increase the college-going rates of African Americans and … decrease their rates of imprisonment, or [if] those problems [would] still persist? "Lynn 118-119). When debating this and questioning how to transform the American education system, Lynn rhetorically asks if it is possible for us to even think about or discuss transformation in the schools "when we exempt schools

from their own responsibility for creating more inclusive environments and supporting broader progressive change efforts?" (119). In conclusion, Lynn ends his argument stressing the importance of discussing racism as a part of discussions about educational attainment.

However, we might look at the educational attainment gap through a different lens – namely through the eyes of CRT. Barbara J. Love emphasises how the discussion of today´s educational attainment gap is another example of majoritarian storytelling. Love claims that the focus has "changed from a focus on unequal educational opportunity provided by systems, to deficit theorizing about unequal performance of African American children, with a focus on the failure of African American children to perform at the level of their white counterparts" (227). Several tools are used in order to create this majoritarian narrative of inferior and underperforming African American students – such as invisibility. According to Love, "[m]ajoritarian stories are not viewed as stories at all. Rather, they are viewed as history, policies, procedures, rules, regulations, and statements of fact" (229). Thus, when reading the statistics mentioned in this thesis for instance, white privilege and countless majoritarian narratives are being obscured and appear invisible. Finally, Love ends her analysis with a demonstration of what a CRT view of the educational attainment gap could look like and then encourages teachers to challenge the majoritarian narrative and create counter-narratives to change the situation at hand.

Drop-outs, suspensions and school-to-prison pipeline

When looking at racial disparities in the American education system, one area is particularly disturbing to analyse – namely racial disparities in discipline. As Meier and Rutherford notes, "[r]acial disparities in discipline have long been a salient issue in education policy" (122). For whilst African American students "make up 16 percent of school enrollment, [they] account for 32 percent of students who receive in-school suspensions, 42 percent of students who receive multiple out-of-school suspensions and 34 percent of students who are expelled" (Cook, par. 13). Clearly, these numbers are disproportionate. The fact of the matter is that "African Americans continue to face suspicion, challenges, and violence from the state for engaging in the most routine daily activities" (Ifill, par. 10).

Moreover, when investigating the impact African American teachers and administrators had on the disparities in discipline, Meier and Rutherford found that "an increase in black teachers is associated with more equitable discipline for black students, but an increase in black administration is positively correlated with racial disparities in discipline" (122-123). However, impact made by the teachers is more substantial than that made by the administration, thus an increase in African American teachers and administration "would generate an overall reduction in racial disparities" (Meier 124). Meier and Rutherford also found a significant difference in the impact African American teachers make between Democratic and Republican school districts, as "the efficiency of black teacher representation triples in Democratic districts relative to that of Republican districts" (124). Needless to say, these severe differences will have a tremendous impact on the lives of African American students.

Another important field to discuss in relation to this is the school-to-prison pipeline. The pipeline is explained by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) as a "trend wherein children are funnelled out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems" ("School-to-prison pipeline", par. 1). Assistant Professor of English Education at the University of Tennessee, Judson C. Laughter and ninth-grade teacher Kayla M. Gass claims that "disciplinary policies are the foundation of the school-to-prison pipeline" (Gass 335). ACLU explains that "schools have embraced *zero-tolerance policies* that automatically impose severe punishment regardless of circumstances", causing students to be expelled or suspended for minor mistakes and misdemeanours ("School-to-prison pipeline", par. 6). The organization further points out that students who are expelled are often unattended and without constructive tasks to complete, and thus the possibility of them dropping out or engaging in criminal activity increases ("School-to-prison pipeline", par. 7).

Furthermore, evidence has also been provided demonstrating a connection between the school-to-prison pipeline and adulthood arrests. Barnes and Motz at the University of Cincinnati investigated how "racial inequalities in school-based punishment will (partially) explain inequalities in adulthood arrest" (2328). Extensive disciplinary sanctions in school "may causally impact arrest and incarceration rates later in life" (Barnes 2329). The results from Barnes´ and Motz´ research "revealed that intervening on the racial inequality in school-based punishment might help break the developmental cascade of the school-to-prison pipeline" (2335). They found that the

racial disparities in the school-to-prison pipeline manifest in arrest rates later in life. Consequently, solving the problem of racial disparities in discipline in the education system might also impact the racial disparities in the criminal justice system and incarceration rates.

Moreover, there are also vast racial discrepancies in law enforcement´s reactions in the drug war. A report published by ACLU on the war on marijuana reveals that "on average, a Black person is 3.73 times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than a white person, even though Blacks and whites use marijuana at similar rates" (*The War on Marijuana….* 4*).* The National Registry of Exonerations explains that "[w]ith rare exceptions, drug investigations are initiated by the police themselves, who … have essentially unlimited discretion to choose how and where to enforce drug laws, and against whom, which opens the door to pervasive discrimination" (*Race and Wrongful…* 2). The repercussions of this are enormous. For instance, in relation to cases involving drug possession "African Americans are more likely than whites to be convicted by mistake because—guilty or innocent— they are more likely to be stopped, searched and arrested" (*Race and Wrongful…* 2). While the reasons for these disparities in frisk searches and arrest might be many, it is clear that race is one of them.

Additionally, videos of police shootings and brutal arrests of African Americans have given rise to numerous protest in recent years, e.g. after the shooting of 18-year old Michael Brown in Ferguson. In order to examine the relevance of the target´s race in police officers´ decision to shoot, Correll et. al used computer tasks to test for racial bias. White and African American male targets appeared on a screen with a realistic background, and the participating police officers were to press either a key labelled "shoot" or "don't shoot". Correll et. al found that participants "shot an armed target more quickly if he was Black (rather than White) but decided not to shoot an unarmed target (pressing the "don't shoot" key) more quickly if he was White rather than Black" (203). Also demonstrating the presence of racial bias in officers´ decision to shoot is the finding that "participants erroneously shot unarmed Black targets more frequently than unarmed Whites. Conversely, they mistakenly chose not to shoot armed White targets more often than armed Blacks" (203). In other words, the effects of racial bias in police officers´ decision-making can turn out to be fatal for young African Americans.

In addition to the problems discussed above, statistics relating to dropouts further demonstrates racial disparities. For their report on dropouts, Child Trends

explains dropouts as "individuals, ages 16 to 24, who were not currently enrolled in school and had not completed high school or obtained a GED" (Child Trends, "High School…", par. 4). The numbers provided by Child Trends does not include institutionalized youth. Nevertheless, the organization reports that even though the overall dropout rate has decreased in the last decades, racial disparities persist. These findings are further supported by Meier and Rutherford who claim that "black students continue to have both the lowest high school graduation and college enrollment rates" (5). According to Meier et. al, "only one in three black students who enroll in high school is likely to pursue postsecondary education, and many of these students will not make it to their college graduation" (5). These data thus reveal a gloomy present for many African American students.

In relation to dropout rates, it appears important to note that there are numerous reasons for the depressing statistics for African Americans. A report published by the Schott Foundation for Education states that "students who have been suspended or expelled often have less social bonds to schools, are less likely to feel that they belong at school and are at increased risk of dropping out" (The Schott Foundation 31). Also, the socioeconomic status of their household might leave African American students with no choice but to quit their education and start working in order to help support their family. When discussing the consequences of the dropout rates, Pedro A. Noguera notes that they manifest in the criminal justice system and are "evident in the high rates of unemployment in economically depressed, socially marginalized neighborhoods, cities and towns where desperation festers and crime and violence are rampant" (The Schott Foundation 52). It is crucial that we understand the complexity of the reasons for why African American students drop out of school in order to lower the dropout rates in the foreseeable future.

Situations at home

The racial disparities discussed thus far are mainly concerned with youth and young adults. However, racial disparities in performance and abilities can be found even before children start kindergarten. Cook points to data revealing that "[w]hile 91 percent of white children aged 3 to 5 who weren't enrolled in kindergarten were read to by family members three or more times per week, 78 percent of black children were read to with the same frequency" (par. 6). There can be several reasons as to why this is

the case – e.g. lack of access to materials for African American parents or they might be less comfortable reading to their children due to their own uncertainties about reading. Regardless, this tendency is just one of many contributing to racial disparities even before children start formal schooling.

Furthermore, African American children are more likely to have suffered traumatic experiences during childhood – such as maltreatment, neglect or abuse. Data from Child Trends reveal that 14 out of 1000 African American children were maltreated (Child Trends, "Child Maltreatment…", par. 6). The equivalent statistic for white children was 8 out of 1000. Unsurprisingly, such traumatic experiences might lead to a plethora of problems later in life, e.g. anxiety, aggression and decrease in ability to concentrate. Additionally, African American families more often "live in households that are low-income, extremely poor, food-insecure, or receiving longterm welfare support" than white children (Cook, par. 19). It might not be hard to understand that children who life in unsafe neighbourhoods or unsafe homes, might have a harder time with focusing on and working on their education.

When investigating family support for African American students, Lanita Sledge from Eastern Michigan University found that "[f]amily involvement in the pre-college years is critical to student success. The greater the family participation, the better students are prepared to cope with the challenges of college life" (18). There are also differences in parents´ expectations for their children's education. Overall, fewer African American parents expected their children to graduate college than white parents, according to a report published by the National Center for Education Statistics (Lippman 7). Lippman et. al claim that "Asian students had the highest percentage of parents who expected them to finish college (80 percent versus 66 percent among White students, [and] 64 percent among Black and Hispanic students" (7). As Cook notes, these expectations might lead to "lower expectations from the student, less-positive attitudes toward school, fewer out-of-school learning opportunities and less parent-child communication about school" (par. 5). Racial disparities in education are thus evident at the very first stages of life and in the primary sphere of socialization.

Employment

The problems in the education system manifest in employment data as well. When discussing problems in relation to employment, a report published by the Center for Economic and Policy Research emphasises *un*employment and *under*employment. The report reveals that " [i]n 2013, more than half (55.9 percent) of employed black recent college graduates were in jobs that did not require a four-year degree" (Jones and Schmitt 6). One might think that this is due to the "natural transition for recent college graduates entering the labor market" (Jones and Schmitt 6). However, data reveal that while 56.2 percent of all college graduates were underemployed, 67.1 percent of African American college graduates were underemployed (Jones and Schmitt 6). Thus, African Americans are more frequently underemployed than their white fellow students.

In relation to unemployment, Levine and Levine found that "Black unemployment rates…have persisted at more than double the rates for Whites" (454). Also reflecting these tendencies is data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics revealing that the total unemployment rate for white men and women aged 16 years and over was 3.2% in 2018. Among African American men and women in the equivalent age group, 6.1% were unemployed ("E-16…". The disparities in unemployment are thus vast.

In addition to the common issues everyone has to face when trying to find a job, African Americans "face additional challenges in the labor market, including racial discrimination" (Jones and Schmitt 11). Recently, a meta-study investigated whether or not the level of racial discrimination in the labour market had changed over time. The authors of the study claim that "[d]espite clear signs of racial progress, however, on several key dimensions racial inequality persists and has even increased" (Quillian 1). Quillian et. al found that "at the initial point of entry—hiring decisions—African Americans remain substantially disadvantaged relative to equally qualified whites, and we see little indication of progress over time" (5). The authors stress "the need for strong enforcement of antidiscrimination legislation" and denote that they "find the persistence of discrimination at a distressingly uniform rate" over time (Quillian 5).

Moreover, Quillian et. al discuss the claim made by some researchers that racism is on the decline in the U.S. They explain that "while expressions of explicit prejudice have declined precipitously over time, measures of stereotypes and implicit bias appear to have changed little over the past few decades" (Quillian 1). In the past, racism was a common and obvious part of society. As commonly known, there was a time when

blatant racist actions and attitudes was the norm. Even though this has in many ways changed, "racial bias has taken on new forms, becoming more contingent, subtle, and covert" (Quillian 1). This view is in line with Critical Race Theory, which emphasises the permanence of racism. A CRT analysis of the racial disparities in employment would also stress the CRT tenet of "whiteness as property" where the racial discrimination in hiring can be analysed as an attempt by whites to protect their "property rights" (Capper 803).

As demonstrated by the data presented above, inequity is not merely a part of the American education system but manifest itself in employment as well. Even after overcoming severe obstacles in the education system in order to obtain a higher education, African Americans still have to deal with racial discrimination when attempting to find work.

Discussion: Is educational inequity the only problem?

When looking at the data presented above, educational inequity might appear to be the sole problem we are facing in today´s society. Sadly, this is not the case. African Americans have yet to be treated equally in several aspects of society. As Meier and Rutherford demonstrate, it is clear that "[e]ducational deficits in performance and attainment lead to larger gaps in long-term employment, health, housing, social capital, and contact with the criminal justice system" (Meier and Rutherford 4). Thus, not only are the racial disparities in education huge, but so are their repercussions in other areas of society as well.

While many topics could have been discussed here in order to demonstrate the devastating racial disparities, the focus in this essay will be on the racial wealth gap. This is due to the close connection between the wealth gap and educational disparities. Even though the racial wealth gap will be discussed separately, they are– as most other areas of society – intertwined with the problem of educational inequity and other problems in society. Thus, closing the equity gap in one of these areas is simply not enough. Alarmingly, the discussion below will demonstrate how *inequality* rather than *equality* is ingrained in the pillars of American society.

The racial wealth gap

For 246 years African American slaves were considered as wealth in America. They could not own property as they were considered to *be* property from the beginning of slavery in 1619 to 1865 when the 13th amendment was signed. After Emancipation Proclamation, freed slaves were promised 40 acres of tillable land to own through Sherman Special Field Orders, no. 15. Former President Abraham Lincoln signed the law promising land to newly freed slaves, but when he passed away his successor Andrew Johnson reversed the progress that had been made in relation to racial equality. This resulted in thousands of former slaves being homeless. Those who had worked the land their whole lives and suffered through unfathomable atrocities as slaves were left with nothing as free citizens. The disparities in homeownership and wealth that started during slavery laid the foundation for what would be known as the racial wealth gap in America and turned out to be closely connected to educational disparities.

One process that turned out to be detrimental to the financial situation for African Americans was redlining. During former President Franklin D. Roosevelt´s reform programme called New Deal and the National Housing Act of 1934, "the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) created loan programs to help make home ownership accessible to more Americans" (Thompson, par. 9). The National Community Reinvestment Coalition explains the process of redlining in this manner: in order to decide who could receive loans or not, the Home Owners´ Loan Corporation (HOLC) created maps where neighbourhoods they considered to be dangerous or "high risk… were often redlined by lending institutions, denying them access to capital investment which could improve the housing and economic opportunity of residents" (Mitchell, par. 1). This is further supported by Jamelle Bouie who states that "redlining forced blacks into particular areas and then starved those areas of affordable capital" (par. 9). Redlined neighbourhoods were consequently impoverished and the quality of the education provided for the students living in redlined neighbourhoods lessened.

Unsurprisingly, redlined "[n]eighborhoods … were predominantly made up of African Americans, as well as Catholics, Jews and immigrants from Asia and southern Europe, [and] were deemed undesirable" (Jan, par. 6). An African American family moving into a predominantly white neighbourhood was seen as a threat to housing prices and property value. Thus the ones who managed to buy a house in a white neighbourhood were often threatened, harassed and their houses were vandalized.

Redlining therefore prohibited African Americans and other ethnic minorities in owning a home regardless of their financial situation. Living in a redlined neighbourhood affected every aspect of life, including job opportunities, quality of education and whether your house increased or decreased in value over time. Consequently, redlining set the scene for the racial wealth gap of today.

After the passing of the National Housing Act, several laws on housing and discrimination were passed. Among these were the Housing Act of 1949 and the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977. Kimberley Amadeo, U.S. Economy expert for The Balance, claims that "[d]espite these laws, discrimination in housing continued as banks pushed blacks into subprime mortgages" (par. 34). Subprime loans are in general given to people who fail to meet the criteria and repayment schedule and whose credit is poor. However, according to Larry Schwartztol at the ACLU Racial Justice Program, "the link between race, subprime lending, and devastating rates of foreclosure has been crystal clear for some time" as African Americans were victims of "systematic targeting of communities of color for risky and unfair loans" and only offered subprime loans regardless of their credit (par. 3 and 1 respectively). Subprime loans "have rising interest rates, which makes them more expensive" and also harder to finance (Amadeo, par. 34). Because most of the people receiving subprime loans were African American before the financial crisis of 2008, the African American community took the biggest hit when the crisis occurred. For while the African American community lost 53% per cent of their wealth, white communities lost 16% of their wealth (Kochhar 1).

Moreover, the disparities in wealth become even clearer when looking at data on homeownership. The Federal Reserve state that "[w]ell over half of white households are homeowners (73 percent), compared with just under half of black and Hispanic households (around 45 percent)" (Dettling, par. 9). The racial wealth gap is also reflected in the degree to which housing accounts for families´ total assets, as "housing accounts for only 32 percent of [white homeowners´] total assets, compared with 37 to 39 percent for black and Hispanic homeowners" (Dettling, par. 9). Indeed, the disparities are vast.

In relation to this, a study at Duke University addressed whether or not "the racial homeownership gap was the ´driver´ of the racial wealth gap" (Darity 10). Referring to several researchers and journalists who claim that the main factor enabling the racial wealth gap is the disparities in homeownership, Darity et. al points out that

"home equity is a *component* of wealth" and not the only asset that constitutes it (11). The authors of the study then note that "[h]omeownership and wealth are clearly correlated, but it is a severe misstatement to claim that if blacks owned homes at the same rate as whites the racial wealth gap would be closed" (Darity12). The problem is more complex and diverse than that and so is its solution. "[T]he path to homeownership has been riddled with entrenched racism" and African Americans have had to face serious and systematic obstacles in order to own a home. Darity et. al further stress that "[r]ather than homeownership creating wealth, having family wealth in the first place leads to homeownership, particularly high equity homeownership" (14). This is often a problem, as "blacks have minimal initial wealth to invest in homes or pass down to their children to assist with down payments" (Darity 14). The starting points are thus different.

How does the racial wealth gap and particularly homeownership relate to education then? In her book called *Homeownership and America´s Financial Underclass,* Mechele Dickerson argues that America has "a rhapsodic view of homeownership" and that homeowners "are viewed as being noble, hardworking, responsible, and financially stable and secure" as opposed to renters (19). Dickerson further points out that even though the process of steering white buyers towards white neighbourhoods and African American and Latino buyers away from them has now been made illegal, "de facto neighborhood segregation continues to exist largely because of the remaining vestiges of redlining and steering" (153). Thus, segregated neighbourhoods lead to segregated schools. Because "there is a strong correlation between the quality of neighborhood schools and the type and value of homes that whites own and those that blacks and Latinos own" (Dickerson 207). Dickerson urges officials to "abandon educational policies that assign children to schools based on where they live" (207). This is because as long as neighbourhoods are segregated – so will the schools be, which in turn enables disparities in the quality of education to grow.

Furthermore, the study at Duke University investigated whether or not increasing the educational attainment in the African American population would lead to closing the wealth gap. We often get the impression that as long as you get a degree, you are somehow guaranteed a decent salary. In fact, "[f]amilies with college-educated heads appear to accumulate more wealth than families with heads with lower levels of education over a lifetime" (Darity 5). However, this does not mean that whites and

African Americans with "similar levels of education … display comparable levels of wealth" (Darity 5). The study mentioned above found that "[w]hite households with a bachelor's degree or postgraduate education … are more than three times as wealthy as black households with the same degree attainment" (Darity 6). This is further supported by Jones and Schmitt who demonstrate that "black college graduates of all ages consistently have higher unemployment rates, higher underemployment rates, and lower wages than their white counterparts" and thus less chance of accumulating wealth later in life (13).

Moreover, disparities in the accumulation of wealth later in life also widen the racial wealth gap. Dettling et. al state that "[w]ealth generally increases with age", but when looking at the accumulation of wealth for African Americans this is often not the case (par. 14). A study made by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis found that "[w]hite college-educated households amass wealth, whereas the wealth of their Black counterparts declines" (Meschede 121). In order to better understand this, the authors of the study "analysed the impacts of inheritance and targeted financial transfers" which include "information on financial support from parents for education, a home purchase, or other unspecified financial support over the life course" (Meschede 134 and 129 respectively). Their findings revealed what other research has found earlier, namely that African American parents are often less wealthy and thus "less able to financially help their adult children" (Meschede 135). Meschede et. al further claim that the parents of African American college graduates "are in more need of financial help from their grown children… [and] Black college graduates are more likely than White college graduates to financially help their parents (and others)" (135). Thus the different starting points in life manifest themselves throughout adulthood despite educational attainment.

When looking at the racial wealth gap and the processes causing it from a CRT point of view, the disparities appear even more premeditated. As already mentioned, a primary tenet of CRT is the idea of whiteness as property (Capper 803). This, according to Capper, means that whites have "an automatic affordance of rights and privileges— that Whiteness is property" (803). African Americans were deprived of their right to own property for nearly 250 years and were considered to be property themselves. From the moment that the first slave ship arrived the American shores, whites were automatically afforded the right to own slaves. White privilege was there from the start and laid the foundation for the racial wealth gap of today. Also, the majoritarian

narrative depicting African Americans as "dangerous gangsters and drug dealers" were stories whites told themselves and perceived as the truth in order to justify their efforts to keep people of colour in segregated neighbourhoods. Hence, a CRT analysis would describe the racial wealth gap as being the result of conscious actions made by whites in order to further establish their supremacy.

Where do we go from here? Even if we were to somehow close the educational attainment gap and even out the unemployment rates between African Americans and whites, the African American community still has an almost unfathomable hurdle to overcome. For more than 240 years, African Americans were considered to be wealth rather than having the opportunity of accumulating wealth. Then, after Emancipation, they were systematically discriminated against in relation to housing for over 100 years until The Fair Housing Act was passed in 1968. Making housing discrimination illegal, The Fair Housing Act sought to close the homeownership gap and in turn the racial wealth gap. However, the data discussed above reveal a different story. These words, written by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in his famous book *Why We Can´t Wait,* describes this exact hurdle: "[f]or it is obvious that if a man is entered at the starting line of a race three hundred years after another man, the first would have to perform some impossible feat in order to catch up with his fellow runner" (King 165). To this day, systemic discrimination and racism prevents African Americans from joining white Americans at the starting line.

Prospects of the future – where are we heading?

If the tendencies demonstrated above continue, where is America heading? Pedro A. Noguera from UCLA states that "[f]or the last 16 years, federal education policy has been focused on reducing racial gaps in academic achievement; however, closing opportunity gaps has been a much lower priority in the educational policy agenda" (131). Yet, unless changes are made "the U.S. will be left with an education system that doesn´t serve the majority of its children properly…[a]s the percentage of white students … shrinks and the percentage of students of color grow" (Cook, par. 3). Disparities in wealth are growing, and "evidence shows that widening gaps in wealth and opportunity have a profound impact on educational achievement" (Noguera 131). Without action, the wealth and education gap will continue to grow.

In addition to having to make changes in the education system, it appears that fundamental change is also necessary in other areas of society. The question is whether or not we can expect African American children and youth to focus on their education and create a solid foundation for their future when so many areas of society are not enabling them to do so, but are constraining and hindering them? Can we discuss disparities in educational attainment and academic accomplishments when unarmed African American children are being shot by police for misdemeanours – or for simply "looking suspicious"? Or can we expect African American students to obtain higher education, avoid prison and increase their wealth if we do not deal with systemic racism across all areas of society and understand the complexity of the problem? Noguera further argues that "strategies aimed at reducing disparities in achievement will never succeed if they do not address the blatant denial of basic educational opportunities and the unmet social needs of children" (133). According to Noguera, then, systemic change is necessary if the education and social system wish to prevent economic and educational deprivation.

Several other researchers further support the arguments made by Noguera. Marvin Lynn rhetorically asks whether or not "African Americans [would] become less vulnerable to racist policies and practices in the larger society" if the educational attainment gap would narrow (119)? Darity et. al states that "if the structural sources of racial inequality remain unchanged", there is nothing that African Americans can do at an individual level to close the racial wealth gap or the inequality that pervades society (3). According to these authors, "America must undergo a vast social transformation produced by the adoption of bold national policies... addressing, finally, the long-standing consequences of slavery, the Jim Crow years that followed, and ongoing racism and discrimination" (Darity 4). In other words, they agree that a fundamental transformation is necessary.

A CRT analysis of the future for marginalized students, e.g. African American students, emphasises the importance of educators´ focus. According to Monica Allen, "educators are encouraged to examine curriculum, pedagogy, teaching and learning through a CRT lens. When done so, it becomes apparent that the educational system in America is heavily influenced by White supremacy" (38). Allen argues that there is a need to challenge the majoritarian narrative that dominates K-12 education and higher education in America, and further claims that topics related to colorblindness, selective

admissions policies and the racial climate at campuses is what CRT scholars typically focus on (39). In the eyes of Allen and other CRT theorists, it is important that educators understand how campuses across the country are "advocating for colorblindness and raceneutral policies" (Allen 41). As already mentioned, Capper´s extensive analysis of CRT in educational leadership provides "a CRT Inventory for Leading the Elimination of Racism… [that] can help leaders assess the legitimacy and effectiveness of racial policies, practices, initiatives, and equity change efforts… to eliminate racism in public schools" (822). All in all, CRT advocates critical examination of the situation at hand and awareness of the pervasiveness of racism in society before there is even a possibility for change to come.

Possible solutions to the problem

Unsurprisingly, the data presented above are upsetting and disturbing to read. While some refuse to acknowledge reality as it is, others not only acknowledge this reality but also make efforts to change it. They investigate, discuss, seek answers and ask questions. Many are the men and women who try to find possible solutions to the prevailing problem of racial inequality. Many are the men and women who dare to challenge a system still treating its students unfairly and who have the wisdom to shed light on a rather confusing and overwhelming issue. In order to discuss possible solutions to the problem, this work will address the recent writings of Eddie S. Glaude Jr. and Beverly Daniel Tatum. Also, in order gain a broader perspective, Debby Irving and her book called *Waking Up White and Finding Myself in the Story of Race* will be discussed. While there are numerous researchers and writers who present valid and fruitful analysis of and solutions to the problem, the ones mentioned above demonstrate different perspectives and are thus deemed sufficient in relation to demonstrating a broad range of possibilities.

Eddie S. Glaude Jr. and remaking democracy

In his book called *Demoncracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul,* chair of the Center for African American Studies at Princeton University Eddie S. Glaude Jr. discusses the history of racism in the U.S. Throughout the book, Glaude explains how what he refers to as "the value gap… and racial habits… undergird racial inequality"

(Glaude 6). Glaude explains that *Democracy in Black* "exposes the illusion of innocence at the heart of [America] by pointing out the concrete effects of persistent racial inequality" (8-9). For him, racial inequality and white supremacy is engrained in America´s democracy. Thus, he emphasises the need to uproot American democracy as we know it today and remake democracy into being what we hope for.

Glaude´s theory on the remaking of democracy begins with the notion of "the American Idea – that [the U.S. is] a nation committed to liberty, freedom, and the unfettered pursuit of individual dreams" (33). According to Glaude, people who believe in this idea do not see racial inequality as "fundamental to who [America is] as a nation, [but rather] as a basic contradiction between … ideals and practices" (33). He coins this with what he refers to as the value gap – the belief that white lives matter more than African American lives. "The American Idea shapes our democracy, and that idea is in turn informed by the value gap" (Glaude 34). Glaude goes on to explain that part of the problem is that we see "America as something in the abstract, as an idea separate from our practices" and that "[w]e keep treating America like we have a great blueprint and we´ve just strayed from it" (34 and 37 respectfully). However, racial inequality and white supremacy is part of American history and thus American democracy (Glaude 37).

Additionally, Glaude explains that "[h]ow we collectively remember is bound up with questions of justice… [and that] what we choose to forget often reveals the limits of justice in our collective imaginations" (46). He notes that "too often, how we tell our story keeps us from seeing aspects of the past that may call into question American Idea" (47). In a sense, many Americans actively forget the parts of history that somehow taints the image of America as the Redeemer Nation. This act of forgetting creates not only a version of the past that is incomplete, but also an impression that the pain felt by many African Americans for centuries does not matter. Thus, Glaude stresses the need for "a wholesale transformation of our idea of who we are… We must tell ourselves a different story… We can no longer forget" (49).

In order to fundamentally change, "uprooting the racial habits that are the lifeblood of the value gap" (Glaude 50) is vital. Glaude notes that "[a]ll Americans are shaped by biases, stereotypes, and the history of racism in this country that incline us to treat certain people in certain ways. We are shaped by our racial habits" (55). These racial habits are the ways in which the value gap manifests in our everyday lives – whether we are aware of these habits or not. Racial habits "are formed by the outcomes

we see in the world rather than by the complex processes that produced those outcomes" – thus many Americans assume that African Americans are lazy when they see statistics on unemployment, instead of thinking of the history of discrimination in the labour market (Glaude 57). A process further enabling racial habits is "the habit of masking… how [we] feel about racial matters" (Glaude 61). In the 21st century, no one – at least not many – wants to be known as a racist, and there is a desire to avoid messy discussion about race to avoid confronting deeply repressed prejudices. This process further hinders the possibility of racial equality.

Furthermore, Glaude sheds light on what he deems to be one of the most pivotal factors enabling racial habits – namely white fear. He explains this fear as "the general frame of mind that black people are dangerous, not only to white individuals because they are prone to criminal behaviour, but to the overall well-being of our society" (74). According to Glaude, this fear is not limited to an individual level, but "is a deeply felt, collectively held fear shared by people who believe, together, that some harm threatens them and their way of life" (75). Despite the fact that this fear sometimes can be well explained, it "can be understood as something anticipatory, a fear just waiting to be expressed" and can in turn lead to "racial moral panics" (Glaude 76). This fear "blinds us to the humanity of the people right in front of us [and] makes it easier to devalue them, to see them as a threat" (Glaude 83). White fear pervades American history and makes it possible for Americans to believe in democracy *and* hold on to white supremacy at the same time.

What needs to happen then? How can democracy be remade? According to Glaude, "[a] revolution of value [which] upends the belief that white people are more valued that others" is needed (182). By revolutionising value, racial habits can change – because "[h]abits are not fixed forever. If we are aware of their presence in our lives, we can change them. But we can´t just look inside ourselves and solve the problem" (63). A fundamental change in society is also needed. Glaude´s idea of this revolution encompasses three key components; "a change in how we view government, … a change in how we view black people, … and a change in how we view what ultimately matters to us as Americans" (184). It is vital that we do not forget the past, for "when we disremember… we free ourselves from any sense of accountability" (188). And "we have too much blood on our hands" to not hold ourselves accountable (Glaude 188).

The second component mentioned by Glaude involves changing how America views African Americans. He claims, much like Critical Race Theory does, that "[m]ost Americans, conservative or liberal, see African Americans as failing" and as being "perennial victims"(197). When "conservatives sees black people as failures, ... liberals see them as statistical data" and forget to pay attention to the actual lives behind the numbers (198). We forget that "much of the hell black people catch in [America] today is rooted in the enduring legacy of racist practices in every domain in American life" – practices which "ensured that white people would benefit and black people would struggle" (Glaude 199). There is thus a need for to view African Americans as being capable and equal, and not merely passive victims.

All in all, *Democracy in Black* calls for a remaking of democracy in America. This remaking involves changing how people are valued and closing the value gap once and for all. By doing this, racial habits of thought can be changed. In the eyes of Glaude, only a profound and fundamental change in our beliefs, attitudes and habits will make possible a new attempt at democracy in America – a democracy that stands apart from white supremacy.

Beverly Daniel Tatum and self-segregation

In the the 20th anniversary edition of her 1997 book *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*, Beverly D. Tatum writes that she was faced with the question of whether or not things were getting better in relation to racial segregation and racial inequality. This question fuelled the direction for the rest of her book. Throughout the 2017 edition of the book, Tatum questions if it is even possible to change the climate surrounding discussions about race and racism – and if so, how? Tatum argues that the only way to end the racial segregation and racial inequality that is still pervading the United States, is through honest, open and straight communication about race.

Tatum begins by attempting to define racism and discuss the impact it has on all of us. She leans on David Wellman´s definition of racism "as a ´system of advantage based on race´" (Tatum 87). Also, Tatum argues that "[s]ometimes the assumptions we make about others come... from what we have *not* been told" (84). Much like Woodson, she points to the lack of black heroes and heroines in school curriculum and notes that

many have "never been exposed to Black authors" (85). According to Tatum,

"[s]tereotypes, omissions, and distortions all contribute to the development of prejudice.

Prejudice is a preconceived judgment or opinion, usually based on limited information"

(85). Prejudice and racism "is like smog in the air. Sometimes it is so thick it is visible,

other times it is less apparent, but always, day in and day out, we are breathing it in"

(Tatum 86). Tatum argues that "[u]nless we engage in… conscious acts of reflections

and re-education, we easily repeat the process with our children" (87). This is because

"unexamined prejudices of the parents are passed on to the children" through actiong

and the stories that are told (Tatum 87). Thus, self-examination is necessary for the

cycle to end.

Furthermore, Tatum addresses the issues of alleged colour-blindness. She points

to research showing that we still notice race in today´s society, and claims that instead of

living in a colour-blind society, "we may be living in a color-*silent* society, where we have

learned to avoid *talking about* racial difference" (24). Tatum points to research made by

the internationally known Mahzarin Benaji "on unconscious bias – attitudes that

influence our behaviour sometimes below the level of our consciournes" (24). "Those

biases manifest themselves in ways that matter – whom we offer help to in an

emergency, whom we dicide to hire, whom we give a warning to instead of a ticket, or

whom we shoot at during a police encounter" (Tatum 25). Facing these truths about

one´s self, however, is uncomfortable for many. Awareness of white privilege and

systemic racism, "elicits considerable pain, often accompanied by feelings of anger and

guilt… [f]or many Whites" (Tatum 89). Yet we cannot expect anything to change unless

we are willing to acknowledge reality as it is.

In relation to this, Tatum discusses Eduardo Bonilla-Silva´s theory on colour-

blind racism as an ideology in America. According to this ideology, "White people deny

of minimize the degree of racial inequality or explain contemporary racial inequality as

the result of factors unrelated to racial dynamics" – e.g. African Americans are simply

not as smart as whites when it comes to school or that they are too lazy to find a job

(Tatum 226). While this ideology is expressed in many ways, Tatum highlights two of

them with reference to Ruth Frankenberg. The first of these expressions is "color

evasion" and it puts "emphasis on sameness" (Tatum 226). According to Tatum, and

Frankenberg, colour evasion "overlooks the fact that people of color are not having the

same experiences as White people" (226-227). The second expression of colour-blind

racism is referred to as "power evasion" by Frankenberg, and can be explained as "when someone minimizes the impact of racism, claiming that everyone has the same opportunities to succeed and those who don´t only have themselves to blame" (Tatum 227). Tatum stresses the need to move past this this ideology and learn how to have conversations about race – because "you can´t fix what you can´t talk about" (Tatum 228). This step is necessary in order to have fruitful and honest communication about racism.

Moreover, Tatum also sheds light on whites´ thoughts on their own ethnicity and their own prejudices. She notes that "[t]here is a lot of silence about race in White communities, and as a consequence Whites tend to think of racial identity as something that other people have, not something that is salient for them" (186). White people are just white – they do not have an ethnicity. As will be demonstrated below, this is very much in line with Debby Irving´s thoughts on whiteness. Also, "while [whites] have been breathing the ´smog´ and internalizing many of the prevailing societal stereotypes of people of color… [t]hey often perceive themselves as color-blind, [and] completely free of prejudice" (188). As noted by Tatum, facing our own racial bias and prejudice is uncomfortable. It might create a different image of ourselves than what we might wish for, and shake the very foundation that we have built our self-image on. Thus, individuals try to avoid conversations challenging this self-image.

Much like Glaude, Tatum addresses how fear can be paralyzing and stop any "meaningful, productive dialogue" from taking place (331). While Tatum´s focus differs slightly from Glaude´s in relation to fear, the former argues that because "fear is a powerful emotion, one that immobilizes, traps words in our throats, and stills our tongues", it can hinder any substantial societal change (Tatum 331). Tatum explains that she has noticed from several of her own work-shops and discussion groups on racism that "[s]ome White students [are] afraid of their own ignorance, afraid that… they might ask a naïve question or make an offensive remark" (332). In other words, whereas Glaude focuses on white fear of African Americans, Tatum emphasises the fear that white people have of their own ignorance. While Tatum agrees that "[b]reaking the silence undoubtedly requires courage", she proclaims that "we must begin to speak, knowing that words alone are insufficient" (339 and 342 respectively). There is a need for action as well.

Thus, Tatum´s solution to the problems America is currently facing is communication – open, honest, soul-searching and face-to-face cross-racial communication. Also, her focus appears to be more on an individual level than that of Glaude – which focuses on changing the system and remaking democracy. Tatum stresses the need to face our own demons and be willing to examine our own prejudice and racial bias, engage in dialogue with others about topics that matter and that are often avoided and find the courage needed to move past paralyzing fear. Tatum states that "[h]elping students to see the past more clearly, to understand and communicate with others more fully in the present, and to imagine the future more justly is to transform the world" (358). While Tatum´s suggested solution to the problem might appear naïve or too easy for some, her thoughts might still shed some much needed light on the conversations we too often shy away from and demonstrate the need to seek those very conversations instead.

Debby Irving and her awakening

In her book called *Waking Up White*, Debbie Irving descries her own attempt at understanding racism and white privilege. Irving tells of a "childhood in white" where "a key social code included avoiding conflict by keeping social interactions light and cheerful" (1 and 23 respectively). Later in life, when Irving was working as an arts administrator, she noticed racial disparities in the community and found that "the more [she] tried to understand and ´help´ the more confused [she] became" (29). She went on to take a class about "Racial and Cultural Identity" where she came to realise that "racism is, and always has been, the way America has sorted and ranked its people in a bitterly divisive, humanity-robbing system" (Irving 30 and 31 respectively). This class became the catalyst for what Irving refers to as her awakening and resulted in years of trying to understand not only systemic racism, but also her own racial bias.

At the beginning of her book, Irving addresses the topic of class vs. race. When discussing the problems we are facing in relation to equity, Irving states that "[c]oncluding class is the real issue would give me permission to avoid thinking about race. Similarly, assuming race is the more significant issue overlooks the complications faces by white people caught in a vicious cycle of poverty" (13). However, while "race and class are inextricably linked… skin color is visible and fixed, forever and always"

(Irving 14). One cannot escape or change the colour of one´s skin. Additionally, Irving denotes that her "persistent sense of needing to ´help´ and ´fix´… are considered by many to be trademarks of the dominant class" and can further uphold the notion of rich, white people helping needy African Americans who are incapable of fixing their own problems. This is another element that Irving tries to make her readers aware about throughout her book.

Furthermore, one of the major breakthroughs Irving experienced during her awakening "was understanding the degree to which [she tends] to align what [she sees and hears] with [her] underlying beliefs" (63). In order to explain this she refers to sociologist Kenneth Cushner. Cushner notes that if you think of culture as being an iceberg, it consists of two parts – "10 percent above the waterline and the 90 percent below" (Irving 64). The tip of the iceberg consists of "the things we can see and hear", and "[b]elow the waterline and invisible to the eye are the beliefs and values one adopts because they are the norms of one´s culture" (Irving 64). According to Irving, understanding this is vital in order for change to happen for "[n]o matter what happens above the waterline, little will change until our belief systems get a twenty-first-century tune-up" (66). Thus, Irving stresses the need to dig deep and fix not only the problems above the surface, but also the very foundation on which those problems are built.

Another vital element in order for change to happen is raising awareness of "inattentional blindness, also known as selective seeing" (Irving 69). Irving puts this phenomenon in relation to white privilege. She notes that "[a]s a white person, whether or not I know it, whether or not I admit it, I´ve got white privilege, an advantage that both is born of and fed into white dominance" (71-72). Irving claims that white privilege can be seen in relation to inattentional blindness because "you notice [privilege] least when you have it most" (71). However, "[d]iscrimination and privilege are flip sides of the same coin" (Irving 72). Thus, in order to really understand discrimination and racism, awareness of privilege is necessary. According to Irving, this might be extremely difficult and uncomfortable for white people. But she argues that "as long as our racial system is intact, there´s nothing I can do to give away my privilege. I´ve got it, whether I want it or not. The question is what will I do with it" (74). Being overwhelmed by guilt or shame when becoming aware of white privilege will not help the situation. Only concrete action can make a difference.

A necessary step in order to acknowledge white privilege is to first realise *whiteness* as a race and how good people might still be "players in the system" (Irving 153). Irving notes that when asked about her race, she thought that "the idea of asking [her] to study [her] ´racial identity´ felt ludicrous" because she did not think of herself as having a race (30). As mentioned above, this is in line with what Beverly D. Tatum noted in her book. Irving argues that despite the fact that "[p]eople of color get labels, complete with narratives and stereotypes…, [n]ot having a label for white people reinforces for [her] the idea that white population are the norm, raceless and ethnicity-less" (Irving 89). She saw people who had less than her and despite the fact that she regarded herself as being a good person, she did nothing to change the situation. Why? "[B]ecause [she] didn´t understand how racism worked" (Irving 98). When she understood whiteness, and started "[s]eeing [herself] *in* a system *with* people as opposed to a sympathetic observer on the sidelines", she "understood… that it was possible to be both a good person and complicit in a corrupt system" (98-99). Not only did the way she looked at other races change, but so did the way she thought of white people.

Furthermore, the discomfort that many feel when attempting to "cross the racial line… helps maintain segregation, avoidance, and racially socialized behaviors" (Irving 75). Irving explains that she never really understood how good people could be racially biased. However, she explains that "[t]he charged barrier that makes crossing the racial line so fraught reminds [her] of the electric fencing system people use to train their dogs to say in the yard" (Irving 75). When people feel the discomfort of crossing the racial line they quickly learn where the line is drawn and stay in their comfort zone. Irving notes that when she understood the power of the zap line, she "understood how oppression can be held in place by good, but ignorant, people" (Irving 79). People, no matter how good they are, want to feel comfortable. But "[a]s [she] replaced ignorance with understanding, the cross- racial conversational playing field leveled. As [she] moved from segregation and avoidance to contact and connection, [she] slowly transformed what had once been a charged barrier to a beckoning bond" (Irving 80). In the eyes of Irving, this is "essential to racial healing" and thus a necessary step in order to move forward (81).

Additionally, Irving stresses the importance of stories. She states that they "feed our belief systems… [and] are a primary way we connect to those around us and before

us" (82). While critical race theory emphasises majoritarian narratives as a tool for creating stereotypes and upholding the idea of white superiority, Irving mentions that stories can, in "subtle and indirect way[s]" be "one of the most powerful tools of racism" (6 and 82 respectively). The stories we are told shape our perception of people. Irving recalls a story her mother told her about the Indians when Irving was a little girl. The incorrect and uninformed version of history that her mother told her shaped how Irving viewed Indians for many years. Irving even argues that "[t]he very idea that the world´s many peoples could be categorized by something called ´race´ is a story", and it has destroyed not only individuals but entire communities over the years (Irving 84). Awareness of this issue should urge us to tell different stories than the ones we have told thus far. However, this is easier said than done as these stories are so ingrained into every part of us.

Like Glaude and Tatum, Irving also offers a possible solution to the problem. She claims that "[c]hange requires flexibility, adaptability, open-mindedness, and resilience" and this change will not happen until white people "meet people of color on common ground by sharing the burden of being uncomfortable and out of ... element" (189 and 227 respectively). White people should learn to "tolerate [their] feelings of shame, humiliation, regret, anger, and fear so [they] can engage, not run" from conversations that might lead to racial healing (Irving 171). Thus, Irving argues that "one of our greatest tools for change... [are] [s]elf-examination and the courage to admit to racial bias and unhelpful inherited behaviors" (249). Individuals must dare to be uncomfortable, and not conform to the problems they are facing in order for change to finally happen. Similarly to Tatum´s suggested solution, then, Irivng emphasises the need for inner work and cross-racial conversations. While Glaude´s solution entailes larger and more fundamental changes in society, Tatum and Irving advocate individual and inner changes as catalysts for societal changes. Nevertheless, all three of the authors argues that fear is one of the main factors hindering progress. Glaude discusses white fear of African Americans, Tatum notes that fear might prevent us from dealing with our own ignorance and Irving states that fear of being uncomfortable makes it possible for good people to be racially biased. Thus, it might appear as though facing these fears is a necessary step in the right direction.

Race and education in Norway

When reading this work, one might wonder why this is relevant for people beyond the borders of the United States. The data and statistics discussed in this thesis are all based on the U.S. and is mostly written by and written about people living in the U.S. Yet the author of this thesis will argue that the problem of racial inequality reaches far beyond the American borders. As will be demonstrated by data on discrimination and inequality from the Norwegian school system, and also by a purely humanitarian perspective, the international relevance of the problem is vast.

As already mentioned, the author of this essay is not an African American student with first-hand experience from the American education system, but rather a white Norwegian student. Thus, referring to data on the Norwegian school system when demonstrating the international relevance of the problem appears obvious. A report published by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination examined Norway´s "implementation of the provisions of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination" (OHCHR, par. 1). When State Secretary at the Ministry of Children and Equality of Norway, Tom Erlend Skaug, presented the report, the National Human Rights Institution of Norway pointed to several issues – one of them being " the lack of equal treatment in recruitment processes" where "a visible minority background could often be a disadvantage in the labour market" (OHCHR, par. 15). Norway still has a long way to go in relation to discrimination based on race.

In relation to education, Norwegian researcher Stine Helena Bang Svendsen argues that "Norway has a more tense and confused relationship" to the term race (Bergstøm, par. 11). According to Svendsen, "there are many understandings of racism in Norwegian society and that the ambiguity about what racism entails creates challenges and conflicts in the schools" (Bergstrøm, par. 14). Furthermore, Svendsen notes that in the curriculum"[t]hat which is Norwegian is presented as developed, and the others as under-developed" (Bergstrøm, par. 20). The sense of "others" is thus established by the curriculum provided for the pupils. Also, Svendsen claims that "[e]ducation about racism that seeks to bring about change must be uncomfortable for a white Norwegian teacher. It must incorporate some experience of instability and risk for those who are privileged in the situation" (Bergstrøm, par. 44). This is similar to Debby Irving´s experience of stepping out of her comfort zone in order to understand racism.

Thus, the American and Norwegian curriculum in a sense promotes white superiority. It appears as though both of the counties need to further help teachers step out of their own comfort zone and face the rough and sometimes uncomfortable conversations about race.

When researching race-based statistics in Norway it becomes apparent that such statistics are hard to find, as most of the race-based debate in Norway uses immigration as a proxy for race. Statistics refer to *immigrants* or students with *immigrant parents* when comparing educational outcomes. As argued by Svendsen, Norwegians´ complicated relationship to the term *race* can easily be avoided or not dealt with by referring to people with other ethnicities simply as *immigrants*. However, this method of avoidance will not work for long as Norway is facing an education system where many students of colour are not immigrants or children of immigrants, but rather come from a family that has lived in Norway for several generations. Thus a race-based approach to the conversation of disparities in educational opportunities and attainment appears needed.

Furthermore, the Norwegian school system also shows signs of segregation. The close link between demographics and student ethnicity is particularly evident in Oslo. In Oslo, data analysed by journalist Jørgen Gilbrant reveals that 42 per cent of infants born in Oslo during 2017 had an immigrant background (Gilbrant, par. 5). However, this number varies significantly between the West side and the East side of the city. On the West side, in areas like "Ullern, Vestre Aker and Nordre Aker, the percentage of infants with immigrant background has risen to nearly 30 per cent. [On the East side], in areas like Groruddalen and Søndre Nordstrand the percentage has risen to nearly 80 per cent" (Gilbrant, par. 6). A report published by Human Rights Service discusses "white flight from Groruddalen", and states that while some researchers claim that this is due to white parents´ concern for the quality of education provided for their white children when the majority of the class has immigrant backgrounds, others argue that white flight is not the main factor contributing to segregation (*Segregering, Mangfold…,* 7). Nevertheless, the data demonstrates a clear trend in residential patterns between the West side and the East side of Oslo. As in America, residential patterns manifest in classroom demographics and thus create racially segregated classrooms.

Additionally, data published from Statistisk Sentralbyrå, i.e. Statistics Norway, reveal that while 73% of all students enrolled in high school graduate within five years,

the equivalent number for immigrants is 54,3% (Steinkellner, fig. 2). Through analysis of the students´ high school education, Steinkellner found that "one in three immigrant boys (31 percent) who started their high school education in the fall of 2011, received neither a vocational nor an academic degree within five years" and hence dropped out (par. 31). A report published by the Norwegian department of Education (UDIR) further demonstrates disparities in educational results. The report notes that in high school, "other students get higher grades than students with immigrant parents. In turn, the latter group of students get higher grades than students who are immigrants themselves" (Utdanningsdirektoratet 18). Also, the report refers to findings demonstrating that compared to other countries, children of immigrants perform well in Norway but that the gap in performance between children of immigrants and immigrants is huge (Utdanningsdirektoratet 23). In other words, while Norway has made progress in terms of educational opportunity, there is still a long way to go when it comes to improving the educational attainment for immigrants.

Another argument supporting the international relevance of the issues at hand is the United States´ role in the international sphere. The Redeemer Nation´s glorified promises of equal opportunities for the pursuit of happiness has turned out to be – at least in many occasions – false, and the country might "[need] a new national narrative", as argued by NY Times´ David Brooks (par. 5). Nevertheless, U.S.´ role as a superpower in the international arena should not be underrated. From movies, music and TV-shows to academic, societal and cultural revolutions, most of us are influenced or affected by the U.S. in some way or another. The fact that America is one of the most – if not *the* most – powerful and influential country in the world further emphasise the international relevance of the problem.

Moreover, the problem of racial inequality in the U.S. is internationally relevant from a humanitarian perspective. As mentioned earlier, the borders of one´s country does not set the limits for one´s humanity or empathy as a human being. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote in a letter from 1963 that "[i]njustice anywhere is a threat to justice anywhere... **Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly**" (King, par. 4). If injustice happens somewhere else, it just as well might happen here. If it happens to someone else, we are – as humans – bound to react and try to restore some sense of justice. Thus, the problem of racial inequality and persistent existence of discrimination in America is not solely of concern for Americans – it concerns us all.

Conclusion

All in all, this work sought to examine the history of African American education through the eyes of Carter G. Woodson and Carol Anderson and in turn demonstrate that African Americans have systematically been oppressed in favour of whites throughout history in relation to educational opportunities and in other areas of society. While Woodson focused on how African Americans had been indoctrinated into inferiority and an attitude of submission throughout history, Anderson stressed how white rage and resistance to African American advancement had hindered any substantial progress having been made. Both of the authors, however, demonstrate systemic oppression that favours whites. Through policies, government spending, segregation and opposition to any serious African American advancement, the white majority remains the privileged group in society.

Furthermore, recent data and research on the disparities in educational opportunities demonstrated that African Americans are too often excluded from full participation in a system rife with inequality. Findings revealed that schools are still segregated and unequal in terms of availability of resources, government spending and the quality of education provided for the students. Also, data demonstrating the educational attainment gap was presented and discussed. Not only did this discussion highlight statistics but also questioned whether or not discussing an attainment gap in the first place is a tool for whites to further establish their superiority over people of colour.

Potential remedies and promising initiatives made by Eddie S. Glaude Jr., Beverly S. Tatum and Debby Irving have been discussed. Glaude advocated a fundamental remaking of democracy in America, as the current form of democracy cannot be deemed as anything other than intertwined with white supremacy. Tatum on the other hand stressed the importance of open communication and self-examination in order for change to happen. This is somewhat in line with Irving´s thoughts on inner work and the connection between the cultural belief system and the things we can observe in society as being racially biased. Furthermore, all of the authors described how different kinds of fear might prevent progress being made. While Glaude noted how white fear of African Americans is detrimental not only for African Americans but also for society, Tatum discussed how fear of one´s own ignorance might hinder change. Irving, on the other hand, described how fear of being uncomfortable and finding out unpleasant truths

about one´s self and about society can be a powerful factor. Also, all of these authors call for *active* participation and stress the need to *take action* as opposed to waiting for a magical and fundamental change to occur. In their eyes, nothing will change unless we make them change.

Lastly, this work argued that race-based educational discrimination is of international relevance. There are several reasons as to why this is a problem beyond the American borders. Firstly, discrimination in the education system can be found in other countries as well. In this thesis, the Norwegian education system was discussed in relation to the problem. Data demonstrating the problem of segregation in the Norwegian capitol, Oslo, were also discussed. Secondly, the U.S. is regarded as an international superpower with massive influence on other countries both through media and technology but also through bigger cultural and societal revolutions also. Thus awareness of what reality is like for numerous Americans is important. Thirdly, this thesis argued that the problem is of international relevance based on humanitarian principles, as we are all bound to react to injustice committed upon fellow human beings. Discrimination based on race in the American education system is thus of relevance internationally.

Several factors complicated the process of creating this work. The biggest complicating factor, though, turned out to be the author´s own nationality and skin colour. A recurring question when writing the thesis was "who am I to tell this story?". The fact of the matter is that this story is – in many ways – not mine to tell. I am neither American, nor African American. I am neither a professor, nor a civil rights expert. I am neither a legal expert, nor an expert on finance and economy. Quite frankly – I am a 25-year-old white Norwegian student whose only experience with discrimination has been that of white privilege. I have never been denied a job because of my last name and never been suspected of committing a crime because of my skin colour. Much like Irving, I have had to take a long and hard look in the mirror several times throughout this process. Not because I am an evil person – but because the more I learned, the more I realised that we are all "racialized" in some way. Thus, the perhaps biggest complicating factor in the development of this thesis has been its author.

Moreover, critical race theory laid the foundation for this thesis and its tenets fuelled the discussion and questions asked throughout the work. One of the most important tenets revealed itself to be that of majoritarian narratives. This is because one

of the author´s main concerns when creating the narrative of this thesis was to avoid any sense of "white superiority" or "Norwegian students fixes it all". From start to finish, it has been made clear that the problem of racial inequality and racial bias is complex and diverse – as are the solutions. As racism is not something that is fixed, but rather a dynamic, moving and breathing thing that surrounds us, the solutions need to embody the same flexibility and diversity.

Where do we go from here? As demonstrated above, we are at risk of facing an education system that treats its majority of students as second-class citizens unless changes are made. The question, then, is *what* changes should be made and *how* should they be made. While Glaude, Tatum and Irving offer three different ways of moving forward – the former focusing more on outer and structural work and the two latter emphasising the need for inner work – they all argue that change *is* possible. However, words and high hopes are no longer enough. Empty promises have been made throughout history promising equality and justice for all. Too many times have attempts to change an unjust system failed and disappointed those affected by racial inequality. But maybe that is the key – we have tried to change the system first, not realising or being *willing* to acknowledge the fact that the problem with the persistent racism *in* the system lies with the people in it. The problem lies with me, you and with all of us. The change must come from within. Maybe one day, when we have all acknowledged our own part in the history of racial injustice, we will finally be able to say that things changed. *We* changed.

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