
“Trust Us,” They Explained: Racial Distrust and School Reform

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Last December, the nation engaged in a brief but wrenching discussion about the cultural and political legacy of the civil rights era. The proximate cause was U.S. Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott's remarks at the 100th birthday party for Senator Strom Thurmond suggesting that the country would have been better off had Thurmond prevailed in his 1948 Dixiecrat presidential bid.¹ The episode pressed hot-button issues of race, resurrected uncomfortable ques-

tions for conservatives and Republicans, and concluded with Republican senators replacing Lott as majority leader and committing themselves to a more “inclusive” agenda.

The incident provided an important window into the racial distrust that has persistently attended modern conservatism.

Especially significant was Lott's last-ditch reversal of long-standing opposition to affirmative action and

race-based preferences. In abandoning his commitment to color-blind conservatism, Lott variously managed to imply that his prior convictions had been misconstrued, shaped by ignorance, or marked a broader need for conservatives to rethink race-based policies. In mounting this flailing defense, Lott fed the perception that the only sincere efforts to remedy racial inequities are those rooted in Great Society prescriptions and that market-based or color-blind approaches are rooted in ignorance, malice, or a desire to camouflage a hidden agenda.

Lott's plight illuminated the challenge that hampers efforts to reimagine Great Society-era social policy, even in an era when many of the left and the right see a legacy that has included an urban underclass and a generation of failing urban schools and social services. It also made clear the degree to which the moral legitimacy of contemporary conservatism depends on the credibility of its commitment to equalizing opportunity and empowering every citizen to make the most of his or her talents. That universality of opportunity is critical if conservatives are to hold a morally coherent and defensible position as they embrace low taxes and limited government, and reject efforts to equalize outcomes.

Questions about conservative racism or disregard for blacks strike at the very heart of the opportunity premise and raise the specter that conservative principles are inconsistent with efforts to democratize opportunity. The problem for conservative

reformers is that black distrust of their motives is not altogether unwarranted. The legislation and court decisions of the civil rights era culminated more than a century of ardent and arduous African American efforts to win access to wider educational opportunities. During that time, black Americans had few allies and what little support they did receive came predominantly from the left.

African American distrust of conservatives has been significant in ways that extend beyond the facts of the moment. In debates over urban policy and equal opportunity, black Americans play a privileged role. Given the circumstances of America's racial history, black leaders are accorded a singularly powerful voice in discussions of social equity and opportunity. In recent decades, the plight of the black community has often served as the barometer by which the nation's commitment to opportunity is measured.

Nowhere is the black-conservative schism more significant than in the case of schooling. Education is where the conservative commitment to equal opportunity meets its acid test and where efforts to redress social inequities must ultimately be won. In the post-industrial economy, schooling plays a dominant symbolic and substantive role in debates about social equity and equal opportunity. African American distrust of conservatives, combined with the left's embrace of civil rights legislation and affirmative action, has led to a long-standing alliance between African Americans, teacher unions,

and the public school establishment. The result has been a tacit agreement in which the left avoids blaming schools for education problems, promotes bureaucracy and teacher protections as a response to failing urban schools, and cloaks the educational status quo in the rhetoric of civil rights.

Conservatives must address urban poverty and racial inequity, but they cannot do so by wishing away political reality and they should not do so by crumbling before it. Rather, they must understand the reasons why blacks regard them so warily and address that skepticism in a principled fashion.

The Aftermath of 1964

Modern attitudes on race and public policy were shaped by the 1960s. They were crystallized, on the one hand, by Lyndon Johnson's decision to sign, in quick succession, the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act in 1964 and 1965 and, on the other, by Barry Goldwater's 1964 Republican presidential campaign, which featured an ideological commitment to "states' rights" that southerners viewed as hospitable to their efforts to resist federal civil rights legislation. As late as 1962, Americans were evenly divided on whether the Republican or Democratic party was more supportive of racial equality. In fact, the vast majority of Republicans in both the House and Senate endorsed Johnson's efforts on civil rights; the opposition was led by southern Democrats.

In the aftermath of Johnson's decision to aggressively push the CRA and

VRA, and Goldwater's 1964 campaign, public attitudes rapidly and radically changed. By 1964, surveys found that the Democrats enjoyed roughly a 50 percentage point lead when the American public as a whole was asked whether the Democrats or Republicans were more "sympathetic to blacks."¹ Beginning in 1964, the white South began a massive migration from the Democratic to the Republican column. The loss of the solid South sloughed from the Democratic party its conservative and hawkish wing, enabling the party's activist wing to embrace a domestic policy agenda sensitive to the claims of racial minorities, unions, the academic elite, feminists, and the countercultural left.

Thus was framed the narrative of the next three decades, with the Republicans positioned as the defender of middle America and conventional values and the Democrats as the guardian of the marginalized and the disadvantaged. In that period, African Americans cemented their ties to the left as the Democrats became the standard-bearers for affirmative action, race-based set asides, and expanded social welfare programs. Meanwhile, some Republican candidates did have occasion to employ racially tinged appeals to court white voters, especially in southern races.

That distrust became embedded in the culture of the black community. J. C. Watts, former chairman of the House Republican Conference and the only black Republican on Capitol Hill for eight years, often related that his

own father wondered how Watts could be a Republican and would remark, “A black man voting for the Republicans makes about as much sense as a chicken voting for Colonel Sanders.” The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies reports that of the 9,040 blacks elected to office across the country in 2000, just fifty were Republican. In 2002, just 10 percent of blacks identified themselves as Republicans.² Since the 1980s, 80 percent or more of blacks have consistently self-identified as Democrats.³

Opportunity Conservatism and the Educational Challenge

The issue of racial equity looms so large due to the nature of contemporary conservatism. From the New Deal to the early 1960s, the Republican Party had been dominated by a Midwestern, fiscally prudent, localist conservatism that rejected any government role in proactively extending opportunity. In 1964, however, a radically different conservatism came to the fore. Championed by GOP presidential nominee Barry Goldwater, the new conservatism forsook these stodgy, traditional values for a frontier-accented doctrine of individualism, self-reliance, economic liberty, social mobility, and entrepreneurship. Goldwater’s was a brighter, sunnier conservatism, suffused with the implicit assurance that opportunity was the birthright of every American. While this new conservatism would prove politically potent, it would be squeezed

between its implicit promise to broaden opportunity in an unequal society and its hostility towards activist government.

Casual observers have misunderstood how this promise created a challenge for Goldwater-style conservatism that never confronted conventional Republican localism. On the one hand, the Goldwaterite commitment to opportunity and individual responsibility resonated, yet voters also expressed a belief in the implicit promise that the playing field ought to be level—that everyone deserved to have a chance to succeed.⁴ Without a visible commitment to increasing opportunities for the disadvantaged, Goldwaterism risked being seen as merely an excuse for injustice; yet such efforts to combat inequality would imply a call for federal action at odds with the conservative antipathy towards large government, centralization, and redistribution. The most visible manifestation of this tension would be conservative efforts in the area of education.

While Goldwater had gone down to crushing defeat in 1964, his ideas would emerge triumphant in 1980 when Ronald Reagan claimed the presidency. Reagan argued that Democrats had abandoned equality of opportunity for a doctrine of equality of results, had in doing so abandoned shared American values, and that this shift was to blame for the nation’s stagnant economy and general malaise. On the education question, the 1980 Republican platform called for “deregulation by the federal government of public education

and—the elimination of the federal Department of Education” and argued that Democratic education policy had produced “huge new bureaucracies to mispend our taxes.”

Reagan could promise to roll back government and still broaden opportunity for the disadvantaged because he inverted the Great Society storyline in which the government was cast as the protector of opportunity and defender of the oppressed. Reagan recast the policy debates by advancing the alternative notion that bureaucrats were self-interested actors and that government programs and regulation choked the paths of social and economic opportunity. The Reagan-influenced shift to “opportunity” conservatism became unmistakable in the early 1980s when a group of conservative and mostly young Republican congressmen banded together under the moniker of the Conservative Opportunity Society. These young turks, who included Newt Gingrich, Vin Weber, and Trent Lott, unabashedly argued that Reaganite social and tax policy would do more to democratize opportunity than would the welfare state.

In the 1980s, after more than a century spent trying to kick down the doors to the nation’s schools, the African American community had finally triumphed in its long effort to gain access to the education system. In a bitter twist, this was the moment when a Reagan-appointed blue-ribbon commission issued its 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* and the public awoke to the troubled condition of the nation’s

schools—especially its urban schools. The report spurred divergent calls for improvement. The teacher unions and their allies embraced prescriptions focused on teacher pay, participatory governance, teacher professionalism, heightened licensure barriers, and curriculum and pedagogy. The conservative response featured accountability, core curricula, teacher testing, and nascent efforts to promote choice-based arrangements—with accountability and school choice the two most prominent strands. While questions of accountability are compelling in their own right, political tensions of this essay will focus upon the issue of choice-based reform.

In promoting school choice, conservatives endorsed policies that would make it easier for families to exit the schools to which African Americans had only recently gained access. While there were compelling policy reasons behind this stance, the conservative proposals were seen as potentially serving to undo the “access” agenda for which the African American community and its allies had long fought. Choice-based reform held special appeal because it squared the “opportunity” circle—it married conservative antipathy towards activist government to a proactive commitment to increase social equity. Whereas Reagan’s earlier choice rhetoric had focused on appealing to disaffected Catholics, by the late 1980s Republicans began a tentative effort to use school choice as a way to neutralize the party’s weakness on education and the fairness issue and as a

way to reach out to the black community. The 1988 Republican platform supported federal school vouchers as a way to “empower [low-income families] to choose quality schooling.”

Conservative efforts to portray vouchers and charter schooling as a way to help African American and urban youths trapped in inferior schools did little to broaden Republican support among these groups, despite growing support among African Americans and urban residents for aggressive measures to improve schooling. Throughout the 1990s, Democratic leaders were successful in depicting the conservative commitment to equal opportunity as half-hearted or hollow. Even in 2000, when Republican presidential nominee George W. Bush promoted a doctrine of “compassionate conservatism,” pointedly criticized conservatives who think government should “get out of the way,” charged the government with an obligation to see that “no child would be left behind,” and promoted his Texas gubernatorial record of working on behalf of minorities, Bush claimed just 10 percent of the black vote.

A Natural Reform Alliance

There is a natural alliance between the African American community and education reformers, of right and left, willing to embrace structural measures designed to address the root causes of mediocrity. Both are frustrated with schools that are inflexible, inefficient, and resistant to demands for improvement. Both are tired of half-hearted “reforms” that do not demand educa-

tors to take responsibility for student learning, make it easier to terminate ineffective teachers and reward effective ones, or help schools to tap the energy and entrepreneurial skills of the talent available in inner cities and minority communities.

These shared interests bind the African American community and school reformers and make their relationship fundamentally unlike that between reformers and teacher unions, education schools, or professional education associations. The education constituencies have strong material incentives to oppose accountability, managerial flexibility, performance-based pay, the overhaul of teacher licensure, or choice-based reform because such changes promise to undermine the political influence of education interest groups, end their privileged position, reduce their revenue, and threaten their philosophical notions of how schools should be run. As a result, these constituencies have reason to make excuses for current performance and oversell modest concessions.

Neither urban residents nor members of the black community are under any such compunction. African Americans are consistently more critical of school performance than is the general population. While a majority of the general population rates their local public schools as good or excellent, most black adults routinely rate schools as fair or poor. The most negative segment of the black population is 26- to 35-year-olds —those who do not share the affective attachment of their elders to the public system. Less than a third

of blacks believe that their schools are improving, and younger blacks and low-income blacks are especially likely to report that they are getting worse.⁵ In 2002, 56 percent of African American parents gave their public schools a “C” grade or lower and the most frequently cited problem in local schools was lack of discipline.⁶ While majorities of suburban and rural residents gave their local schools an “A” or a “B” in 2002, less than a third of urban residents did so.⁷ Black America’s Political Action Committee (BAMPAC) president Alvin Williams has observed, “African Americans are becoming increasingly frustrated with the public school system and its failure, in many cases, to provide a quality education for their children.”⁸

The new generation of African American leadership coming to the fore is less concerned about conventional questions of “access” or “integration” than it is about school quality and what aids black children. This generation is less attached to the old alliances, more willing to criticize the failure of social welfare and race-conscious policies, and more receptive to new policy prescriptions. Many of these leaders regard the emphasis on integration as having undermined school communities, hurt educational quality, and aggravated middle-class flight. In fact, there is little evidence that ongoing efforts to promote desegregation have done much to systematically improve the conditions or achievement of black students. John Chubb and Tom Loveless noted in

2002 that testing data show a continuing “racial gap in achievement.”⁹ Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips noted that in the late 1990s “the typical American black still scores below 75 percent of American whites on most standardized tests” and acknowledged, “It is true that the [racial] gap shrinks only a little when black and white children attend the same schools.”¹⁰ These inequities translate to the labor force. Princeton economist Alan Krueger and his colleagues have noted, “The relative earnings of black workers have declined since the mid-1970s—on the heels of a period (1940-1970) in which the wage gap narrowed substantially.”¹¹

Given this status quo and the lack of evidence of improvement, it should not surprise us that majorities of African Americans consistently tell pollsters that they support school choice and other radical school reforms. In 2002, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a left-leaning think tank that focuses on issues that concern the black community, reported that 57 percent of African Americans supported school vouchers.¹² Other surveys have frequently reported figures of 60 percent and more.¹³

Understanding Black Distrust

Despite these figures, groups like the Congressional Black Caucus and the NAACP remain solidly opposed to vouchers and African American voters continue to overwhelmingly support

liberal Democrats. The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies reports that 69 percent of black elected officials oppose vouchers.¹⁴

Moreover, when one interviews urban African American parents and leaders about education, suspicion of conservative motives is palpable. This is especially true among the community leadership. Although the African American community is fed up with mediocre urban schools, African Americans are reluctant to abandon their traditional allies to align with the market-oriented, generally conservative voucher proponents with suspect motives. As one member of the NAACP leadership in Milwaukee remarked to me regarding the city's voucher program, "These Republican types, the ones in business and the suburbs, never used to care about black children. Now they do? I don't buy it. They're after something."

David Bositis, senior political analyst at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, has noted that many older African Americans "believe that school vouchers would represent a transfer of public money to subsidize those white parents who prefer that their children attend all-white schools." Blacks will be inherently distrustful of conservative overtures, he believes, because conservatives have historically "cared so little about the lives of black Americans."¹⁵ There is a deep-rooted suspicion among the older generation of leaders that today's charter laws, tax credit programs, and voucher programs are Trojan horses, designed to attract

African American support for programs that will later be rewritten in ways that advantage white, suburban families and corporate interests.

This resistance to conservative overtures has confounded more than a few proponents of school choice, who express exasperation that African Americans would continue to support elected officials who stand by policies that show little evidence of working. Choice proponents point out that their proposals primarily benefit minority children trapped in poor urban schools. As one ardent choice organizer recently said to me, "We're breaking our pick trying to offer solutions to these families, and the numbers show that the people we help are really satisfied. But the unions and their friends just sweep in and tell the papers that we're racists, without offering anything that will help, and a lot of people believe them. Sometimes you just want to rent a bunch of billboards that tell the community...We're the ones who are on your side.' And you wonder why they don't see it." The seeming puzzle disappears upon closer examination. The calculation is eminently sensible from a black perspective, as leadership entails making nuanced calculations about alliances and future outcomes that individual voters need not address.

Two points are critical. First, choice proponents too often regard the desirability of vouchers as fully and firmly settled. It is not.¹⁶ Trying to generalize from existing experiments and programs to a large-scale choice system poses several daunting challenges—

regarding such factors as what new schools would look like, the constancy of peer effects, whether disciplinary norms could be replicated, and so on. Choice proponents should not regard skeptics as necessarily being apologists or dupes.

The second, larger, issue is that voucher and charter programs today do consistently promote equity and increase racial integration, but that is largely because these programs are designed to prohibit discriminatory practices and advantage poor children. Skeptics may reasonably fear that this is merely a tactic of the moment, and that choice proponents are secretly itching to discard redistributive strictures and program constraints once the programs are safely up and running. Such concerns are entirely legitimate. In fact, while voters are unlikely to concern themselves with such complex possibilities, leaders who did not consider such possibilities would be remiss.

Concerns over evidence and design features are buttressed by other attachments that the African American community has forged to public schools. In urban centers, political control of the school system is a source of jobs, political power, and community pride. Urban schools are leading employers and African American community leaders fear that they will lose influence over jobs and system operations.

Black elected officials, civil rights leaders, and community activists control no institutions at the national or state level. What black leaders in urban areas do control, providing a

base of influence, control over jobs and revenues, and a symbolically potent platform, are the institutions of municipal government. The largest and most visible of these are public schools. Measures that undercut the ability of black leaders to control urban schools routinely encounter fierce opposition—whether the mechanism is school choice, state takeover, privatization, or anything else. Efforts to reduce local control are often viewed through an explicit racial lens. Often forgotten in discussions of Milwaukee's voucher experience is that the entire debate was sidelined for about five months in 1998 when the governor called for a possible state takeover of Milwaukee schools. The city's African American community attacked the proposal as an effort by upstate Republicans to seize control of a mostly black system with Democratic state representative Johnnie Morris-Tatum offering a typical riposte, commenting, "We don't need lily-white faces telling us what to do."¹⁷ In fact, the most recent figures available from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission show that African Americans constitute 21.8 percent of full-time city government employees—a figure that is almost twice the black percentage of the general population.¹⁸ Harvard professor Gary Orfield has noted that cutting urban budgets or municipal systems inevitably "means cutting into the black middle class since city government tends to hire much larger proportions of blacks than other large employers."¹⁹

A New Understanding

The presumption that the American left is the defender of African American interests has ensured the left near-uniform black electoral support in return for a commitment to affirmative action and conventional civil rights legislation. However, in return for the left's support on explicitly race-conscious policies, the civil rights leadership and black elected officials have accepted policy constraints demanded by their allies in the municipal employee unions and the cultural left. The black leadership tacitly agreed not to blame urban problems on ineffective bureaucracies, uninspired public employees, a breakdown in discipline or civil society, or poorly designed social policies. In place of such critiques, which had been much in evidence before the 1960s, black leaders held their allies blameless by tracing nearly all their community's ills to racial discrimination, poverty, and insufficient government spending. These complaints provided common cause with other constituencies of the left—permitting black leaders to lobby shoulder-to-shoulder with their allies for more spending, set-asides, and government programs—while avoiding the uncomfortable silences that would arise if black leaders asked why urban public institutions were the site of such profound failure.

Those black leaders who challenge this tacit arrangement have been quickly tarred as subversives and apologists. Howard Fuller, former Milwaukee school superintendent and school

choice advocate, has wryly noted, “If you support something that so-called conservative people support, you’re duped. If you support something in this country that so-called liberal people support, you’re brilliant.”²⁰

Crucial to effectively reshaping Great Society-era social policy is a significant element of the black community tracing many of its continuing problems to arrangements that cannot be redressed without confronting the vested interests of the municipal employee unions and the professional civil liberties lobby. The fact that bad educators cannot be fired or good ones rewarded, that educators have not been held accountable for student learning, that school discipline is undermined by a sprawling regime of procedural rights, that special education legalisms inhibit sensible allocation of resources—these are all the products of policies and contractual agreements sought by the allies of black America. And recognizing the problems these constraints cause does not even begin to address the cases of outright corruption or malfeasance on the part of these allies, such as the scandal recently exposed in the D.C. teachers union or the construction scandals that have plagued cities such as Cleveland and Los Angeles.

A new generation of black leadership has come of age in an era in which doors are now open to the most talented members of their community—but where those who want to return to that community to aid others too often find themselves stifled by regulation, red tape, avaricious interests, and lethargic bureaucracies. Young black leaders in

organizations like the Black Alliance for Educational Opportunities are willing to entertain the notion that their alliance with the teacher unions, the civil liberties lobby, and the professional education constituencies is a bad deal—that access, integration, and money don't help black children if schools are dysfunctional, undisciplined bureaucracies whose performance depends on the intrinsic motivation of educators.

Acknowledging that long-standing allies are part of the problem, however, will require black leaders to sever ties and walk away from their base of political and institutional support. There is little (read: *no*) likelihood that significant elements of the black leadership will do this unless they believe they have a viable alternative. Openness to change does not mean that black leaders are willing to put their faith in allies who were late to the dance or whose motives are in doubt.

“Trust us,” is not an adequate answer to such concerns. Reformers who wish to convince the African American community to abandon their old alliances must forcefully address fears that they will abandon their new allies halfway through the journey. This requires more than symbolism or protestations that one's heart is pure, but should not be thought to suggest that reformers ought to kowtow to Al Sharpton or embrace race-conscious policy prescriptions. Working respectfully with the African American community does not mean abandoning colorblind values or principled policy

preferences.

In fact, transparent pandering and mimicry of the left's positions may undermine the black leaders who are seeking to mount a more profound critique of twentieth century welfarism and the culture of victimhood. Rather than offering a different way to redress festering social problems, such appeals suggest that the left was correct all along—raising the question of why African Americans should flee their long-standing allies for these Johnny-come-latelies and, more importantly, undermining the credibility of daring black leaders who suggest that the old answers are not the right answers.

The rarely acknowledged truth is that African Americans and conservatives approach school reform in very different ways. Unlike conservative reformers, who are often inclined to school choice on theoretical or normative grounds, the interests of African American and urban parents and community leaders tend to approach school reform in the same pragmatic fashion that a drowning man approaches a life preserver. Frequently, conservative views of choice are informed by either an abiding faith in the efficiency and fairness of markets or a concern with trying to protect social and ideational behavior from the embrace of spreading government. Both impulses take the desirability of choice-based arrangements as a given. Blacks and urbanites, on the other hand, are generally looking for a way to receive better services and take better care of their children. In fact, polls show they are

amenable to nearly any potentially promising reform.

Suburbanites and middle-class urban residents see the common-sense benefits of markets daily in their choice of groceries, gas stations, and dry cleaners. In impoverished neighborhoods, for a variety of reasons, markets have not historically provided the same conveniences, choices, or efficiencies. To be blunt, urban residents generally do not have very positive personal experiences with markets. Disorganized and impoverished communities generally boast little that illustrates the potential benefits of a functioning market. The Boston Consulting Group has found that the “urban core is dramatically underserved. Unmet consumer demand ranges from 25 percent in some inner-city areas to as high as 60 percent in others...[and that] retail competition in the inner city is minimal or nonexistent.”²¹ PricewaterhouseCoopers has reported, “In general, inner-city residents have less access to shopping center and food stores than do their suburban counterparts. Shoppers in the inner city typically pay higher prices for goods and services and have fewer products to choose from.”²²

Observing the imperfections of urban political economies is not an indictment of choice-based reform, but it does explain why urban African Americans might be sympathetic to school choice without becoming ardent supporters. While reformers can design school choice to serve urban interests and avoid potential perils, it is not certain that they will do so.

In fact, choice arrangements can be used—and have been used in recent decades—to facilitate efforts by whites to avoid minority populations.

What Then?

Winning minority support requires reformers to explain how black interests are short-changed by their current allies and why accountability, flexibility, responsibility, choice, and merit will improve schooling and democratize opportunity. Rather than bemoaning the lack of trust, it makes sense to take small and careful steps together. Common action, shared effort, and reliability build trust. If conservatives and blacks take some steps and see that neither group intends to cut and run, it will be easier to take larger and more ambitious steps. The challenge is to start with measures that are less threatening and less reliant on sustained good will, ones which don't require as great a leap of faith and whose potential fallout isn't as negative. Clearly, asking urban black leaders to open up one of the few major institutions they control, to put substantial numbers of black jobs at risk, and to give up the fruits of bitter legal battles all on the good faith of longtime opponents does not fit the bill.

Would-be reformers will benefit if they augment choice-based efforts with intermediate steps that will advance accountability, weaken the education monopoly, improve school quality, and create a context in which choice-based reforms are more likely to function as intended. The appeal of these steps is that they do not demand the faith

required by radical choice. What are examples of such steps?

The approach that has already been widely embraced is promoting accountability systems that hold schools and educators responsible for student learning. At the heart of the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act, such accountability can serve as a powerful lever for ensuring that essential skills are being taught to the worst-served children. By assessing student performance and holding educators and schools accountable for results, high-stakes systems can harness the self-interest of teachers and administrators to concrete improvement. While such accountability systems inevitably include trade-offs, they provide a powerful lever to ensure that the educators of minority or poor children can no longer excuse incompetence or overlook failing teachers or schools.

Another approach is to radically reshape the teaching profession by making it easier for adults to pursue teaching jobs and for schools to terminate ineffective practitioners or reward effective educators. A third course is to enable nontraditional candidates to pursue positions of educational leadership, to make it easier to remove ineffective principals, and to permit schools or school systems to more readily hold educational leaders accountable and reward them on the basis of performance.

A fourth tack would be to address the legal and procedural morass that constitutes so much of special education, resulting in defensive posturing on the part of school officials, difficul-

ties enforcing school discipline, and an often reflexive allocation of educational dollars. A final approach could include working to increase access to public choice and to the supplemental services promised under the provisions of NCLB. This might include helping to launch and support parental information centers, providing resources to support transportation, providing technical and legal resources to small supplemental service providers, and so on.

While these steps will not satisfy the most ardent vouchers supporters, they will advance the goals of enhancing parental choice, increasing accountability for student learning, building more flexible and performance-oriented schools; will undercut the education cartel and the privileged positions of the schools of education and the education groups; and will more effectively provide equal opportunity to all of America's children.

Finally, not least, such changes will provide a real and straightforward agenda on which serious school reformers may more readily find common ground, and where African Americans may more readily see their traditional allies as self-interested and obstructionist.

Notes

1 Lott's exact words, at the December 5, 2002, event, were, "When Strom Thurmond ran for president, we [Mississippians] voted for him. We're proud of it. And if the rest of the country had followed our lead, we wouldn't have had all these problems over all these years, either."

- 2 Edward G. Carmines and James A. Stimson. 1989. *Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. p. 165.
- 3 David A. Bositis. 2002. *National Opinion Poll: Politics*. Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, Washington DC.
- 4 David A. Bositis. 1997. *National Opinion Poll: Politics*. Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, Washington DC.
- 5 This tension can be readily illustrated with poll data. In 1964, for example, 79 percent of respondents to one poll agreed, "We should rely more on individual initiative and ability and not so much on governmental welfare programs." When the same 1964 poll asked respondents to identify what was responsible for holding unsuccessful people back in life, the most common response was not a lack of individual talent or initiative, but a "lack of education and training." Roper Center, Public Opinion Online, September 1964.
- 6 Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. 1998. *National Opinion Poll: Education*. Washington DC.
- 7 BAMPAC 2002 National Opinion Poll. Black American's Political Action Committee.
- 8 Lowell C. Rose and Alec M. Gallup. 2002. "The 34th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 84(1): 41-56. Ellen Sorokin. 2002. "Poll Finds Most Blacks Favor Charter, Private Schools," *The Washington Times*, July 19, p. A13.
- 9 John E. Chubb and Tom Loveless. 2002. "Bridging the Achievement Gap." In John Chubb and Tom Loveless (eds.), *Bridging the Achievement Gap*. Brookings Institution: Washington, DC p. 2.
- 10 Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips. 1998. "The Black-White Test Score Gap: An Introduction." In Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips (eds.), *The Black-White Test Score Gap*. Brookings Institution: Washington DC. p. 1-2.
- 11 Michael A. Boozar, Alan B. Krueger, and Shari Wolkon. 1992. "Race and School Quality Since Brown v. Board of Education." In Martin Neil Baily and Clifford Winston (eds.), *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity: Microeconomics* 1992. p. 270.
- 12 David A. Bositis. 1997-2002. *National Opinion Poll: Politics*. Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, Washington DC.
- 13 For instance, the 1999 Public Agenda study On Thin Ice reported African American support for school vouchers at 68 percent.
www.publicagenda.org/specials/vouchers/voucherhome.htm.
- 14 Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. 1999. Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. Washington DC.
<http://www.jointcenter.org/DB/table/NOP/BEO/VOUCHERS.doc>
- 15 David A. Bositis, 2001. "School Vouchers along the Color Line," *New York Times*, August 15.
- 16 Readers are likely to be well-acquainted with the work of scholars like Paul Peterson, Caroline Hoxby, Jay Greene, and Terry Moe that suggests the benefits of school choice. This work is certainly valuable and persuasive. However, there is also thoughtful scholarship that could leave a fair-minded reader unconvinced that the merits of choice-based reform are clearly established. See, for instance, Helen F. Ladd, 2002, "School Vouchers: A Critical View," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 16(4): 3-24 or Derek Neal, 2002, "How Vouchers Could

Change the Market for Education,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 16(4): 25-44.

17 Quoted on p. 123 in Frederick M. Hess. 2002. *Revolution at the Margins: The Impact of Competition on Urban School Systems*. Brookings Institution: Washington DC.

18 Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. 1999. *Job Patterns for Minorities and Women in State and Local Government*. Washington DC. p. 18.

19 Gary Orfield and Carole Ashkinaze. 1991. *The Closing Door: Conservative Policy*

and Black Opportunity. University of Chicago: Chicago. p. 24.

20 “A Voice for Choice,” as quoted by Fritz S. Steiger in CEO America’s electronic newsletter. August 28, 2000.

21 Boston Consulting Group, 1998, *The Business Case for Pursuing Retail Opportunities in the Inner City*, Initiative for a Competitive Inner City: Boston.

22 PricewaterhouseCoopers, 1999, *The Inner-City Shopper: A Strategic Perspective*, Initiative for a Competitive City: Boston.

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