Control, Punish, and Conquer: U.S. Public Schools' Attempts to Control Black Males*

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Abstract

Policies and procedures that govern public education in the United States have produced a system of control and punishment that impedes the education of Black males. The historical antecedents of this system are reflected in various forms of racism, from denying education to enslaved Blacks through legal segregation in schools during the post-Civil War period. This study reviews the treatment of Black male children attending public schools in the United States. It focuses on contemporary policies and procedures related to special education, alternative schooling, and the practice of "medicating" children with behavioral difficulties to demonstrate how covert forms of racism in public education continue to control and punish Black males.

Introduction

A system of control and punishment is evident in the treatment of Black male children attending public schools in the United States. This system is a byproduct of the rationale developed to defend slavery (Feagin 2000; Hutchinson 1994). Because White males who controlled the school system viewed Black males as a sexual and physical threat, they created myths and manipulated stereotypes to justify the need for social control (Cose 2002; Feagin 2000; Hutchinson 1994).

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Additionally, the background literature illustrates high levels of social control directed toward Black males as a form of social reproduction of racism supported by racist ideologies inside U.S. public education. This form of social reproduction is the process wherein one generation passes on the racist ideology and the concomitant racist attitudes as justification for racial inequality and oppression of the Black population (Feagin 2000). "[T]hese conditions include substantial control by whites of major economic resources and possession of the political, police, and ideological power to dominate subordinated racial groups" (Feagin 2000:25-26). Such transmission is visible in the various policies and services enacted by public school districts. Specifically, these efforts are revealed by public schools' uses of corporal punishment, behavioral stimulants (any form of mind-altering drugs), and alternative education settings (i.e., self-contained classrooms within regular settings and/or satellite facilities away from regular education settings). This article reviews previous research and excerpts from a recent study to show that policies of control and punishment permeate public education and ultimately lead Black males down a path of academic and social disaster.

To appreciate this system of control, it is important to examine the evolution of American public schools. Public education grew out of the general belief that a country could not advance unless the majority of its citizens were educated (Tyack, Anderson, Cuban, Kaestle, Ravitch, Bernard, Mondale, & Meryl 2001). Colonial education reflected principles of the Protestant Reformation that stressed the importance of literacy for learning scripture. This had become the common school movement by the late 18th century, stressing the importance of education for good government. Nineteenth century demographic and economic changes saw consequent changes in public education. It was able to assimilate masses of immigrants and consolidate U.S. national identity, while at the same time embracing, often violently, racial segregation through most of the 20th century. Finally, the post-Civil Rights era of integrated public education evoked earlier political philosophies that argued the importance of good education for good government. Recall that while many of the founders of public education in the United States focused on the idea that education was vital to fostering national progress, democracy, and Protestant values, White males enacted this system for White males. Even after women were granted access to education, minorities, particularly Blacks, were held back; they were the last to receive such access.

The focus of public education moved from promoting Protestantism to meeting the demands of the changing industrial economic system. However, the intent to enact a certain level of control over citizens has been retained. This intent is most evident with respect to people of color, particularly Black males. The social control of Blacks may be traced to the denial of access to education during slavery. Once Blacks were legally allowed access to education, they felt that education would guarantee a better life and opportunities previously denied. Blacks have historically linked education with freedom — education became synonymous with lib-

eration. However, the system of public education was unfair and biased against Blacks because of racist and oppressive policies and procedures intended to exert control over this population. The system persists today in America's public schools.

Social Reproduction of Racism

Before a discussion of public school policies and services, it is important to examine how the portrayal and treatment of Black males in the United States, leads to policies and practices in today's schools. Victimization of Blacks is observable throughout the history of the United States. John Hope Franklin (1965) discussed the existence of two "worlds" in the United States — a White world and a Black world. According to Franklin, these worlds divided from the arrival of the first slave ship in the colonies of America. He describes the feelings of inferiority that Whites projected onto the slaves. This provided the rationale for slavery and discrimination that many Whites have accepted and practiced. This theory of inferiority resurfaces repeatedly in the relationships between Whites and Blacks throughout the history of this country (Feagin 2000; Daniels 2002). Racist ideologies of inferiority validated, and in many ways continue to defend, the two separate worlds of inequality in all major social institutions, including public education. In "The Pragmatic and Politics of Difference," Kal Alston (1999) noted that traditionally, minority groups such as Blacks have never enjoy ed the rights and privileges or the equality granted to Whites in the United States. For example, the privileged have customarily justified their philosophy of inequality by amplifying the differences between Blacks and Whites. This divisive technique created the political concept of "whiteness," to build a unified opposition to racial groups in the U.S. that were different in appearances and culture. For example, Native Americans were considered savages, incapable of self-government and in need of moral guidance. Black males were considered violent, hypersexual, uncivilized, and child-like, irrational individuals at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. In contrast, Whites and, to some extent, European immigrants received much higher moral regard after full ideological and cultural assimilation (Feagin 2000). This ideology has been acknowledged in many scholarly works that describe Blacks as perceived by Whites and other minority groups, as presented in the popular media, and as reflected in some scientific writings (Cose 2002; Feagin 2000; Hutchinson 1994; Tait and Burroughs 2002).

The social reproduction of racism is also apparent in the judicial system. In general, minority male youths have a higher probability of being jailed before they turn 18 years of age than their White counterparts. "Crime control" laws enacted over the past 20 years have affected minority children more negatively than they have affected White children (Brown, Russo, and Hunter 2002). Black male youths in 1992 were 27 percent more likely to be involved in juvenile arrests than other races (Weatherspoon 1998). In 2003, young Black males in the U.S. prison system

continued to outnumber White males disproportionately (Tucker 2003).

Public schools remain principal locations for the social reproduction of racism. The process is managed by teachers and school officials. Kunjufu (1986) argues that U.S. public schools have contributed to the "destruction" of Black school age males through the creation of social barriers such as special education, standardized examinations, and academic tracking. Black students, and to some extent Latino students, are being labeled special education students at an alarming rate (Pressman 1993).

An article in the March 3, 2001, issue of the *Chicago Tribune* cited a 1997 Illinois Department of Education study that noted Black students were almost three (2.9) times more likely to be labeled with a disability than were their White counterparts. Many critics of this practice in special education claim that those "experts" who fought for equality on behalf of all students regardless of race have actually brought about inequality and segregation within special education. The practice of labeling these students and segregating them academically from the regular education population underlies these inequities (Barton and Tomlinson 1984). Thus, public school education sharply diverges from Hiner's (1990) vision of education as "...the entire process by which human beings develop a sense of self and formulate an identity; learn the ways of society so that they may function within it; and define and transmit their culture from generation to generation" (p. 138).

Essentially, there is a dual and unequal system of education in our public schools. This duality has been perpetuated by the manner in which teachers treat students of color, and especially Black males. As early as 1978, Lawrence-Lightfoot noted that teachers

> ...use the dimensions of class, race, sex, ethnicity to bring order to
> their perception of the classroom environment. Rather than teach-
> ers' gaining more in-depth and holistic understanding of the child,
> with the passage of time, teachers' perceptions become increasingly
> stereotyped and children become hardened caricatures of an ini-
> tially discriminatory vision (pp. 85-86).

Researchers continue to note this type of behavior in the schools. Delpit (1995) argues that White teachers operate on stereotypes, social distance, racism, biased research, and ignorance of minority community norms. Irvine (1990) also notes that White teachers are not sensitive to the cultural backgrounds of Black students. They are often unwilling to engage students of color in the classroom. For example, early research has shown that White teachers used negative adjectives more often in reference to Black children while Black teachers used descriptors that are more positive for the same children. Others have also found that White teachers demonstrate little excitement, enthusiasm, or confidence in teaching Black students (Gottlieb 1964; Bruno and Doscher 1981).

These actions have aggravated conflicts between public school systems and Blacks, especially concerning culture and control of Black males. Delpit (1995) dis-

cusses the cultural misunderstandings that occur between White teachers and minority children. She noted that White teachers frequently misread aptitudes, abilities, and intent because of the minority child's cultural communication styles. The unfortunate result is that teachers often adopt methods of instruction and discipline that oppose the norms of the child.

Schools act as mechanical sorters with the tools of evaluation, standardized tests, and rankings based on student academic and social performance. Miron and Miron (1996) examined this phenomenon in two inner city high schools located in Louisiana, one with a racially diverse student body and the other predominantly Black. They found that minority students fall victim to discrimination when school and student cultures clash. In the diverse high school, Black students expressed a general dislike of their treatment by teachers and administrators. The researchers identified the curriculum as a tool used to discriminate against Black students. The school climate was characterized by racial tension and social conflict. In the areas of behavior and academic performance, they found that Whites were subjected to less strict observances than Black students were. In contrast, the predominantly Black school fostered a strong sense of pride and caring. Students regarded teachers as positive influences and mentors. Teachers held high expectations for the students and motivated them to achieve academic success. Miron and Miron's (1996) study provides an instructive example of how cultural conflicts between school and student can create inconsistencies and consequent disparities in education. It also shows some of the immediate consequences of the social reproduction of racism through education. This troubling relationship is most evident in programs for school desegregation and alternative schooling and trends in corporal punishment and behavioral medication trends.

Education for Blacks: Access Denied

From the beginning when Blacks were forcefully "imported" into this country, citizens and slaves alike knew the limits of access to education for African Americans. During slavery, the White elite did not want Blacks to be educated because it could threaten their power (Feagin 2000). Many slaves were subject to physical violence for attempting to get educated. This attitude was apparent in the both the Dred Scott and Plessy decisions. More specifically, the decision in *Dred Scott v. Sanford* (1857) deemed Blacks inferior and ineligible for the privileges of citizens that were available to Whites (Feagin 2000). This paved the way for the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) case, which illustrated that "racism was natural." These decisions by the Supreme Court sent the world a message that Blacks were inferior and thus should be denied those rights freely granted to Whites. The Plessy decision also presaged the Jim Crow segregation of public facilities, hospitals, restaurants, hotels, and other public locations. Importantly, the court decision also created a division between Whites and Blacks within public and higher education. The legalities defending

segregation were part of a Southern redemption rationale that incited White violence against Blacks who did not accept the oppression set forth by White supremacist domination. Indeed, Feagin (2000) estimated that from the Civil War to the 1990s, there were 6,000 lynching incidents, where large mobs gathered in celebration to torture, at times dismember, and murder Blacks.

Many U.S. citizens believe that a shift in public attitudes about race can be traced to the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Some believe that the legal victories won by civil rights activists demonstrated that the country was ready to declare racial prejudice un-American. Events, polices, and procedures that are widespread in U.S. public schools challenge and in many ways invalidate this position. For example, a paradox within special education has existed since the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling that desegregated public schools. School districts began to use tracking and ability groupings as a new approach to continue the segregation of White students from Black students. They manipulated policies, labeling Black students and directing them to programs for students identified as mildly retarded. Students who did not meet the eligibility criteria for special education were placed in segregated lower academic tracks. In fact, the 1990 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has done little to remedy the limited educational opportunities experienced by minority students and the racial discrimination emerging from special education policies and procedures in public schools. The Civil Rights Project (CRP) at Harvard University charged that this is a nation-wide problem, particularly for minority students (Harvard University CRP 2001). In a letter to Senator Tom Harkin, the project cited:

> ...widespread agreement among researchers that a major contributing factor to minority over identification and placement in unnecessarily restrictive special education settings is the failure of teachers and administrators in regular education to provide effective instruction in reading and math and to effectively manage their regular classrooms (Harvard University CRP 2001; Toppo 2001).

The nature of controlling access to education by those deemed inferior has been shifted from overt measures to covert techniques wrapped in notions of special education and tracking.

Racial Differences in School Corporal Punishment

In Colonial New England, Puritans viewed children as "creatures of sin" who were ignorant and evil (Ryan 1994). Parents felt responsible for bringing their children into the light of righteousness through religion. The Bible was quoted as a rationale for the use of corporal punishment, with Proverbs such as, "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it from him. Withhold not correction from the child; for thou beatest him with the rod, he shall

not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod and shalt deliver his soul from hell" (Cryan 1987:148).

Even today, a number of states still use corporal punishment in the classroom. The current trend of corporal punishment is difficult to interpret. The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) has indicated that the use of corporal punishment has declined in recent years (Bauer 1990). OCR reported in 1988 that 1.5 million incidents of corporal punishment occur each year (Bauer 1990). On the other hand, critics have argued that the OCR has underestimated the number of incidents that occur. Many incidents of informal punishment such as slaps, shoves, and kicks are never officially recorded. In addition, corporal punishment may not be reported if it occurs in a state where corporal punishment is illegal (Bauer 1990). With respect to disaggregated information on Black males, there was no national data until 1994 that examined the use of corporal punishment in schools by race and gender. Gregory (1995) studied the first available national data to distinguish by race and gender set forth by the OCR. He found that out of the national survey of 4,692 public school districts and 43,034 public schools, Black students accounted for 127,103 cases of corporal punishment (44 percent) and White students accounted for 97,420 cases (34 percent). Furthermore, the analysts found that boys were four times more likely to be physically punished than were girls. Black male students were approximately three times more likely to receive corporal punishment than a Black girl or White boy. They were sixteen times more likely to be struck by a school official than was a White girl (Gregory 1995). Earlier, Sandler, Wilcox, and Everson (1985) reported that Black males are more likely than are others in the public school setting to be punished with severity for minor school offenses.

While there remains a dearth of research examining the association between teacher race and frequency and use of corporal punishment, it is widely acknowledged that White teachers outnumber Blacks in most public education settings. Given the low degree of cultural competence among teachers as discussed above, we can expect the disproportionate punishment of Black males to continue. In addition, many schools are stressed by a rising population of children with behavioral difficulties and special needs, a diverse socioeconomic minority population, and escalating bureaucratic expectations. In such climates, teachers, regardless of their race, often find themselves frustrated by these and other dilemmas common to teaching. This can contribute to bias, animosity, and consequent punitive actions directed toward misunderstood populations of school age children. These students and others are dramatically affected in a negative manner. Michelle Wallace, author of *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (1991), reasoned that when a society practices the punishment of Black males in public, they are essentially sending a message rooted in racist oppression and hatred to others in society. The consequences of corporal punishment can be dramatic for all children, no matter their race. Research has shown that children who have been administered corporal punishment have a tendency to drop out of school. They exhibit increased aggres-

sion, absenteeism, truancy, and tardiness. Bauer (1990) reports that these children also show signs of fear, anxiety, low self-esteem, and even symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in some cases.

Evolution of Pharmaceutical Control of Black Males

Precursors - The Hutschnecker Memo

A request through John D. Ehrichman, Domestic Affairs Advisor, from President Richard M. Nixon to the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, was sent on December 30, 1969. The President wanted the Secretary's opinion "as to the advisability of setting up pilot projects embodying some of [the] approaches" presented by Arnold A. Hutschnecker, M.D. in his 1,600-page memo which advised the government to conduct nation-wide testing on all children six to eight years old (Schrag and Divoky 1975:3). This national testing approach proposed means to detect homicidal and other violent tendencies in children. Dr. Hutschnecker, who was at the time engaged in psychotherapy, hoped his proposal for nation-wide testing would allow the children identified as having problems to be subjected to "corrective treatment" (Schrag and Divoky 1975). The children Hutschnecker mentioned would be moved to special camps, counseling sessions, and day care centers that specialized in correcting their violent, delinquent tendencies. In his memorandum to President Nixon, Hutschnecker expressed his belief that it was possible to identify those children with possible "future delinquent tendencies" nine out of ten times. His primary assertion was that one must attack the problem of delinquency with an intervention through the children's minds.

Even though the proposal was eventually abandoned, the perspective revealed in the memo suggested a profound change in attitudes toward children. Ideas similar to those in the proposal are echoed in the Mental Health Early Intervention, Treatment, and Prevention Act of 2000 (NAMI 2000). This act is designed to increase the resources for treatment of people within the criminal justice system through screening, education, and diagnosis. As such, this policy affects the children and adolescents who are in the criminal justice system. It represents an enlightened approach to mental illness, but so far, its application in education has been directed toward efforts of social control.

Current Behavioral Medication Trends

As with the use of corporal punishment, there is a disparity between the number of boys and girls labeled with Attention Deficit Disorder/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/HD). The ratio of boys to girls with ADD/HD is approximately 6 to 1. Breggin (2001) reported that on conduct measures, boys receive higher scores than hyperactive girls. Other studies have documented the greater likelihood of boys being labeled hyperactive and diagnosed with the disorder because boys are generally more aggressive than girls are (Ackerman, Dykman, and Oglesby 1993). For this

reason, ADD/HD is regarded as primarily a male disorder (CHADD 1993).

Slee (1997) examined the relationship between economic changes, changing community dynamics, and student expectations to patterns of increasing school control: "The deviant is not sot scrutinized for crude punishment. S/he is pathologized" (Slee 1997:11). There is little data by race regarding the number of children being diagnosed by ascriptive factors. However, because of the disproportionate number of Black children being assigned special education categories with learning or behavior problems, Black children are among the largest number being treated with psychotropic medication. Since Black males are being punished more and assigned to special education categories more than White children, it can also be expected that they are being diagnosed and treated with behavioral stimulants more than White children (Pressman 1993; Gregory 1995; Fitzgerald 2002).

Diagnostic practices are an area of considerable weakness in the system. Approximately 50 percent of those labeled with a disorder were never properly diagnosed (Safer 1995). It has been argued that physicians diagnosing children with ADD/HD are not using uniform diagnostic instruments, yet the numbers of children being diagnosed with this disorder do not do not seem to be decreasing. The *Conners* and the *ACTeRS* scales are two examples of tests that can be used, but these practices vary within the medical community (Sprague and Jarvinen 1995). According to Gordon (1995), there are no tests, interview questions, or standard rating scales for use by physicians in diagnosing ADD/HD. This lack of uniformity and precise diagnostic procedures generates further vulnerabilities in the system where race-based abuses can result from "manipulating" diagnoses, consciously or not, for controlling Black males.

Fitzgerald's (2002)'*The Circumvention of Public Law-142 and Section 504: the Sorting and Controlling of Black Males* is one of a very few analyses of the intersection of issues related to race, ADD/HD diagnosis, and the use of psychotropic medication. This work investigates the racial ramifications of using psychotropic drugs to control undesirable behavior of Black school age boys. The primary focus of the study is how the federal policy of Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of 1975, (P.L. 94-142), known presently as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990, has become a gateway for the introduction of behavioral stimulants as a means of social control for Black males. Fitzgerald established that the flaws of IDEA promulgated a theme of control among public schools, and to some extent parents, toward the male population of school-age children (Zirkel 2000). The findings suggest that both White and Black males were disproportionately placed within the category of special education and prescribed psychotropic medication in comparison to White and Black females. However, the results also revealed that White and Black males within special education were placed for different reasons: White males were placed primarily for academic reasons, but Black males were placed mainly for behavior concerns. This pattern was also observed in the rationales provided for prescribing behavioral medications.

Consequences of Medical Diagnosis and Drugging

As noted above, little research documents behavioral medication trends by race and class. We do know that in 1996, 1.3 million of the 38 million children in the United States aged 5 to 14 took Ritalin on a regular basis. The distribution varies from state to state, but all regions of the U.S. showed steady increases from 1995. By 1998, 2.5 million children had been prescribed Prozac. The number of prescriptions of Prozac and other similar drugs had tripled by 1999. Some reports indicate that preschool children treated with these medications will suffer enduring effects on their development (Breggin 2001). Surprisingly, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has not undertaken any investigations regarding the potential long-term effects of these medications on children. Capturing the rising concern among many, an article published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* stated that the significant increase in number of children being treated with behavioral modifying medications is nothing short of a crisis in the field of mental health. The U.S. uses Ritalin five times more than the rest of the world. Hitti (2005) noted that more than two million American children regularly take Ritalin as treatment for ADD/HD. In 1995 alone, the sale of Ritalin brought in $350 million, suggesting a significant financial motive for the pharmaceutical industry. This industry has developed tactics that target families with children who have ADD/HD or related behavioral diagnoses. For instance, the pharmaceutical companies offer free medication to low-income families. Depending on insurance coverage, some companies allow families with less than $40,000 annual income to receive free Paxil, Prozac, Valium, and other psychotropic medications for their children (North Region Newsletter 1999).

Although this provision may appear generous on the part of pharmaceutical companies, undesirable outcomes are apparent when one considers the links between family income, race, gender, and behavioral medication use. A disproportionate number of Blacks are classified as low income. Blacks also account for a disproportionate number of those receiving medication under low-income provisions. Black males outnumber all others for behavioral medication prescriptions of the most popular ADD/HD drugs – Methylphenidate HCL (Ritalin), Prozac/Prozac Weekly, Wellbutrin/SR, Adderall, and Concerta (Illinois Department of Public Aid 2001). Institutional racism in the public schools, flawed diagnostic practices, increased availability of behavioral stimulants regardless of income, and the tendency to control Black males, reinforce unrestrained labeling of Black boys as students with special needs that require control through medication.

Warehousing Black Males: Alternative Education Settings

In the United States, warehousing practices traditionally include suspension, expulsion, retention, exclusion, and placement in alternative settings. For example, during the 1998-1999 academic year, Black students made up only 17 percent of

the public school student population, but 33 percent of those expelled for periods longer than 10 days (Johnston 2000). Expulsions in Chicago Public Schools rose from 14 in the 1992-93 academic year to 737 for 1998-99. Blacks made up 53 percent of the student population, but 73 percent of those expelled (Harvard University CRP 2001:3). Black males are suspended and expelled at much higher rates than are their White counterparts (Skolnick and Currie 1994; Johnston 2000). Wisconsin reported that 25.5 percent of Black male students had been suspended in the 1997-98 academic year (Harvard University CRP 2001:3). Black males are also less likely to be placed in advanced and honors classes, but more likely than others to have high rates of absenteeism and low scores on standardized examinations (Oakes 1985; Garibaldi 1992). In addition, the response to perceived school violence has caused parents, support staff, teachers, and teachers' unions to exert pressure for measures to separate the "good" students from the "bad" students. In effect, students who are labeled as underachievers are forced into an educational "dead pool" fostered by teacher perceptions that deem these children incapable of learning (Collins 1988). Hilliard (1991) went further to note that Black male children, even at very young ages, are more likely to be labeled by teachers and school officials as less intelligent with more behavioral problems. The labeling of Black students as "at risk," "learning disordered," "slow learners," or "emotionally disturbed," has been linked to low expectations of them by teachers. These labels affect the treatment that students receive from teachers and they can ultimately be used to justify their removal from regular education settings.

Morrow and Torres (1995) observed that the same problems reported by Brookover in 1965 continue to plague the public school system. Race and socio-economic background of a child have an effect on how the child is perceived and cared for within public schools. Black males are described by the "Five Ds" — dumb, deviant, deprived, disturbed, and dangerous (Gibbs 1988). Goffman (1963) referred to individuals in such stigmatized positions as having "spoiled identities." Exclusion of such unsalvageable individuals is thus justified.

The process of exclusion involves a "warehousing" system of alternative placement for poor, minority, and disabled students. As for Black males, they are most often relegated to separate academic tracks that isolate them from their White counterparts. This separate track is filled with inferior academic instruction that falls short of the active participation and quality of learning that is employed in regular public school settings (Darling-Hammond 1990). The policies that allow the creation and maintenance of alternative schools do not even equip students in these settings with adequate skills to hold positions in entry-level jobs (Dunbar 1999). It would appear that public schools, in their efforts to work with Black males, rarely take into account the consequences of poverty or social class due to institutional racism's blinders (Jordan and Cooper 2003). Moreover, the effects of institutional racism and its social reproduction cause students to internalize their own oppression through socialization that leads them to view themselves as unworthy, worth-

less, and less undeserving than their peers (Hare 1987). Unsuccessful experiences in public schools increase the likelihood that Black males will suffer from low self-esteem and frustration that leads them into a vicious cycle. Frustration leads to deviant and disruptive behaviors that justify placement in alternative settings (Finn 1989; Lonigan, Bloomfield, Anthony, Bacon, Phillips, and Samwel 1999). In fact, alternatively placed children too often follow a pathway from the alternative school setting to juvenile detention centers, and ultimately, to youth or adult prisons.

Example from a Mid-Western Community

Table A below reports data from the 2002-03 academic year of a public school district in central Illinois. The school district serves 9,182 children in a diverse cosmopolitan community of approximately 100,000 people. It has 11 elementary schools (K-5th), three middle schools (6th-8th) and two high schools (9th-12th). There are two alternative placement facilities – one for middle school and one for high school – and four self-contained classrooms within regular education settings for children with emotional and/or behavioral problems. Outside medical/therapeutic or alternative education facilities are used for the placement of children with special education needs that are in combination with behavioral concerns and students with severe emotional disturbances that for one reason or another are not currently identified as special education.

One hundred thirteen students were placed in alternative settings. Eighty-six were males and 27 were females. Black students were almost 80 percent (78.7%) of the overall population and Black males were almost 60 percent (59.3%). This example illustrates the disproportionate involvement of Black males in public school settings designed to control or punish, but not necessarily to educate.

Table A
Population in Behavioral Alternative School Settings
by Race and Gender

	Black	White	Total
Male	67	19	86
Female	22	2	27
Total	89	21	113

Conclusion

The offensive against Black males began early in the country's history. In order to justify slavery as part of an ethical order supporting the slaveholding oligarchy, myths surrounding Black males were proffered. This gave way to overt forms of violence seen in the numbers of lynched, castrated, and murdered Black males over the course of U.S. history. The mid 20th century struggles for racial equality and justice in education brought about a decline in overt forms of oppression, but gave

birth to new forms of covert control through tracking, expulsion, alternative placement, introduction to special education, labeling, and ultimately, the medication of Black males as a substitute for education in our public schools.

The social ills of racism, false perceptions of Black males, faulty special education labeling techniques, and the potential dangers of psychotropic drugs such as Ritalin, endanger the education of Black males. These issues must be addressed for the benefit of Black males today and tomorrow. If they are not addressed, the achievement gap between Black male students and others in the public schools will continue to grow. While significant disparities persist between Blacks and Whites in the areas of high school graduation and college matriculation and graduation, the situation is more critical for Black males. If current trends continue unchecked, Black males will find themselves permanently isolated and marginalized in a societal "last place."

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