The On-Going Struggle: Education and Mobility for Black Women

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary discussions of racism should be expanded to cover diverse forms of racial oppression. Data from a study of fifty-six college educated Black women reveal how racial oppression takes different forms across schools with different racial structures and for students of different social classes within the same school. Subjects were among the first major wave of Black students to attend predominantly White colleges in the Boston area in the 1960s. They were interviewed about their educational experiences from elementary school through college. Their stories reveal both the multiple strategies that they and their families used to obtain a good education and the personal costs associated with them. The forms of oppression and the strategies differed in segregated (de facto and de jure), integrated, and predominantly White schools.
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At the beginning of the century, W. E. B. Du Bois wrote: "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line,--the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea." (1) While we may very well end this century struggling with race issues, they will be different issues from the ones Du Bois saw in 1903. Rather than being fixed, "race is a sociohistorical construct which is neither objective nor static. It is a multidimensional complex of social meanings, subjectivities, practices, and institutions organized around the question of human physical characteristics." (2)

There is tremendous diversity in the meaning of racism across different historical eras and in different places. Black educational goals in the 1950s and 1960s revolved around issues of access, funding, and desegregation. As gains were made in each of these areas, the nature of racism changed and the strategies to end it were also fundamentally altered. With each gain came a renewed commitment on the part of Blacks to seek additional changes, to write new agendas, and to devise new strategies. In a society where education is the primary means of mobility for Afro-Americans, it has been imperative for families to persevere in the
struggle for access, equitable distribution of resources, and humane treatment for their children.

Many scholars and policy makers posit that in order for our society to translate its' vision of equality into reality, our educational institutions must be free of race, gender, class and other forms of bias. Currently, our educational institutions play a critical role in reproducing current social and economic structures.(3) To move toward the goals of reforming schools, it is important to understand how people experience these institutions. Educational policy makers cannot define the problem and devise the solutions without input from those who must survive in schools.(4) It is especially important to hear from members of traditionally oppressed groups, those who have been victimized in our schools and as a consequence in other institutions in the society.

How young people in educational institutions experience the racism of the society varies by gender and social class of the student, the location of the school (urban, suburban, or rural), its' racial and class composition, the size of its' student body, the racial and gender composition of its' teaching and administrative staff, and other factors.

This essay explores how Black women's social class origins and the racial structure of their schools shape their educational experiences. It also details some of the different strengths and scars Black women develop in segregated (de jure and de facto), integrated, and predominantly White primary and secondary schools.
THE STUDY

The data presented here are drawn from a larger study of social class differences in the mobility strategies of fifty-six educated Black women. The women are college graduates, who completed their baccalaureate degrees in co-educational institutions in the Boston area between 1968 and 1970. Born between 1946 and 1950, these Black women are part of the baby boom generation. They grew up in various locations around the nation, but mostly on the East coast. They were sent questionnaires six to eight years after their graduations from college. At that time participants had moved beyond early thinking about their futures; some were completing advanced degrees; but most had actually settled into careers and/or marriage. The substantial time period since their early schooling experiences made it easier for them to reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of the strategies they had pursued. All the fifty-six women responded to extensive questionnaires and twenty of them were also interviewed in person. Their stories reveal the variety of ways that racism affected the lives of middle- and working-class Black women in different educational settings.

The 1960s was a unique historical era in many respects. The decade began with the majority of Black college students enrolled in predominantly Black colleges. By 1970, the majority of Black students enrolled in higher educational institutions were attending predominantly White colleges and universities. These women were in the early wave of that move to White colleges. To gain the credentials to be attractive to these predominantly White
colleges these women had to scale racist barriers in housing and educational institutions.

While the subjects attended schools during an earlier historical era, their stories have contemporary importance for several reasons. First, today questions about Black life are shifting from a focus on segregated and all-Black settings to an investigation of racism in integrated settings. Understanding the experiences of Black women who attended integrated and predominantly White schools can shed light on these new concerns. Second, these experiences are shared by many other baby boomers who were involved in desegregating educational institutions throughout this nation. Third, many of these women were token Black students in their classes and we can learn a great deal about the token experience from their stories. And finally, the stories of these women are important in highlighting the educational strategies employed by Black families in the 1950s and early 1960s to maximize their children's educational options. Many of these strategies remain relevant to contemporary Black families' quests to educate their children.

The fifty-six college graduate women in this study came from both middle- and working-class families. Social class was defined by the distinction between mental and manual laborers, a division which roughly parallels the line between the census categories of professional, managerial and administrative workers and the remaining working class. Recent research has demonstrated the relevance of this division to the class perceptions in the Black
community. (5) Subjects were classified as middle class if either their father or mother were employed as mental laborers.

Twenty-five of the respondents were raised in middle-class families and thirty-one in working-class families. Common occupations for middle-class parents included social worker, teacher, and school administrator, as well as higher status professionals like attorneys, physicians, and dentists. Middle-class parents had relatively high levels of educational attainment: twenty-four had advanced degrees, eleven had completed college, five had some years of college and eight had high school diplomas.

Typical jobs for working-class fathers were: postal clerk, craftsman, semi-skilled manufacturing worker, janitor, and laborer. Many mothers were clerical, sales or private household workers. Two working-class parents were college graduates, sixteen had some years of college, twenty parents were high school graduates, four had some years of high school and sixteen had nine years or less of formal schooling. (6)

Middle-class parents had greater information, economic and other resources with which to confront the racial barriers that they and their children faced. Within urban, suburban, and rural areas, racial discrimination limited Black families' access to housing and schools in many of the same ways that it blocked entrance to employment sectors, health care, and political participation. Both middle- and working-class Black families in urban, suburban, and rural communities devised strategies to scale racial barriers. Basically they knew that the less segregated a
facility, the more likely their daughters would be to receive an education which would enable them to enter and graduate from college. They pursued strategies which fit their geographic location and economic resources. In those days prior to major Civil Rights legislation, Black families and individuals had to develop private strategies for change. When the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964, most of these respondents were already in or just entering college.

During this era, most of the Black working- and middle-class Northern families favored integrated schools. In their view, the more White children in an educational setting, the more likely that all children would get a quality education and not be short-changed.

Middle-class families could achieve quality schooling in two major ways: by living in school districts with excellent schools or paying tuition for private schools. In the North, where residential segregation was high, local schools reflected class and racial composition of neighborhoods. Middle-class families would move into predominantly White or integrated areas to enter these local public schools. Some families moved to the suburbs, while others found middle-class communities in the central city. Even in the days when dual housing was the pattern, these Black families were among the few who had the resources to overcome restrictions and move out of the ghetto. In my study, eighteen of the twenty-five middle class respondents grew up outside of the ghetto.(7)

Middle-class families also had the option of not leaving
their predominantly Black communities. Some middle-class Blacks lived in affluent sections of Black communities and preferred to remain there and send their children out of the ghetto to school—thus, they paid tuition for their children to attend private or parochial schools. Six middle-class women graduated from private or parochial schools. Three other middle-class women attended private schools during their junior or senior high school years.

Middle-class families selected options that best fit their needs and economic resources. For example, Rosalind Griffin’s middle-class family moved out of the ghetto to a predominantly White suburb when she was six years old. (8) Her parents sought home ownership, but the move to this isolated community was primarily motivated by their desire to provide Rosalind, their only child, with access to excellent schools. (9) As a result, Rosalind was a token both in the school and the larger community. She had a very lonely childhood. In contrast, Katrina Charles’ middle-class family lived in an affluent section of a predominantly Black inner city community. Katrina socialized with young people in her neighborhood, many of whom were the children of her parents’ friends. Yet, daily she left her neighborhood to attend a predominantly White private school.

The working-class parents who attempted to pursue similar routes to obtaining a quality education found their way hampered by class barriers. Moving in search of better schools was also a strategy used by many working-class Black families. Twelve of the thirty-one working-class respondents lived in predominantly white or integrated neighborhoods during part of their childhoods. Like
their middle-class counterparts, these families attempted to leave the ghetto in search of better housing and improved schools. Unlike middle-class families they were less successful in their quests. Many found that they had only moved to the fringes of the ghetto or into areas in transition—which quickly became predominantly Black. Thus, the ghetto schools they were intent upon fleeing, pursued them into new areas. Many parents were successful in getting their children through elementary school before the neighborhood school became predominantly Black. Once urban schools became predominantly Black, serving these constituents became a lower priority for city officials than serving integrated or predominantly White schools. While families were fighting this practice in the political arena, they were also seeking personal strategies to minimize the impact of deteriorating schools on their own children.

Most working-class families were dependent upon public schools, because private or parochial school tuition was a burden that they could not bear. Only one working-class respondent graduated from a parochial school. All others were public school graduates. Their class position structured the strategies they could use to secure adequate schooling. As a result, the majority of working-class parents were strong advocates within public school systems for their children and used all available public school resources. (10) This meant that in cities where specialized academic high schools were available, parents worked hard to get their children prepared to pass entrance examinations to attend those schools. In general, Black parents surveyed their
communities looking for educational opportunities for their children. For example, Nancy Brooks by-passed her overcrowded, predominantly Black district high school to be one of thirty Blacks students desegregating an all white high school. She remarked:

My mother really wanted me to go to college, because she had not been able to finish. So she made the decision that I would go to Wilson Hill (an all White high school). The only other choice was A. Philip Randolph High School, which was another all Black school. So I took public transportation and went to Wilson.

Parents in the North used their residence, money, and energy to get their children into integrated or predominantly White schools. In the South, where segregated schools were still the norm, parents worked within the system of segregated schools. Yet, even the most successful strategies for getting an education carried a price. Often young people faced social isolation, social discomfort, a childhood lost, and other personal difficulties. While people were intent upon procuring the educational benefits of these schools, little attention was paid to the personal costs associated with these strategies.

SOUTHERN SEGREGATED SCHOOLS

Many people are familiar with the perils of Southern segregated schools. The detailed discussion of these institutions before the Supreme Court resulted in the landmark 1954 decision that declared segregated facilities inherently unequal.(11)
Seven of my subjects graduated from Southern high schools which at that time were segregated. While two middle-class women noted certain disadvantages of their schools like teachers' qualifications, supplies, equipment, and facilities, the majority from both middle- and working-class homes were very positive about most aspects of their schooling experiences. They felt accepted by peers, encouraged by teachers, and were very active in school affairs. The comments of Natalie Small typify this group.

Natalie grew up working-class in a Southern city. She states:

I enjoyed a variety of school activities: band, choir, language clubs, honor society and others. The students, parents, and teachers all knew each other and cooperated to make the school (which was all Black) a very positive and meaningful experience. We never felt inferior or dejected because our school was all Black. We believed it was a good school with very concerned teachers and parents.

Unfortunately, their positive social experiences in segregated elementary and high schools were lost when most respondents entered predominantly White colleges. In Southern segregated schools, the Black respondents had well-rounded high school careers. Their educational preparation was similar to that of working class women who graduated from Northern comprehensive high schools. The majority of both groups spent the first two years of college adjusting to the pressure and pace of college work. But the positive social experiences of Southern segregated
schools gave these women the stamina to tolerate later years in less welcoming educational settings.

NORTHERN PREDOMINANTLY BLACK SCHOOLS

While subjects identified many positive aspects of their Southern segregated education, Northern de facto segregated schools had few redeeming qualities during the 1950s and 1960s. Ghetto schools were primarily places where Black children were damaged. Residential segregation gave birth to ghetto schools and they were nurtured in an environment of urban neglect. The ghetto school had a very special deadening effect on Black children. Kenneth Clark in *Dark Ghetto* identified social class and racial biases on the part of teachers as important in the development of a self-fulfilling prophecy in ghetto schools:

In the late 1950s, a number of teachers in New York public schools told white student interviewers assigned by the author that Negro children are inherently inferior in intelligence and therefore cannot be expected to learn as much or as readily as white children and that all one would do, if one tried to teach them as if they could learn, would be to develop in them serious emotional disturbances, frustrations, and anxieties. The humanitarian thing to do for these children, the proponents of such theories maintain, is to provide schools that are essentially custodial, rather than educational institutions. (12) Confronting attitudes such as these in the classroom can
produce despair and anger in young Black people who initially begin school with high aspirations. In the end, many Black people accurately perceive the school system as a place where they will reap few benefits. In schools where discipline is stressed over learning, and where they receive little encouragement, Black children become more disadvantaged than when they entered. These school situations do not facilitate participation in the mainstream of American life. Rather, as Clark says, schools are "very effective instruments in widening socio-economic and racial cleavages in our society and in imposing class and caste rigidities." (13) Clark’s observations were confirmed by many investigations into ghetto schools by both teachers and researchers. (14) Clark’s comments about New York City schools were also truisms for many Northern Black parents during the 1950s and 1960s.

The women in my study who attended Northern ghetto schools on the elementary or junior high school level expressed mixed emotions about their experiences. As very bright and highly motivated students, school was a place that most of the respondents enjoyed. It is not surprising that they did well, even in ghetto schools. For these working-class Black students, the costs of ghetto school attendance became apparent after graduation, when they moved on to the next educational level. For example, Dorothy Wall, a working-class respondent who grew up in Boston, enjoyed school and her education appeared to have been adequate until junior high school. She said her junior high school was "ninety-nine percent Black and many of the teachers
hated the students." In this hostile setting, she continued to be a good and cooperative student and she received special attention for some teachers. But as a high achiever in her ghetto school, Dorothy was unprepared for high school. She recalled:

One major drawback of junior high school—the ghetto school—was it really didn’t prepare you for an integrated high school. Levels of achievement which were perfectly acceptable in junior high school would earn you a D in high school. In junior high I was on the honor roll. In high school, that first semester was like a shock treatment. My A became C. There was no way over a three month period you could become so stupid. My study habits, that had earned me A’s and B’s, honor roll grades in junior high, could earn me nothing but C’s and D’s in high school. My mother came up and wanted to know what was going on. They told her I was not prepared.

Her poor preparation hurt Dorothy in a number of ways. First, her performance in high school confirmed her teachers’ beliefs that Black students were less able than White students. Second, with these beliefs supported, Dorothy’s high school teachers did not actively encourage her to make up the work she had missed. It was easier for them to accept her as a "C" student. Third, Dorothy had to work doubly hard to catch up with her White high school peers. The motivation and support to remedy the deficiencies of her ghetto schooling came from her family. Her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Wall, believed in their
daughter's abilities and encouraged her even in the face of little institutional support. In the end, Dorothy was successful in this pursuit and upon graduation from high school she went directly to college.

Dorothy vividly remembers the personal costs of her earlier schooling and the racism she faced in high school. The transition to an integrated high school was a rude awakening. It was the time when she first recalls having to consciously cope with being victimized in a racist society. She did not accept the limited views of her potential that were revealed by her teachers. She knew she was more than "a hard working, but limited student." Recognizing the racism in the larger society helped Dorothy cope with her situation. She ended by saying: "I just wonder how many kids went through that crisis and didn't have someone to say, 'It's not you, it is the amount of information you have been given.'"

It was Dorothy's experience that many Black families feared. They planned strategies to avoid schools where Black children would get limited exposure to quality educational materials and a diluted education. Thus, they attempted to avoid de facto segregated schools, especially the ghetto public school, where Black children were systematically taught less. In these days before researchers and activists talked about institutionalized racism, Black parents were familiar with racial bias in the public school system and sought ways to lessen its impact on their children. Parents of the women in this study were often able to help their children avoid the poor educational preparation in
ghetto schools by gaining access to predominantly white and integrated schools. Predominantly White and integrated schools brought better educational training and personal costs.

PREDOMINANTLY WHITE SCHOOLS

The majority of the respondents (forty-nine) attended integrated or predominantly White high schools. There was tremendous diversity in their experiences, but there was also common themes. It is instructive to contrast aspects of their lives with those of respondents who went to predominantly Black schools. It should be noted that even in integrated schools, the college bound courses were often predominantly White, therefore, there are many similarities in the experiences of women in predominantly White and the women in integrated schools. Thus, these two groups of students will be discussed together in this section. During this time, there were few educational settings that were truly mixed along racial lines, thus seventeen of these respondents attended high schools with integrated college bound programs and they will be discussed separately.

Black students in predominantly White classrooms, especially with middle-class peers, were guaranteed exposure to academic material appropriate or even advanced for their grade level. But it was common for Black and White students in integrated classrooms to receive different personal treatment. This was particularly true in the majority of urban public schools, where there were few Black teachers in the 1950s and 1960s.
The women did experience overt racist treatment. Joyce Saunders' teacher wanted her to sit in the back of the room, two rows behind the White students in her predominantly White suburban high school. Denise Larkin, a working-class respondent, reported that one of her teachers refused to give her the grades she had earned. A common pattern was for Black students to sit in a classroom and watch all the White students receive rewards and praise. Black students had to do exceptionally well to earn minimal praise from instructors. Some would do well and never receive praise.

Linda Trott, a working-class respondent who is now a professional educator, spent years reflecting on her schooling experiences. She realized that patterns of differential treatment began in her integrated elementary school. She commented:

I really think I was damaged by the school system in a lot of ways. In elementary school I was a good student, I mean I got A's and B's, well pretty much all A's. But the White students in the class, with the exception of your less able White students, always got rewarded more by the teachers. And we accepted this as the natural order of life. And that is what bothers me now. That was the pattern all the way through until I went to college.

This treatment was not reserved for Black working class youth. Middle-class respondents in both public and private predominantly White schools also commented about how little attention Black students received. Karen White, a middle-class
respondent who is now a physician, had difficulties surviving as a
token in her predominantly White high school. She did not receive
much attention from teachers until she scored high on the SAT
examinations. Then the teachers and counselors were determined to
get her into a good college, because that accomplishment would
reflect well on the high school. Never did teachers reach out to
her personally. Karen recounts the experience:

On the whole, school was a bummer. I didn’t make
many friends or any close friends. I only knew one
person from my junior high school and we were not in any
of the same classes. I was the only sister (Black
female) in most of my classes and felt extremely
isolated, vulnerable, and insecure.

Deborah Jones, a middle-class respondent, attended a private
school in a mid-Western city. All the Black students in her
school were middle class, but Deborah still noticed racial
differences in treatment. Black students were less likely
candidates for the status of "interesting student," and only
those who were the brightest in the entire school received
attention. Deborah reflected on the consequences of this
educational strategy:

The major advantage of attending College Prep High was I
got an extremely good standardized education. The
disadvantages were a certain amount of mental cruelty,
emotional and intellectual conflict. This was strongly
felt during the late high school years and continued
into college.
These women and many like them had to endure the difficulties of being a token in predominantly White settings or being one of a number of Black students in the class who were frequently ignored by teachers. Such treatment did not make getting an education easy. It was hard for young Black women to continually remember that they were bright and talented individuals. In many ways, they suffered, particularly with regard to their self-image. Linda Trott thought about the years of coping in predominantly White learning environments. She said:

I started off as a little kid in nursery school very outgoing and very verbal. I talked all the time, there was no shutting me up. I was alright, I had no problems with people. And I went through a period of extreme regression. I was really withdrawn in high school. I sat there and did not say anything for three years. I came there with my little notebook, went through the day, and then went home.

Linda is now a very verbal college educator, but it took her years to regain her confidence in herself and develop a more accurate sense of her potential. And she is not alone.

Men and women like Linda Trott played an important role in de-segregating many predominantly White high school and college bound programs around the country. They knew that they were among the first Blacks to be "let in" these schools. They were highly visible tokens and felt pressured to do well. They wanted to please their families by succeeding in these settings. Also
performing well in high school and going to college were goals they personally desired.

At the same time, these young Black people were not just in these educational program for themselves and their families--they were there for the race. And each one recognized the need to demonstrate that she could do well, because her performance would have implications for other Black people. It was critical to demonstrate that Blacks deserved access to these places. Their role was at once a source of pride and pressure. Many Black women put up with painful and impossible situations so that others would have opportunities. Therefore, they pushed aside their feelings of pain, anger, terror and the like and performed well in high schools and then went on to repeat this pattern in predominantly White colleges.

In each case, the presence of talented Black students in college bound tracks was a benefit to the individual school. School officials could boast having three Black students in the top class. They could take pride in getting a Black woman into an elite college. All the time, these teachers and counselors did little to assist the Black students in coping with their schools and bridging the gap between predominantly White schools and Black homes. Teachers never addressed how intimidated and isolated these students were as tokens in these predominantly White settings. Having liberal and progressive goals that promoted integration could not compensate for neglecting the personal lives of these Black students.
INTEGRATED SCHOOLS

Seventeen of the women in my study attended integrated schools, that is, schools where there was diversity in the student body, in the college bound and/or honors program, and in the faculty. The majority lived in states that had a history of de jure segregated schools that quickly desegregated after the Supreme Court Decision.

For example, Margaret Cooke attended a public high school in a mid-Atlantic community that desegregated in the late 1950s. Margaret’s school was more than fifty percent Black. The high school offered both a college preparatory program and high honors course. Margaret was in the high honors track, but she was not isolated. There were many other Black students, and people of color as well as White students in her classes. She enjoyed high school and found it "academically stimulating." She said, "I related to both teachers and fellow students well. There were good extracurricular activities and I had an active social life."

Margaret had particular praise for her teachers. She notes:

I had older Black teachers (and some whites) who knew their subject matter very well and were dedicated to teaching. Also they were supportive of students, at least those in the Honors program.

Margaret Cooke’s situation gave her the support from Black teachers, often found in Southern segregated schools, while her school had the financial resources found in many middle-class Northern public high school.
Middle class respondents who attended integrated schools were very positive about their schooling. The presence of Black faculty and classmates meant that these Black women were less isolated and did not feel the incredible pressure common among tokens to succeed for the race. Rather than feeling isolated and very self-conscious about race like their counterparts in predominantly White classrooms, these graduates of integrated high schools felt a part of the school community. They felt able to relax and enjoy high school. For example, Michelle Clark, a middle-class respondent in the honors track of her high school, recalled:

Several other Black students--about ten--were in an Honors group, but the rest of my friends were in the regular college prep group. I enjoyed high school. I liked my subjects and different activities. I had different friends and was in social groups. I particularly enjoyed math, glee club, the sciences, the newspaper, and sports--both our and the men's school teams.

These integrated schools were comprehensive secondary schools. In this country secondary schools are double-tracked to accommodate the children of the middle- and working-classes. The overall objective is to prepare each student to reproduce the social class position of her/his parents. (15) Thus, there were important social class differences in the reception and degree of support for college attendance experienced by middle- and working-class students in integrated high schools. Being middle class was
an advantage in comprehensive high schools. As the children of college educated parents, middle-class students did not have to convince their teachers that they were "college material."

In contrast, the women from working-class families had their college aspirations questioned by teachers and school counselors. As a consequence, working-class respondents in integrated high schools had to work hard to demonstrate that they were indeed qualified to cross class lines. A few had difficulties gaining access to college preparatory courses. Yet even when working-class Black women were tracked for college, they were rarely the recipients of special attention. For example, Darlene Maxwell was ignored by teachers in her all-girls high school. As the daughter of a machinist and a secretary, she was not viewed as a likely candidate for college. Teachers questioned her aspirations, until she scored high on the PSATs. Other working-class respondents talked about how teachers did not take their goals of college attendance seriously. Their counselors attempted to steer them towards community colleges and technical schools rather than four year colleges. (16)

Unlike their middle-class peers, the eight working-class women in integrated high schools faced obstacles to college attendance. Yet, despite those problems, these working-class respondents expressed appreciation for the relaxed social atmosphere in schools. Sylvia Mason’s high school had several tracks, but the honors and academically talented classes had Black and White students of all social class backgrounds. Sylvia had friends of all social classes and races who were planning to go to
college. Another working-class respondent, Adele Lewis commented that in her high school there were enough Black and White students with varied interests that she could pick her friends on the basis of shared interests and personalities.

The data from this study suggest that when racially balanced comprehensive high schools with reputable academic programs were available, they were the first preference for Black students and parents. In fact, this was the most common option selected by middle-class women whose families had the greatest resources at their disposal.

CONCLUSIONS

The Black women in my study all coped with racism in high schools during the early 1960s. But the forms of racism that they faced differed substantially by the type of school they attended and their family's social class. Segregated schools institutionalized inequalities in access to educational resources. In the South, the detrimental impact of poorly funded schools was tempered by the cooperative support of the Black community. Black parents with children in Northern de facto segregated schools attempted to mitigate the harmful effects of those schools primarily by avoiding them. In predominantly White private and public school classrooms, middle- and working-class respondents received quality educations that prepared them to attend predominantly White colleges. But the education came with a high personal cost, including isolation and feeling pressured as tokens. In contrast, all the women who attended integrated
schools remembered positive social experiences. But the working-class women felt that they had to prove they belonged in college bound programs every day, while their middle-class counterparts were strongly encouraged to attend college.

All the women in this study went on to predominantly White colleges in the Boston area, where again they confronted racism. As members of a small Black cohort, they felt pressured to demonstrate that other Blacks merited access to these institutions. For many, their training in predominantly White high school classrooms prepared them for this new venture. Others from integrated and predominantly Black educational settings had to learn to cope with being a token. All had to adjust to an even greater immersion into the White world.

Throughout their lives, many of these women have paved paths into formerly predominantly White environments. They first integrated schools and as college graduates they are integrating many work environments. Although society gains from their presence in formerly all-White environments, the women pay a personal price in terms of isolation and heightened pressures to perform. These women play a critical role in the race relations of the 1980s since they serve as mediators and interpreters between the Black and White communities.

The stories of these women’s struggles with racism in educational systems in the 1960s also reveal much about the struggles of the 1980s. Integration is still the prized goal for most Black people and social class continues to influence who has access to integrated settings. Middle-class Blacks still have
more educational options than working-class Blacks. In fact, desegregation has primarily provided greater access to a range of professional, managerial and administrative positions and enabled the Black middle class to translate economic gains into housing and educational options.

Working-class Blacks still face uphill battles when seeking to enhance their children's educational preparation. Today, Northern and Southern urban public schools are more similar to each other than they were in the 1960s. In both regions, public school systems have to accommodate to increasing numbers of young people of color and fewer Whites. Urban comprehensive high schools are also increasing composed of poor and working-class youth while the middle-class of all colors seek suburban, inner city magnet, and private schools. As schools become re-segregated along both race and class lines, working-class Black youth face multiple barriers to educational paths that lead to college.

And finally, like the women in my study, many Blacks continue to be highly visible as one of the few Blacks in affluent secondary schools like private and public schools in suburban areas, college towns and rural communities. Although there is more interracial friendship and interracial contact now than in the 1960s, these students are often the first middle-class Black people that White youth in these communities have met. Thus, there are still tensions and pressures associated with Black attendance in predominantly White schools.

Most importantly this study demonstrates the wide range of strategies Black people use to resist oppression. Although
collective political actions are the most visible to the public, Black people do not limit their actions to the political sphere. Battling racism is a protracted struggle which requires daily attention. People also struggle in private and personal ways, for example, as parents when they comfort their children after a long day in a predominantly White environment. They resist institutional racism when they make financial sacrifices to live in areas where the schools have advanced educational programs. In whatever ways they can, Black parents struggle to mitigate the impact of detrimental policies and institutions on their children's lives.

Racism's many forms, its relationship to social class, and the many ways people struggle for change will continue to be topics of discussion in the late 1980s and the 1990s. Hopefully, the stories of these women have raised awareness of how race and class intersect to shape educational options and opportunities for Black Americans.
ENDNOTES


6. Not all the respondents knew their parents' level of educational attainment, because they were raised by one parent.


8. All the names used in this article are pseudonyms.
9. This case is very similar to the respondents in a study of Black families who moved out of a middle income housing complex in Harlem between 1952 and 1956. See Oscar Handlin, The Newcomers: Negroes and Puerto Ricans in a Changing Metropolis (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965).


11. Elizabeth Higginbotham, "Race and Class Barriers."


16. This issue is explored in a larger manuscript "Too Much To Ask: The Cost of Black Female Success" (manuscript in preparation).