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The Journey of an African American Teacher Before and After Brown v. Board of Education

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The percentage of African American educators in the U.S. has declined over the past 65 years while the public school populations have become more diverse. Reasons for this decline are posited from a review of the literature, including Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas, *and the expanded opportunities for African Americans during this time period. To better understand and gain insights into possible reasons for the decline in African American educators, an oral history was completed of Miss Eileen Miller (1921-2010). Miss Miller, an African American teacher from Wheeling, West Virginia, taught in that city before, during, and after school desegregation. A discussion of her remembrances is situated in the literature and illuminates her life and career. While much is gained from the literature during the period, Miss Miller's story may well stand as an exemplar of the desegregation experience and as such deserves a place in the history as a talented educator who gracefully and powerfully managed her teaching career through many changes.*

Keywords: *African American teachers, Brown v. Board of Education, desegregation*

A master's degree student posed the following question to our Professional Development in Teaching class: "Did anyone in class have an African American teacher during any of their PK–12 years?" Only two raised their hands: the African American female student posing the question, and I, a middle-aged, female, Caucasian professor. The class discussion revolved around the topic of the relatively few teachers of color who grace our public schools. It also left me with lingering questions of how and why an educated and talented African American teacher had taught me in eighth grade in my predominantly European American community on the northern edge of Appalachia during my school years in the 1960s and 1970s.

—Martha Lash, Associate Professor, Kent State University

As my early childhood professor introduced herself to me and my cohort, she shared past teaching experiences and mentioned that she was originally from Wheeling, West Virginia. I was excited to learn this because I travel from my inner-city Cleveland home to annual family reunions in Wheeling, where my grandmother lives. As a first-generation African American university student, I participated in the McNair Scholars program that semester and needed a faculty mentor. By the end of class that first day, I decided to ask Dr. Lash to be my mentor. Dr. Lash agreed if I would join her in a study to learn about one of her former teachers—an African American female who taught her in the 1970s in the town that we both call home—Wheeling. I agreed.

—Monica Ratcliffe, McNair Scholar, Kent State University

And so began our journey on what came to be an oral history of the life and times of Miss Eileen Miller, a well-educated, highly competent, African American teacher who taught before and after school desegregation. The memory of Miss Miller (January 12, 1921–April 4, 2010) is in our minds and hearts, and fortunately, in our classrooms as we teach today.

—Martha Lash and Monica Ratcliffe

Recognizing that most U.S. students have not had many African American teachers throughout their educational experiences raises concern when one considers the racial composition of public schools (Ladson-Billings, 2009; National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2010; National Education Association, 2001). A review of the literature shows 50% of all African American

professionals were teachers (Foster, 1996) in the 1950s, but during the second half of the century and into the 21st century, these numbers significantly decreased (Irvine, 1988). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the racial/ethnic distribution of full time public school teachers included 83% White, 7% Black, 7% Hispanic, and 3% other (NCES, 2010). Black students in pre-K–12 accounted for 15% of all students, but only 7% of the American pre-K–12 teaching force identified as African American. Ironically, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas* (1954) is believed to be one of the major reasons for the declining numbers of African American teachers (Karpinski, 2006; Patterson, 2001; Place, 1996). *Brown,* a judicial decision made regarding race and educational opportunities, declared that the *de jure* segregation of students in public schools based on race deprived minority students of equal educational opportunity as protected by the Fourteenth Amendment. This ruling reversed the separate but equal doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), which legalized the then existing Jim Crow laws and *de jure* segregation in southern states and parts of border states and *de facto* segregation in northern states (Patterson, 2001).

Our nation's history made one more curious and so these authors decided to delve further into the literature for a deeper understanding of the time period. What was learned in the literature gave a more complete picture that was outlined. Next excerpts from the interview with Miss Miller about her educational journey are shared.

Review of Pertinent Literature and Contextualizing Historical Perspectives

The decline in the percentage of African American educators in the U.S. during the mid- to late-20th century and into the 21st century (Dilworth, 1989; NCES, 2010; National Education Association, 2001) may be disadvantageous to all students and teachers. African American educators bring experiences, expectations, and teaching practices to the classroom that enhances African American students' success in school (McCray et al., 2002). Studies on the pedagogies and philosophies of African American teachers indicated that their practices support the importance of education and its relationship to the academic, political, social, and economic accomplishment and advancement of African Americans (King, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1995. Gordon (1994) noted the need for recruitment of minority teachers for a wide range of reasons, including

- the low academic performance of minority students,
- the inability or unwillingness of middle-class teachers to teach students from low-income minority families,
- the passion of minority teachers to educate minority students,
- the need for all students to experience a multiethnic teaching force, and
- the necessity of a sincere and diverse representation of ideas and abilities in a teaching force that contributes to the development of America.

One of the most important and challenging decisions in the history of both U. S. and African American history is the ruling of the Supreme Court in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Although the case produced many positive changes and was an important part of the maturation of the democratic system in America, the Court's decision to integrate the schools yielded some negative effects as well. The *Brown* decision provided no direction on how the process of integration was to occur, nor did it address what would happen to African American schools, African American teachers, and African American administrators once it was implemented. The well-intended changes that accompanied the *Brown* decision had far reaching results, including negative effects on African Americans communities and the schools themselves, the very institutions the ruling was designed to improve.

Former NAACP President Ben Jealous (2010) claimed that *Brown v. Board of Education* worked everywhere except for the schools, the very venue in which it was intended to effect

change. He noted successful integration on trains, planes, taxis, and buses and pointed out that only 15% of advertising firms on Madison Avenue have no Black employees in a city with just over a 20% Black population. He praised the progress made in other sectors, for example, the military, but bemoaned the lack of progress emanating from *Brown*. Jealous observed that when the NAACP began its first century, it members regarded education as job one, "and now as we start our second [century, education] is [still] job one."

Therefore, the unanticipated negative effects of *Brown* on teaching while concurrently integrating and making available occupational opportunities that had previously been closed to African Americans combined to lessen the percentage of African Americans in classrooms and administration. The opening up of different occupations (not better than, but other than education) allowed African Americans a broader choice of careers. The previously restrictive and limited opportunities outside of education, kept many talented African Americans in education; this resulted in many all-Black schools as places where children received an excellent academic education, along with schooling from their Black elders in "the ways of the world."

In the 1950s one-half the African American professionals in the U.S. were teachers. Between 1971 and 1986 the percentage of African American educators declined from 8.1% to 6.9% (Foster, 1996). Many people attribute the substantial decline of African American educators in schools across the nation, in large part, to the integration of schools in the 1950s and 1960s (Etheridge, 1979; Karpinski, 2006). The case of *Brown* specifically focused on integration of schools, not the integration of educators in various schools. Etheridge (1979) wrote, "As I view the Decision, it was a decision about rights and in the scheme of things education just happened to come first and took a terrible beating for it" (p. 273). After the decision was made and schools were integrated in the U.S., many African American educators were displaced, demoted, and dismissed from their careers as they knew them (Karpinski, 2006). They were often lost in the education system and had little to no control over the progression and development of their careers. African American educators faced many challenges after *Brown*, including

- the closing of many previously all-Black schools,
- testing and certification,
- the firing and non-rehiring of teachers,
- the failure to replace African American teachers who retired, and
- the demotion of African American principals and administrative personnel.

Prior to the 1950s, teachers were not required to pass certification tests, and only two-year diplomas were necessary in order to teach (Stennis-Williams, 1996). Teacher proficiency tests were used after the desegregation of schools to determine which teachers would be transferred to the newly integrated schools of the North and South (Stennis-Williams, 1996). Teacher competency tests measured general and professional knowledge. The tests, some more than others, were culturally biased: "The PPST effectively screened out first-generation minorities who brought the nontraditional languages of their home communities to campus" (Stennis-Williams, 1996, p. 457). The tests were also used to control the number of African American teachers entering the teaching profession. Competency tests were developed to improve the quality of teachers but hindered the entrance of some African American teachers into the field of teaching, and in most states the passing rates of African American candidates were much lower than the European American candidates (King, 1993). These tests were often used to control the entry and retention of teachers. Stennis-Williams' entry in the *Encyclopedia of African American Education* stated, "Once the dual school systems were made illegal, Southern districts began to embrace teacher competency tests as a means of determining which experienced teachers would be retained." (1996, p. 456)

Another major consequence of desegregation was the major displacement of 32,000–38,000 teachers in the 17 Border States (Place, 1996). The firing and non-rehiring of African American

teachers as well as the failure to replace Black teachers who retired also played a major role in the lack of development of African American educators after the *Brown* decision:

> After *Brown*, many school systems retained all of their white teachers, even those with only provisional certification, while dismissing many fully certified African American teachers. An African American teacher who retired or moved away was often replaced by a white teacher or not replaced at all. (Place, 1996, p. 461)

The demotion of principals and other tenured educators was another strategy that deferred the professional advancement of African American educators after school desegregation. Consolidating or closing all-Black schools completed the deferment of the advancement of African American principals and superintendents. Administrators for African American schools were all Black and with the closing of these schools, many were left without employment:

> For African-American principals and teachers, the consequences of *Brown* were ironic and far-reaching. Desegregation resulted in the closing and consolidation of schools that created a job crisis that undermined the status of Black educators who traditionally had occupied a valued position in their communities and who were often the bulwark of the middle class. (Karpinski, 2006, p. 238)

With the various obstacles placed before them, African American educators fought and sacrificed more than most would understand or know to help level the education playing field and create equality among who were involved in 20th-century education. The literature review shows that many African American educators may have encountered one or more negative experiences after the desegregation ruling in *Brown*.

JOURNEY OF AN AFRICAN AMERICAN TEACHER: MISS EILEEN MILLER

To better understand more information pertinent to Miss Miller, the authors reviewed documents from Lincoln School in Wheeling, West Virginia. Miss Miller, similarly to all African Americans her age, attended all-Black schools and Lincoln was an all-Black school where she attended for primary and secondary education and where she taught until 1955. Lincoln School was founded in 1866 as one of the first schools for African Americans in the U.S. and educated children from elementary through high school. As early as 1901, graduates of Lincoln attended Oberlin College and Columbia University. The faculty held bachelor's and master's degrees and in some cases doctorates (Lincoln High School, 2011).

The stories of Miss Miller, at the time of this study, an 87-year-old African American teacher, were gathered in a face-to-face, three-hour interview conducted in her home in Wheeling by the two authors. The time with Miss Miller, listening to her stories, proved to be revealing, enlightening, and entertaining; she was well spoken and gracious while sharing information. Interestingly, many of her stories were more positive than what the literature had revealed. As will be evident, Miss Miller recalled pleasant experiences, partially in contrast to the literature reviewed and partially in testament to the strong African American community she emanated from, her intellect and dignity, her strong family, and her high quality primary, secondary, and postsecondary education. The authors will discuss this more after the highlights of the interview.

Miss Miller began:

> I graduated from Lincoln in 1938 and went to West Virginia State College [college for African Americans] down outside of Charleston in a place called Institute, West Virginia. I graduated there in 1942. My mother was a large part of it; she was my mentor, so to speak, a single mother with three children [in the 1930s]. Nothing seemed to stop her, and she put it into me. She showed me what I could do and that nothing was inferior for me to do. I ran every elevator in town so that I could earn money to go to college. I started substitute teaching at (old) Lincoln in 1943 for a soldier; when he came back, I lost my job. A few years later, I was hired back to replace one of my favorite elementary teachers, who was retiring.

Miss Miller recounted stories of knowing Black leaders and caring about others in her neighborhood. Regarding advantages Miss Miller may have had in getting her first job, she spoke of a kind Black neighbor whom she had befriended. In the following, she again references the generous spirit of her mother–mentor and how learning the right thing to do in the neighborhood also brought substantial benefit to her:

> I had quite a background at WV State College . . . . Anyhow, I came home, and this gentleman—his name was Desmond Chapman—I had known him since we were neighbors. He was a coal miner. I met him when he first had an accident in the coal mine—and I don't know how, but it chopped his arm off, and his wife had said would I like to come and visit him and I did. I said, "Oh, by the way, mama has a pound cake at home. Would you like a slice of it?"
> He said, "I certainly would," so I went over and got him a slice of mama's pound cake. It hadn't been cut, but I had a very generous mother. . . . He ate that piece of cake. He said, "Oh that was good."
> I said, "Would you like another slice?" I went over there with it, and when my mama got home, she had half the cake! And, I had fed half to Mr. Chapman; he never forgot. . . . . He never forgot, and it turned out it paid off . . . He said when I got back in town, he said, "I got some place that I want to take you." I said, "Where?"
> He said, "To the Board of Education. I want to introduce you to a particular board member and he will give you a job." I got a job. See how that paid off?

Miss Miller described her years as a teacher at Lincoln School at the time of the *Brown* decision:

> The students had an option to either stay at Lincoln for another year or go to another school that very year. Some students stayed. The children were excited to go to the various schools, and I was excited for them. I was somewhat worried, but I was also excited. I just wondered how they would get along, whether they would respond well or not. And, yes that worried me, and Rainbow [principal of Lincoln] made such a big deal out of it, you know, because he said the students wouldn't get the attention that we gave them. Our Lincoln faculty had teaching licenses, master's degrees and doctorates. Some were authors. Oh, I tell you, it was something; and every kid that went to Lincoln should feel like I do. They learned triple the amount at Lincoln that they would learn any place else.
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> Now when I was teaching at Lincoln [during the *Brown* case decision], it was quite a change; and we were very concerned about where we [African American teachers and administration] would be placed. It was understood that the teachers at Lincoln would be placed into a school. Not everybody at the same school. And everybody was placed in a position, not necessarily their background or what they were prepared for; but they were placed in a teaching position or just like our principal became an associate out in the board office.
> I was placed at Warwood [Junior/High School]. I don't know how it happened, but I got along fine. No, I didn't select Warwood. They put me there. I was happy to have a teaching job. Then when I got there, I had so much help; and the teachers took me out to a place over in Ohio for dinner and everything. Treated me so nice. I got all kinds of treats. They welcomed me and gave me two [Caucasian] students to take care of me from the first day. Those students, giggling and laughing and kicking their heels, were there to meet me every morning outside my classroom door. "Don't do this, Miss Miller. You do this this way and that way and the other way." They had me all lined up—those two students kept me alive. They helped me a lot.
>
> The Warwood teachers welcomed me—Virginia Lynch opened her arms to me and the Farris sisters too. I could walk to Lincoln, but to get to Warwood, I had to take two buses each way every day. I didn't learn to drive until I was 50, so I rode the bus. Sometimes the Farris sisters would pick me up. They lived out the Pike, and I'd stand out here waiting on my bus. If they passed by at the time I was standing and waiting, they'd give me a ride.
>
> So, no, no, there was nothing like that [prejudice] going on with me. Well, there was one teacher—you would be surprised when I tell you who she was—that tried to ignore me—the gym teacher. And my brother was a house painter, and he worked for her; but she didn't know it until finally she knew it. She was ignoring me, so I finally let her know who I was. I told her I was Henry's sister, and she replied,

"Oh, yes." And after that she didn't ignore me, and she changed her tone of voice. There were a number of years that I was teaching when females were not allowed to get married. The males could get married, but the females couldn't—I have an idea why. Even so, I still feel that was somewhat unfair. And another factor was sometimes the salary was deflated for women from the men's salary from what I remember, and that was unfair.

Miss Miller shared experiences reveal minimal racial prejudice at that pivotal time in history. She indicated that the centrally located African American school was not used for White students. The old Lincoln School was replaced by the new Lincoln School on adjacent property just 11 years before the *Brown* decision, yet it was not used as an integrated school where teachers and Black students could have continued to walk and have a vibrant learning community in a new building. Miss Miller did not dwell on that but expressed her relief at having employment. Her lived experiences with unfairness were connected to the broader concerns of female teachers, that they could not marry like their male teaching counterparts and that they were not paid a wage equal to that their male peers. Nevertheless, she was not immune from race discussions as evidenced by the following vignette about an interaction she had with Mr. Martin, the principal of Warwood High School, who had used racially charged language in a conversation with a Black administrator:

H. G. Martin, the principal, would sit in my room at noon time and read my newspaper, the newspaper that I had delivered to the school. . . . I had the library then (as a teaching responsibility); I had the newspaper in it. He'd sit in there and collect [himself]. You know, I was very sociable. . . . I got along with him fine, but he made a statement something about Blacks one day to Mr. Reed, a Black administrator who worked out of the Board of Education. Something happened. We had a student up there, a Black boy, [who] lived with an Italian family. And he was the grandson of the Italian shoe man up there. They had this little colored boy who was mixed and went to Warwood. And this boy did something; I don't know what it was. And Mr. Martin made a statement about it and Mr. Reed . . . [objected]. Mr. Martin would always come to me and tell me when he did something wrong, [and this time he said], "Miss Miller, I did something." (Miss Miller inferred that Mr. Martin had made an unsavory comment that she would not repeat.)

And I said, "Oh you shouldn't have done that." I told him the same thing about that. I said, "What did Mr. Reed say?"

He said, "There's a better way of saying it. You should have used other words." There's a better way of putting it. So he figured that he was angry. But Mr. Reed didn't jump all over him and knock him down or anything. He just made that statement, and Mr. Martin learned.

Integration had another effect on Miss Miller. The teaching methods she used at Lincoln differed slightly from the teaching methods used at the predominantly White school. She mentioned that she enjoyed teaching all children and that her teaching methods changed, but not by much. She noted that the change in her teaching methods centered on the variety of ethnicities present in her new classroom. Teaching students emanating from various European heritages (e.g., German, Polish, Hungarian, Italian) at Warwood necessitated Miss Miller's learning new ways to make learning relatable to all students she instructed as noted in the following:

Yes, the student background was quite different from what I was. Let me say this—same methods, basic methods. It was all basic. Now some things I did differently like [at Warwood] I was in a very, very highly populated neighborhood, where you had people of different backgrounds. When I say backgrounds, I'm speaking of nationalities. At Warwood, we had different nationalities, backgrounds. In fact, we did a tree with recipes on it of different nationalities with recipes from countries representing the students [heritage].

As long as I had a job, I could teach anywhere, and it didn't matter to me who I taught, you understand? As long as I was teaching . . . I enjoy teaching. I kept going. It didn't burn me one bit. Just like in the evening, I come home from school and take a nap before I went teaching at night down in South Wheeling. And not only teaching all day, I taught adults at night to get their G.E.D. Now that's when I

had a variety of people, a mixture of people, of nationalities [several Euro American immigrants] and they would get their G.E.D. and keep my phone busy all summer telling me whether they got their papers.

Miss Miller provided several humorous and endearing stories of her teaching. Two follow:

Oh, let me tell you about that lectern. One day I was giving the spelling words, and you give the word in a sentence. I was taking care of my mother at that time; my mother had Alzheimer's. Anyhow, I stayed up all night with her, and I was trying to make it. This class was right after lunch, and I'm standing up there at the podium, giving out these words. I don't remember what the word was, but whatever it was I gave a sentence that didn't go along with it. And you want to know what? I had fallen asleep standing up! And the kids realized it, but they didn't say anything. They didn't laugh or anything. They just looked at me. When the bell rang and they left, this one little boy looked around the side of the door: "Goodnight, Miss Miller," he said. Somebody had to get me!

And every September, I lost my voice because of that band under me. [Miss Miller's classroom was directly above the band room.] Anyhow, I told the kids once, about five years after I had suffered so, I said, "Bring any noise maker you want when you come to school tomorrow and put them in my room." They brought drums; they brought tubs, buckets, and horns—everything that would make noise. So I let them put them in the room. When that fifth period class came and that band struck up, I said, "OK, kids. Let's go—one, two, three." . . . And boy, we hit it! . . . And all that noise and the band downstairs was making its noise. Next thing I knew Mercer [the band director] was upstairs peeping in the window on my door. He peeped, but he didn't say anything. He went on back downstairs. I told the kids to stop 'cause I didn't want him to bring the principal. I made my point. After that they never practiced under me again. Oh, they'd go out marching somewhere—take it to the street. I didn't say a word. I didn't complain. And the principal didn't say a word either. Nobody said a word to me, you understand, to let me know that they knew what happened.

We asked Miss Miller whether she noticed a difference in how students learned at Lincoln compared to those at Warwood:

At Warwood they would apply themselves more. I didn't have to fight them [the students] over it. They would jump right in and do it. At Lincoln you had to work harder for most of them to apply themselves, but then once you had them, they got so they liked it, too. . . . Now, I tell you that because my principal came to me one day at Lincoln and said, "Miss Miller, your students don't reach their level like they should."

I said, "No, they don't because I always have to teach what the fourth-grade teacher should have taught." It was [the same] language arts teacher that I had had as a student—she was still reading the newspaper and just assigning things to the kids. And she wasn't teaching, so I had to teach fourth-grade level before I could teach fifth-grade level, and that would leave me in the middle of the fifth-grade level stuff.

Yes, first keep them occupied. And meet them from the beginning with a [determination] that you say that you're going to like them. I couldn't wait to meet my students! Every year I couldn't wait, and I met them with a smile. "I'm so glad to see you!" [I'd tell them]. "I'm so happy to see you!" You know, actually I couldn't wait to get to school [the] first day. Goodie, goodie! School is in session. Keep them occupied. Be really truly happy to see them, to meet them.

Make sure—always be sure that they are understanding what you're teaching. One thing I have learned and always saying [is], "You understand? You understand? You understand? Is that clear?" Then I'd have you write it out [to show] that you understood.

Miss Miller took a dim view of standardized testing of the students. "They (administrators) basically used them on teachers. When I say used them on teachers, [I mean] they measured the teachers. They had been doing that from the time I taught fifth grade at Lincoln." Consequently, Miss Miller connected the broader teaching community with one way that standardized tests could be used against the teaching profession, regardless of race, and this had occurred at the all-Black school as well as the predominantly White school. In closing, she fondly remembered her years of teaching and reflected on the thousands of students she taught:

> I had a glorious time, I learned quite a bit, and I hope the youngsters I taught learned quite a bit. If I learned they couldn't read or were having difficulty, I made it my business to teach them to read. I liked what I was doing, and I wanted the children to like what they were doing. I loved finding out who would be in my class on the first day of school. I became so dedicated that I wouldn't eat dinner until I marked their papers to see if they learned what I had taught them.

REFLECTIONS AND ILLUMINATIONS

Miss Miller's remembrances of teaching before, during, and after desegregation highlight issues surrounding desegregation while also sharing her poignant personal story of teaching over four decades. Her perspective lends substance to, yet contrasts with the literature, warranting interrogation. First, Miss Miller's own character may offer insight: She had a strong sense of self and identity as a teacher and a female; furthermore, she was a well-educated individual for the time period in which she lived. Her own story highlights these aspects of her life as much or more than her race. Miss Miller also credits the influence of her strong mother, a mentor who "trained [her] from a little girl." In addition, the schools where she taught were neither in the South nor the urban areas of the North. On the contrary, the positive experiences of Miss Miller took place in Wheeling, West Virginia, located slightly north of the Mason–Dixon Line and near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Principals and early teachers at Lincoln were educated in Ohio (e.g., Oberlin) and Pennsylvania (e.g., the University of Pittsburgh; Lincoln High School, 2011). Her disposition and attitude toward integration may have derived from her position in a strong family, African American community, and African American school. During the time of Miss Miller's formative years, she attended Lincoln School when Wheeling, West Virginia, was economically thriving and the educators and administrators at Lincoln were as well- or better- educated than their counterparts in the local White schools. Ladson-Billings (1995), noted that success of African American students has a foundation of

- focus on student learning,
- development of cultural competence, and
- promotion of sociopolitical consciousness.

Although this oral history reflects the middle part of the 20th century, one could see that Miss Miller grew up in such an educational environment and that these traits were well integrated into her persona. In addition, at a national poster presentation of this research, an African American educator looked at a photograph of Miss Miller and the Lincoln teaching faculty and noted that many were medium to light-skinned African Americans (see Womack, 2007). Therefore, skin color within and beyond the Black community may have played a role in Miss Miller's positive experiences. Another possibility may be reflected in oral historian, Bindas' (2010) research on how individual and (by extension) collective histories on race are shared and proved insightful in conjecturing how Miss Miller's oral history was situated within and apart from the literature.

The question of the magnitude of the impact integration actually had on communities in the mid-20th century lingers. Desegregation has had both a positive and negative effect on the professional development of African Americans. Integration deferred the professional development of educators of color, and the loss of principals and teachers who held high-level positions heavily affected their role in the community. Without the principals, the members of the African American community lost their voice in education, and the students also lost role models whom they were able to trust and emulate. About this loss, Miss Miller was quite emphatic:

> Yes, and I would make a quote for you. Mr. Reed said that it would be one of the worse things that could happen with Blacks and wisdom, plus they knew what they were getting [at Lincoln], you know the background [of the Lincoln teachers]. Well, he was looking from the standpoint of mentors. That's what missing today. With very few Black teachers . . . it is hard. I noticed the last time [that I saw the high school chorus group]. Now you know and I know in a choral group, you should have more than one Black student. I saw that group, and I didn't see a Black child in the group.

Although "*Brown v. Board of Education* integrated our schools it did not bring the social justice needed for us to create a moral community" (Rowe, 2005, p. 659). Ladson-Billings (1995) contended that prior to *Brown v. Board of Education* and the lifting of restrictive covenants, students in Black schools had caring teachers who lived and interacted in the community. In addition, students from lower socioeconomic households lived alongside Black professionals, who were a positive influence. Coleman and colleagues (1966) and Wilson (1987) supplied policy studies showing the well-documented emptying of inner cities, urban decay, and the struggle beyond the schools into the communities. The lifting of restrictive covenants in more affluent neighborhoods led to an exodus of upwardly mobile Blacks out of central cities and into more prominent White sections of towns and cities. Miss Miller lived most of her life in the same neighborhood where the African American-designated, Lincoln School, was located; she excelled as a student and leader as evidenced by her reminiscing:

> I also enjoyed preparing myself to be a teacher. When I went to college, I enjoyed it very much. And I remember a number of teachers that said that I was quite well-prepared for the classroom and that they were going to offer me some more instruction [in college classrooms]. They [the professors] said, "Where are you from?" The other student would say "New York City," and they [the professors] would say, "Now, here she is from West Virginia, and you are from New York City, and she knows this and knows that and knows more than you know. But the thing was we had quite a faculty at Lincoln! Yes, in the neighborhood I walked to school. I didn't have to be bused to school. They would ring the bell, and all the children in the neighborhood would go. I knew they [the schools] were segregated, that we couldn't go to any of the other schools. That didn't worry me a bit, but we were having a good time at mine.
>
> Oh, yeah. I always had a position where I was a leader in some way. . . . Yeah, and it carried through. I'll always take part in community activities. I'm not doing it now as much as I used to, but I tried to donate to various charities now if I have two cents to give.

Prior to and during the years since *Brown*, researchers, educators, and policymakers have posed questions of why the positive attributes of many African American schools were not and perhaps could not be replicated in the integrated school experience and whether high-performing African American schools should be allowed (Dempsey & Noblit, 1993; Patterson, 2001; W. E. B. DuBois, 1935). Clearly, the focus needed to be not just on school integration; the focus needed to be on the community as a whole (Patterson, 2001; Wilson, 1987) and it still is in all communities.

Just as the students were affected by the lack of role models in the community (Coleman et al., 1966; Patterson, 2001; Wilson, 1987), students were also influenced by the lack of African American teachers in the classroom. As a result, many students did not have a teacher of color to encourage them, and the pride that educators instilled in the students slowly faded with the decades (Delpit, 2006).

Desegregation has helped to improve opportunities for African Americans as a whole, but have the students, schools, and teaching profession ever fully recovered from the "terrible beating" that education took (Ethridge, 1979, p. 273)? In all actuality, the Justices in *Brown* specifically ruled that separate could not be equal, but they did not address nor give guidance as to how to integrate students and certainly not how to retain and integrate African American educators and administrators. The purpose of *Brown* was not to integrate teachers but to provide an equal education for all students, noting that separate could never be equal. The unfortunate side effect of removing African American teachers and administrators from schools was an unanticipated consequence of *Brown* and is unparalleled.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

From Monica Ratcliffe, Student of Dr. Lash:

> Ms. Miller had so much to offer; her experiences were not what I expected to hear but I walked away with so much knowledge. Though much has changed in the last half-century, struggles in training and the attainment of public school teaching positions for African American teachers continue to exist. I experienced first-hand the struggle of being an African-American teacher candidate; it took me three

tries to pass the licensure test. Each time I learned more and studied harder, because I knew that I could touch the lives of children. Standardized tests are not designed to accurately test the knowledge of diverse populations, and urban schools (including the one that I attended) may not sufficiently prepare students for the rigors and biases of such tests. Upon graduation from teacher education programs, African-American teachers have to compete for highly regarded public school teaching positions. Many teachers feel a need to give back to the urban communities in which they were raised; like them, I want to work with inner city children. Many of the struggles that these Black teachers endured have been realized in my own teaching work. With the increase of charter schools in urban communities, African American teachers find these settings to be employment alternatives and places of hope and change for schools and for children. I haven't yet found a Black mentor in the teaching field. I am thankful that this project has allowed me to draw from the teaching and life experiences of Ms. Miller and my McNair mentor as sources of guidance and strength for my own career.

From Dr. Lash, Student of Miss Miller:

As an early childhood professor and mentor to two McNair Scholars, both first generation college students—both African American women from urban areas, I struggle with a variation of the question with which many Whites struggle: "Who am I to mentor these young African American women striving to be teachers?" Rowe (2005) asked a similar question when chosen to address the West Virginia Law Review's Symposium as a White lawyer/politician speaking on West Virginia race relations at the turn of the 21st century. There is a decrease in the number of African American teachers at all levels of education and in all venues, be it urban, suburban or rural; yet 40 years later we see the merits of an African American teacher serving a powerful role to me—an 8th grade student in a predominantly White school. Years later I became an early childhood education professor and teacher–mentor. The sad reality is that I may be the best young African American teachers have in terms of connecting with the history that contributes to who they are today. Highly effective and caring African American teachers are sorely needed in contemporary American schools. If my lived experiences can touch their lives in a way that Miss Miller touched mine, we may be able to stretch to a better future—one student at a time.

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