

# The Truth About Segregation in Ferndale Public Schools

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*Segregated schools were, and are, inferior schools; we still haven't fixed them, fifty years after Brown v. Board of Education, and the inferior education they provided, then and now, helps explain the pervasive achievement gap between today's black and white students.*

- Barack Obama

## **Indefensible and Unacceptable – and We Can Change It**

The Ferndale school district operates two public high schools: one is its flagship Ferndale High School, which is attended by a diverse group of students from Ferndale and the surrounding suburbs; the other is University High School, a public charter school, which is attended almost entirely by black, Detroit students and offers far less than its counterpart. Suburban students have their choice of either school, but know better than to attend University High; Detroit students have no option besides the latter. Students who attend Ferndale High School can prepare themselves to go to just about any university and work in just about any profession after graduating; students who attend University High School have little to look forward to after graduating, other than a low-paying technical job and a college degree from a non-competitive institution.

This must change. And we have the power to change it. In our time, we should be able to expect integration to be the rule, and segregation to find its final resting place in the archives of American history. We should expect every young person to have an education that is sufficient for becoming the President of the United States. We cannot save our crumbling Detroit schools, or receive fair treatment in any other district, unless we restore that critical promise of integration. Our futures are tied together. And so, to everyone who hopes for a new wave of progress and prosperity for our city of Detroit and its surrounding area, we present a plan of action. Fight in Ferndale – and we can win everywhere.

## **The Claims of Ferndale Public Schools**

Ferndale school officials, in response to the criticisms of segregation in their district, have initially opted to defend their policies by using a variety of vague slogans and claims regarding their new project of University High School. But vague slogans and claims are no substitute for hard facts and plain truth. And it is

long overdue for people to learn the plain truth about segregation in Ferndale Public Schools.

*Claim #1: University High School is a unique, "specialized" school.*

A school that offers only a single career path – in this case, subordinate, technical work in the automotive industry – should be called a *limited* school and not a "specialized" school. If the Ferndale school administrators insist on using some derivative of the word "special," then we suggest calling it *especially limited*. Nonetheless, the main problem is neither the Ferndale administration's questionable use of rhetoric, nor is it the offering of a "specialized" education. The problem is that the district segregates and discriminates against Detroit students, restricting Detroit students to an education with a limited focus, while offering suburban students a choice. Suburban students can choose either the "specialized" University High School, or they can choose the well-rounded Ferndale High School, which prepares its students for a variety of career options.

Ferndale schools could solve this problem simply by offering its Detroit students the same options as it does for its suburban students.

If any restaurant in Ferndale seated its Detroit customers in a *separate section* from its suburban customers, and gave the Detroit customers a *smaller menu*, then Detroit and Ferndale citizens alike would protest and quickly put the restaurant out of business. But, if we can apply this standard of equal treatment to a restaurant, then shouldn't we apply it to a school district? Undoubtedly, smaller menus are the lesser evil compared to smaller futures. We should tolerate neither one.

*Claim #2: Different does not mean inferior.*

Difference, as a purely abstract concept, really doesn't mean much of anything. But the actual differences between Ferndale High School and University High School are very meaningful, especially to the residents of Ferndale.

So, what do Ferndale residents think about those differences? On that question, there is no debate: virtually no Ferndale residents attend, or have ever attended, University High School. The exceptions are so few that their number does not even add up to a single percentage point of the number of students who attend Ferndale High. This expresses more than just a general

preference for Ferndale High – it is an outright rejection of University High School as a credible option.

But this only raises another question: why does the Ferndale school district administration continue to operate one of its schools in such a manner that no Ferndale residents will attend it? In fact, the school administration seems to share the near-unanimous opinion of its suburban constituents. In the district's own literature for advertising its schools to potential homebuyers, University High School receives only a brief mention towards the end of the pamphlet, while Ferndale High School serves as the main attraction. The pamphlet most strongly advertises the aspects of Ferndale High School that cannot be found at University High School at all: music, art, a variety of sports and activities, etc., all of the things that University High treats as mere distractions – and all of the things that cost the most money.

On that note, there is actually one reference to University High School near the beginning of the pamphlet, in the section on district finances. The financial report joyously identifies University High School as an important new source of income for the district. Ferndale Public Schools receive an extra \$7,500 for each new student from Detroit. In this context, the reason for the inferior, “different” quality of University High becomes painfully clear: the tax dollars that Detroit students bring into the district mainly serve to enrich the education of suburbanites, while the Detroit students only receive the scraps left over.

*Claim #3: The people who attend UHS do so because they are interested in this “specialized,” “non-traditional” high school experience.*

The people who attend University High School are overwhelmingly from Detroit, belong to low-income families, and do not have access to a decent education, anywhere. The present crisis of Detroit Public Schools has forced many Detroit students to attend schools outside our own city. Compared to the dilapidated conditions of many Detroit schools, almost *anything* else is an improvement – including University High School. But this does not mean that University High School is what Detroit students are looking for in our education.

If the Ferndale school officials actually believe that Detroiters desire and prefer the “specialized” experience of University High School, then there would be no reason to deny us the secondary option of attending Ferndale High School. But these officials know perfectly well that, given the choice, *Detroiters would make exactly the same decision as virtually every Ferndale resident – Ferndale High School.* Detroiters want the same, quality education afforded to wealthier, white students. The fact that some Detroiters will accept the meager offerings of University High School merely reflects the utter desperation that we feel every day – and this so-called “choice” shines no favorable light on University High School.

In fact, the choices available for Detroit students and parents are barely choices at all. Detroit parents

whose students attend University High School cannot vote for representatives for the Ferndale School Board (which is 100% white as of the 2008 presidential election), nor can they *be* representatives. Put plainly, Ferndale Public Schools are perfectly willing to accept tax revenues from Detroiters, but not our political influence. That is taxation without representation.

In essence, the Ferndale School District has implemented a program for taking advantage of, and gleaming profits from, the wholesale degradation of the *Detroit Public Schools*. The impoverished state of Detroit, in the minds of Ferndale school administrators, is actually a good thing for them. This is the very soul of segregationist thought. This is the very idea that has held back progress in America for over a century. This is also the reason why, so long as suburban authorities can propagate segregation, Detroiters will never receive the treatment we deserve, even within our own city. And this is why everyone who cares about Detroit should be fighting in Ferndale.

*Claim #4: University High School is a college preparatory school.*

This claim narrows the definition of a college preparatory school to such an extent that the definition almost loses its entire meaning. University High School only prepares its students to enter low-tier, technical institutions. Its partnership with Lawrence Technological University serves to advertise that students can expect at least some sort of college education after high school. But such low-tier, non-competitive colleges and universities usually accept the graduates of *any* high school – in fact, they accept virtually everyone who applies. That makes it difficult to identify any real, college-related advantages to attending University High School versus anywhere else. College preparatory schools, in contrast, are generally expected to create college opportunities that would *not* be available anywhere else.

Ferndale school officials try to cover up this limitation by suggesting that students at University High can learn a wide variety of applicable skills within a narrow focus. Yes, the students can learn how to design cars, how to build cars, how to advertise cars – anything so long as it leads to nothing more than a subordinate, low-paying job in the crumbling automobile industry. But why would competitive colleges or universities value a University High School graduate over a student who has received a much more well-rounded education?

They don't. In fact, it is precisely the more extensive education that competitive institutions look for in their applicants. Students who play a musical instrument, play a sport, engage in a variety of activities, possess a broader worldview, and have had more exposure to more things – these are the kinds of students that prestigious institutions want to recruit. But the Ferndale school administration has shown no intention of preparing its Detroit students for prestige.

Even more absurd is the claim that University High School is a sort of magnet school. Here, the

definition of a magnet school is discarded entirely. Magnet schools came into being as a means for *integration*, to attract students from different areas with their unique programs. In *real* magnet schools, these unique programs have never narrowed the scope of the education provided, and the fact that University High School serves to *segregate* students – the very problem that real magnet schools exist to solve – only makes such references to magnet schools a slap in the face. Any reference to the word “magnet” should include a massive disclaimer: while all genuine magnet schools serve to attract diverse student populations, this new invention reverses the magnetic poles and successfully repels all suburbanites from even considering enrollment there.

The Ferndale school district advertises that University High School students have access to genuine college preparatory classes – including AP classes – through the Center for Advanced Studies and the Arts (CASA). Without attending CASA, University High School students can choose from only three AP courses, in contrast to Ferndale High School’s twenty. But, regarding the University High School students who do attend CASA, well . . . they actually don’t exist. As of the 2008 presidential election, no student from University High School has ever gained access to even a single CASA class.

*Claim #5: Uniforms and proto-military (“rigorous”) regimentation are appropriate for the education of black youth from Detroit.*

The only appropriate conditions for the education of black youth from Detroit *are the same conditions afforded to everyone else*. If Ferndale school officials actually believe that uniforms and severe regimentation benefit the education of students, then why do they decline to implement these same policies for their own suburban students? And what do they really think is so different about Detroit’s black youth that would require the use of an entirely different method of running a school? Ferndale school officials never really answer these questions.

And they can’t. The stereotypes and assumptions behind their policies are simply too racist for Ferndale school officials to state openly. But their silence on the issue hides nothing.

Between classes, the hallways of University High School echo with the sounds of school authorities barking like drill sergeants. “Get to class!” “Tuck in your shirt!” “Your pants are too low!” “Your skirt is too high!” “Hurry up!” “Slow down!” “Stop talking!” “Give me a response when I’m talking to you!” “Don’t talk back to me!” Students wear plain, modest, and identical uniforms, and work every day amidst this image of complete conformity. Often, a school authority will pull aside a student for some minor uniform violation (such as the wrong color of undershirt) and subsequently *suspend the student from school*. Such scenes might lead an uninformed visitor to believe that University High

School is a school for juvenile delinquents; no one would suspect it of being a college preparatory school.

Not very far away, students at Ferndale High School experience a very different kind of treatment. Between classes, one can observe students wearing a variety of clothes – the school permits them the adult privilege of dressing themselves – and freely talking to their friends without the constant onslaught of shouting from their school authorities. The school is racially integrated, and students of all races take classes together and make friends with each other – an experience that most students at University High School have never known. Ferndale High School also looks like a real high school, unlike its segregated counterpart, which uses a building that was once an elementary school and still has its playground, short water fountains and low doorknobs intact.

Regarding the elementary school building, why even bother using that building in the first place? Ferndale High School alone has the capacity for 2,400 students, but only about 1,400 students attend (and that number even includes many middle school students). University High School’s meager 400 students could fit into Ferndale High School with plenty of room to spare. That could also spare the district the cost of operating a building that it currently doesn’t need, or it could provide the middle school students with their own building. But the administrators know that this would mean the end of University High School altogether. If the district segregated the Detroit students from the suburban students *within the same building*, and enforced *in plain sight of everyone* the unequal policies regarding uniforms, suspensions for no good reason, treating students like criminals, unequal access to AP classes, music classes, art classes, sports teams, career possibilities – then not only would the Detroit students revolt; the suburban youth would join them.

To carry on with this policy, the Ferndale school officials must think that Detroit’s black youth are an entirely different kind of people than the suburban youth. Over the long run, what sort of futures does the district expect for these supposedly different kinds of students? Uniforms are usually only required for jobs at fast food restaurants and other low-paying service jobs. Severe regimentation and oppressive discipline are only commonplace in the military, in prison, or in various subordinate factory positions, but not in the upper echelons of society. Ferndale school officials must believe that black youth from Detroit either cannot or should not be the thinkers and leaders of our society. And, amazingly, they believe that they are doing Detroit students a favor.

*Claim #6: University High School’s “uniqueness” is responsible for the achievements of its students.*

University High School, like many other schools, tries to advertise itself by displaying the significant achievements of its students. And the students at University High School, like many other students, make achievements worthy of display. That much is

completely ordinary. But part of the fallacy of University High School is the insinuation that its students *would not have achieved as much* – or more – at a better school, such as Ferndale High School. District officials insinuate – no, they actually state rather openly – that Detroit students would not be able to perform well at a school like Ferndale High School, that the straight-and-narrow, limited education at University High School is better for the Detroit students, that the Detroit students probably would not have been able to achieve anything without it.

So, when University High School authorities proudly display the achievements of their students, they gloat as though their crude methods are the miracle cure for the underachievement of black youth – as though the world should be amazed that black students achieved anything, at all! These authorities exploit the progressive happiness of people who appreciate the sight of black student achievement, only in order to promote an inferior high school that degrades and limits black student achievement. But there is nothing *miraculous* about the fact that Detroit students make achievements, and so there is certainly no reason for an inferior school to take the credit. *Detroit students are just as bright and talented as everybody else!*

The reality is that Detroit students make these achievements *in spite of* the unfair treatment that University High School dishes out – not because of it. And because of the limitations of University High School, the students' achievements can have only a limited character. The problem behind the underachievement of black youth is not that educators have failed to come up with a different type of school or educational technique. No, this only implies that black students have some innate difficulty with learning. The real problem is that policy-makers and high-ranking officials have consistently failed to provide an integrated, equal, high-quality education for everyone, which is exactly the same problem that the Ferndale school district perpetuates.

*Claim #7: University High School is a new, innovative model for education.*

So far, the claims of Ferndale Public Schools have not held up very well under scrutiny. Based on their performance, we can reasonably give the district officials failing grades in the following academic subjects: English (misleading use of rhetoric), Mathematics (the number of UHS students could easily fit into the same building as the FHS students;  $UHS + FHS < 2,400$ ), Economics (focus on the automobile industry alone fails to take into account current market trends), Law (flagrant violation of the Fourteenth Amendment and *Brown v. Board of Education*), and Philosophy (logical, rational thought obviously eludes this administration).

In addition, the claim that University High School is a “new” and “innovative” model for education adds one more failing grade to the list: *History*.

There is nothing “new” about providing an industrially- and technically-centered education to black students. There is nothing “innovative” about preparing

students to enter a particular sector of the workforce. And it is precisely because the Ferndale school district considers this theory of education to be a “model” for other schools that we all must raise our voices in opposition.

We must raise our voices because, beginning in the final decade of the 1800's, this same theory came to dominate the education of black people – and poor people of all races – throughout the entire era of Jim Crow segregation.

## **The Booker T. Washington Theory for the Education of Black People**

The period of Reconstruction after the Civil War was a period of progress for former slaves, a great thrust towards full citizenship and equality for black Americans. Hundreds of black Americans became representatives in the state legislatures of the South. The Freedmen's Bureau supplied food, houses, hospitals, and schools. Universal public education was established. Many Northern educators moved to the South and dedicated the work of their lives to the instruction of millions of illiterate, newly freed men, women, and children.

But this period of progress experienced a reversal beginning in 1877, when President Rutherford B. Hayes withdrew federal troops from the South. Lynch-mobs increasingly replaced due process. Former slaveholders and Confederate officers rose to positions of authority. Black voters became disenfranchised. Jim Crow segregation poisoned all social relations. And a new model for the education of black people gained prominence, which found its most effective proponent in the former slave, Booker Taliaferro Washington.

Booker T. Washington's ideas reflected the regressive direction of this period, and he provided the crucial leadership to both white and black citizens for the stabilization of a caste society. His message to black Americans was to abandon the fight for full equality and focus on gaining success in the lower-paying sections of the work force. To white Americans – especially Northern, wealthy, white Americans – Booker T. Washington implored their philanthropic support towards creating opportunities so that black people would succeed in such work. Using his authority as the president of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, Washington called for a retreat from classical, liberal arts education, arguing that education for black people should focus on agricultural and technical work, instead. His most famous articulation of this idea was delivered in his 1895 “Atlanta Compromise” speech, as it was later named:

“No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem. It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top. . . . The opportunity to earn a dollar in a factory just now is worth infinitely more than the opportunity to spend a dollar in an opera-house.”

Wealthy liberals in the North embraced Booker T. Washington's vision. They poured huge sums of money into Washington's project of building agricultural and technical institutions throughout the South. Washington became so prominent that he would eventually earn such associates as Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, and President Theodore Roosevelt.

The liberal philanthropists who contributed to Booker T. Washington's project saw themselves, and were seen by some others, as benevolent and compassionate supporters of black progress, lifting black citizens out of poverty and placing them on the road to self-reliance. But unfortunately, that road did not lead to self-reliance; rather, it led to the increased entrenchment of segregation and inequality across the South. With every new infusion of money to agricultural and technical schools, the classical, liberal arts education faded into the background, along with the opportunities to become lawyers, doctors, scientists, professionals – thinkers and leaders. For these large donations did not advance black education, generally; no, these donations advanced the *Booker T. Washington* model of education, and thereby *institutionalized* in practice the idea that black citizens should only receive training towards menial work and low-paying jobs. So, while White Citizens Councils and the Ku Klux Klan provided the negative enforcement of segregation through physical violence, the liberal philanthropists provided the positive enforcement through the power of money.

W.E.B. Du Bois issued stern warnings against this trend. In 1906, he addressed a black teachers' conference at the Hampton Institute:

“On one point, therefore, there can be no question—no hesitation: unless we develop our full capabilities, we cannot survive. If we are to be trained grudgingly and suspiciously; trained not with reference to what we can be, but with sole reference to what somebody wants us to be; if instead of following the methods pointed out by the accumulated wisdom of the world for the development of full human power, we simply are trying to follow the line of least resistance and teach black men only such things and by such methods as are momentarily popular, then my fellow teachers, we are going to fail and fail ignominiously in our attempt to raise the black race to its full humanity and with that failure falls the fairest and fullest dream of a great united humanity.”

But W.E.B. Du Bois did not succeed in saving the education of black people from the clutches of Booker T. Washington. Du Bois never possessed a method of political struggle that was advanced enough and powerful enough to win equal, integrated education for black youth and place the South back on the road towards Reconstruction. His failure loomed over the next half-century of American history. It would require the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the power of a civil rights movement, to break down the walls of

Jim Crow segregation that Booker T. Washington had helped to build.

In other words, it was in part Booker T. Washington's model for education – the same model that Ferndale's University High School employs today – that necessitated the emergence of King's civil rights movement in the first place.



Linda Brown, the student from whom *Brown v. Board of Education* received its name.

In that historic decision in 1954, the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that “separate can never be equal.”

## Robert Thompson, Liberal Racism and Charter Schools for the Poor

In the long period that passed between King's great struggles and today, the Booker T. Washington model for education has had the opportunity for a certain revival. “Specialized” public charter schools, built through private funding but operated by public school districts, have emerged in poor and urban school districts as a “solution” to the current financial crisis of public education. A number of charter schools have proven to be scandalously predatory: various corporations hatched schemes to profit from state funding for charters, building miserable excuses for schools and pocketing whatever money was not needed to keep the “schools” operational. Other small charters grew out of sincere efforts by local churches and individuals who were not personally wealthy enough to change the conditions of public education, but could operate a small school for their own community. But one of the greatest dangers to the future of education has come from the same type of liberal philanthropists who funded the schools of Booker T. Washington – one such philanthropist today is multi-millionaire Robert Thompson.

Thompson does not attempt to profit from his charter school creations, nor does he view himself as engaging in any sort of conspiracy against equal opportunity in education. Rather, he has a purely philanthropic aim. According to his website, “The Thompson Foundation's mission is to help low-income people rise out of poverty and become self-sufficient.” Sound familiar? Virtually all funds from his Foundation go towards the charter-based education of Detroit,

Highland Park, and Hamtramck youth (he has no intention of implementing these charter school models for wealthier, suburban youth). Like the liberal philanthropists a century before, Robert Thompson poses the danger of institutionalizing the second-class model of education, actually creating a stronger ceiling to block the advancement of minority and poor white students in southeast Michigan.

Thompson-style philanthropists, however, do create enormous opportunities – for the corporate elite. University High School, like many other charter schools, has considerable corporate interests invested in it. Michigan Future, Inc. and the Convergence Education Foundation are organizations that invest money from a variety of corporations into educational projects, one of which is University High School. These corporations benefit greatly from the start-up money that someone like Thompson can provide for their charter models. From there, public tax dollars provide the operational costs of the schools, and the corporations have little else to do but wait for the stream of already-trained workers to trickle in – workers who will have to accept meager contracts, because they possess no other skills for gaining employment anywhere else.

University High School's partnership with Lawrence Technological University provides another such "win-win" situation. When University High School advertises its direct relationship to Lawrence Tech, this lures Detroit parents to believe that University High is a credible educational alternative. And Lawrence Tech is abundantly pleased to place students on rails that lead directly into their institution. Thus, the holy trinity of the charter school operation is complete: liberal philanthropists, private financial beneficiaries, and a school district prepared to let them all have their way.

Corporate based philanthropy simply tosses democracy and sound educational policy out the window. Whatever whim some billionaire comes up with after having some caviar and several martinis becomes the new brand of educational reform for black and Latina/o students, overnight. These philanthropists know absolutely nothing about educational policy and simply disdain consulting with any form of democratic, public opinion. They never ask us what we want. And then, when it has become clear that their haphazard experiments for the education of poor people were really a disaster, they insolently withdraw their funding and leave us with even worse conditions than what existed before.

If there is a significant difference between today's corporate charter school model and the Booker T. Washington model, it is this: the Booker T. Washington model only became institutionalized at the college level. Today's corporate, public charters focus on K-12 schools. At face value, this may sound like a sort of sickly limp forward: yesterday's college model for segregation is today's K-12 model. But in fact, insofar as they are different, today's model is worse. Today's application of the Booker T. Washington model has the effect of institutionally constricting the life opportunities of minority and poor white students at a much younger

age. If this model becomes the new standard for the education of urban youth generally, then not only will public education become completely privatized, but many young people's futures will be practically fated from birth.

Liberal racism has always served as a decisive, complementary partner to overt, venomous racism. The truly hateful varieties of racists have always been a small minority, practically from the beginning of racism, itself. And so it has always been necessary for the kind-hearted, compassionate sort of racism to fill the void. Even during slavery, the common opinion was that slavery was an unfortunate thing, that slaves should at least have kind masters, sufficient food, and decent lives – but also that emancipation and equality were outrageously radical and dangerous. If not for the prevalence of this sentiment, the slaveholders and their political representatives never would have been able to maintain their regime for four minutes, let alone four hundred years.

Today, liberal racism possesses the same general features – charitable kindness towards the oppressed, but only so long as we know our place. Wealthy, white Californians will happily hire undocumented, Latina maids to clean their homes and care for their children; they will even treat these maids as part of their own family. But on questions of immigrant rights, amnesty, and equality, these wealthy Californians are loathsome reactionaries. Many white people who idolize black athletes, black musicians, black entertainers of all sorts, will nonetheless oppose affirmative action programs that promote equal college opportunities for black youth. The minority janitor passes by almost unnoticed; nothing seems out of place there – but the minority scholar at an elite university is always the object of intense scrutiny and suspicion. Hence, generosity flows freely towards projects like University High School, but when it comes to projects for advancing integration and equality, we are told that the money simply doesn't exist.

## **What We Really Need and Deserve**

No more lies, no more substitutes, no more excuses, no more flattering words that are not backed up by actions, no New Jim Crow – the time for real equality and integration is now; and this time, we're not settling for anything less. Throw away the schemes to transform our education into a one-way street that leads to a dead end. Toss out the stereotypes and assumptions that say that we cannot learn, that we don't care about our education, that we are only suitable for the lowest places in our society. Get rid of all that nonsense. Today is a new day.

We deserve genuinely integrated schools that recognize the equal capacity of all to learn and thrive. We deserve textbooks, small class size, up-to-date computers, and clean, well maintained school buildings. We deserve the philosophical insight of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, the poetry of Walt Whitman and Langston Hughes, the music of Coltrane, Bach, and Brahms, the artwork of Michelangelo, Picasso, and Rivera, the stories

of Dickens, Steinbeck, and Angelou, the political theories of Rousseau, Hobbes, and Marx, and the many-sided genius of the work of Leonardo da Vinci. We deserve the skills and abilities required by our time and era, and we also deserve the rich inheritance of the insights and lessons of all times and all eras. We deserve to know historic people, places, things and ideas, and we also deserve to know each other, and ourselves, and to develop ideas of our own.

But we also deserve much more than that. We deserve to go on great trips – yes, big field trips, just like the rich, suburban students do – to faraway places and not-so-faraway places. We deserve to have fun for the sake of fun, itself. We deserve a broad range of physical activities so that all of us can enjoy staying active and healthy. We deserve to have food in our cafeteria that is not only nutritious, but actually tastes good, too. We deserve to grow up with our eyes on the stars, envisioning an infinite realm of possibilities for our own lives and for our society. We deserve to express ourselves, to dress ourselves, to be ourselves, to say exactly what we think, and to ask as many questions as we want about as many topics as we can imagine. We deserve to be treated with respect, to enjoy learning in an environment that is free of condescension, cruelty, and abuse. We deserve to meet people from many different backgrounds and cultures, who have different lifestyles and ideas, and we deserve to learn their languages, and to know their history. We deserve to inherit the world, and not just the ghettos and barrios of the world. In a word, we deserve everything. And we can never be satisfied until we can stand face-to-face with the whole of humanity, to see ourselves and be seen by others as equal and as one.

. . . What is a man,  
If his chief good and market of his time  
Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more.  
Sure he that made us with such large discourse,  
Looking before and after, gave us not  
That capability and godlike reason  
To fust in us unus'd. . . .

- William Shakespeare  
*Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*

## **Restore the Promise of *Brown v. Board of Education* – and This Time, Make It Real**

So long as the schools in the Detroit metropolitan area remain segregated, all school districts will be unequal and none will have sufficient state funding. Particularly for Detroiters, there is no reason to believe that our district can receive the resources it needs – in the middle of an historic economic crisis, no less – while the surrounding suburbs use predatory schemes against Detroit students. Any plan for saving Detroit Public Schools *that does not involve fighting against suburban segregation* is simply doomed to fail. Isolated and exploited, Detroiters cannot win anything for our schools using the same, tired campaigns that have practically become an automated routine.

What does integration have to do with finances? Everything. Michigan is over 80% white, and that simple majority is enough to win from Lansing a relatively disproportionate amount of per-pupil funding. Plus, while we are divided against each other, neither Lansing nor Washington, D.C. need to fear our potential, united power to demand more funding for education, generally. By integrating the Detroit metropolitan area into a single, unified school district, we are integrating not only the people of the area, but also the people's interests. Therefore, when the citizens of Bloomfield Hills and Birmingham go to politicians to demand more funding for their schools, they will inherently be demanding funding for our schools, too, because we will be part of the same district and attend the same schools together. Our interests will be mutual. That leaves us with only one, key question to answer: how do we actually accomplish this monumental task?

## **Detroit Has the Power: Build the New Civil Rights Movement**

Detroit now holds more potential power in its hands than it has held in the last forty years. Our task is to raise consciousness of what that power is and how to use it. That much needs to be demonstrated in action; words alone will not suffice. But this is an active time and we are an active, young generation. Starting in Ferndale, we can use the power of Detroit in order to make Detroit the commander of the region and the state. The objective basis for our power largely comes from the following sources:

First, all but the very wealthiest suburban school districts are experiencing financial hardships. Unable to rely on either the state or private contributions to keep their districts afloat, and with few new residents or even a declining population, these districts must turn to Detroit students. The per-pupil funding that Detroiters can bring to the suburban districts puts dollar signs in the eyes of district administrations. Even more, the massive crisis of the Detroit Public Schools has created an equally massive market for luring students out of our own district. Corporate charters, allied with the suburban districts, have wasted no time cashing in on that market. This increasing dependency of the suburban districts upon the enrollment of Detroit students means that Detroit has the power to make or break their districts. We can use our power to make those districts not only more integrated and accountable, but to put them in a position in which failing to combine with Detroit would mean shutting down their own schools. "Open them up or we will shut them down!"

Second, the fact that Detroit students regularly cross district lines and attend suburban schools is an historic breakthrough, in and of itself. From their very inception, the white suburbs have existed for no other reason than to exclude black Detroiters; segregation has been the living foundation of those suburbs for generations. The fact that the suburbs must now disrupt that foundation creates an enormous opportunity for us to shatter the foundation entirely. That, in conjunction

with the progressive ideals of today's young generation, expressed in part through the election of Barack Obama, lets us know that we have allies on the other side of Eight Mile.

Third, the national economic crisis makes every business and institution significantly more vulnerable to boycotts than they were before. Suburban businesses, up against the possibility of such boycotts, have a special interest in opposing the segregation in their districts. Even more, the economic crisis also creates a special interest for consumers to hold onto whatever money they have. We can intervene powerfully in this situation.

But we must act. And in order for us to generate the level of activity that we will need to win, the youth must lead the way. Join BAMN. Be a leader of the new civil rights movement. Circulate the "Petition to End Discrimination Against Detroit Students in Ferndale and Other Area Schools," available at [www.bamn.com](http://www.bamn.com), BAMN's national website. We must be prepared to speak out, to march, to boycott, and to organize at all times. We refuse to see this time of new hope transformed into a New Jim Crow, and we know that we can win so much more. We will fight to restore the promise of *Brown v. Board of Education*. We will save the Detroit Public Schools. And we will integrate Ferndale Public Schools. By Any Means Necessary.

## Operation King's Dream – A Call to Action: Restore the Promise of Brown v. Board of Education Starting in Michigan

Endorsed by:

Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action, Integration & Immigrant Rights, and Fight for Equality By Any Means Necessary (BAMN); The Progressive Alliance of the University of Michigan; Minority and Women Affairs Advisory Committee of the Wayne State University Student Council; Wayne State University Students for Choice; George Chatman, Candidate for 36th District Court Judge; John Riehl, President of AFSCME Local 207; The Ginsburg Center for Community Service and Learning

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