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THE CONTINUING CHALLENGE OF RACIAL CONFLICTS AND CRISES: FOCUSING ON EDUCATION AS A SOLUTION

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Abstract:
In this first-person paper, educator Dr. Lionel Brown takes a sweeping look at the racial crises that have erupted in his home city of Cincinnati during his lifetime, and proposes that education is the only real, long-term way of addressing and disrupting the repeating pattern of violence. He highlights a selection of current and proposed educational initiatives. His perspective is unique, as he was a student at the University of Cincinnati (UC) when the race riots of the 1960s took place, and - after a long career in the city's educational system as a teacher and administrator - he was again at the University as a faculty member when racial violence erupted in 2001. As he struggled to help his graduate students in UC's unique College of Education Urban Education Leadership program find a deeper understanding of the events unfolding around them, he was profoundly struck by the similarities in conditions from the 1960s to 2001.

Purpose

The purpose of writing this paper is to focus on education as a means of addressing the injustices and inequities that persist in educating African American students - the same injustices/inequities that have led to racial crises and conflicts in the city of Cincinnati recently and in the past. Using the city's history of racial unrest as a backdrop, this paper will offer a personal perspective born of nearly 40 years of experience within the educational system of Cincinnati.

Backdrop

Cincinnati has a long history of civil unrest. As early as 1829, a white mob, frustrated with the city's failure to enforce Black Laws, attacked a black residential area. Of the 2,500 African Americans who lived in the city, over 1,000 were forced out. In April 1836 a fight between a white boy and a black boy triggered riots that raged for several days. A white mob burned several black residences. The governor declared a state of martial law, and order was restored. Other racial conflicts occurred in 1841, 1861, 1862, 1884, 1935, and 1941.

On June 12, 1967 - the day after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. visited the city to call for non-violence - a riot erupted in Avondale and spread to eight other African American communities within the city after a protestor was arrested for loitering. Smoldering tensions exploded into several days of widespread civil unrest. Soon hundreds of heavily armed national guardsmen and city police officers were patrolling black sections of Cincinnati. "Armored trucks roared up and down the streets, and angry young blacks burned, looted, and marauded" (Taylor, 1993). During the conflict, one person was killed, and more than 60 were injured, including 25 police officers and firefighters. Over 400 people were arrested. More violence occurred in July, and total property damage reached three million dollars.

On April 8, 1968, violence broke out following the assassination of Dr. King. A shooting in Avondale triggered more rioting that spread to other neighborhoods. Over 50 fire bombings occurred within the first hour. A curfew was imposed, and again, the National Guard arrived. Approximately 260 people were arrested and two people were killed before the situation quieted on April 10, 1968.

As a native-born citizen of Cincinnati and life-long resident, I witnessed first-hand the city's race riots in the 1960s and similar racial unrest in 2001. In the first instance I was a student at the University of Cincinnati. Forty years later I am a faculty member there. I was struck by the similarities and differences in the causes of unrest, reactions to it, and in my own circumstances from one time period to another. These observations and my continuing efforts to address the situation form the basis of this paper.

1967 Race riots in Cincinnati

On a summer evening in 1967, as I drove home late from my classes at the University of Cincinnati, I passed the intersection of Rockdale Avenue and Reading Road and saw a large unruly crowd gathering. People were running into the street from their

homes and from a nightclub. As I slowed my car, there was a loud explosion. Flames leaped into the air to my right and left accompanied by shouts of "Black Power" and "Power to the People." I turned onto Lexington Avenue and heard another loud explosion in the vicinity of Model Laundry, a place my grandmother had worked as a shirt press operator. I heard angry voices moving in all directions, the sound of breaking glass, and smaller explosions. There were bricks crashing through car windows and frightened screams from inside the automobiles. As I turned onto Gilbert Avenue, there was another loud explosion further up near the Thompson Cadillac showroom. I hurried onto Bresford Avenue, turned onto Kerper Avenue and drove to my house. I could see flames leaping high into the air. The next day as I drove the same route I saw Model Laundry, a plant that employed hundreds of people, burned to the ground. Thompson's Cadillac was damaged extensively - wooden boards replaced the large plate glass windows that had previously displayed shiny new cars daily. The intersection of Reading Road and Rockdale Avenue was a shambles. Debris was everywhere - many stores were damaged beyond repair. Windows were boarded up in buildings that had survived bricks, trashcans turned into missiles, and Molotov cocktails. A curfew was enacted quickly, but similar acts of destruction went on until the National Guard was called in to stop rioters and looters. Another night, as I drove home from the University of Cincinnati, I was pulled over by the National Guard, escorted from my car, ordered to spread-eagle against it, and was searched while a bayonet was pressed against my back. My car was also searched. The riot conditions that started that night in early June lasted for the remainder of the summer.

Civil unrest - Cincinnati 2001

In April 2001, I was with a group of fifth and sixth graders, returning from a college tour. These students were participants of GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs). As the last of our group stepped off the bus at Parham Elementary, the school custodian told me there was a racial disturbance in the city. Later that evening, I drove to the downtown post office and passed a large crowd of angry people moving down Vine Street, and another large crowd moving up Central Parkway. Violence had erupted - windows were broken, food carts were overturned, and buildings were looted and set afire. Once again, as many years earlier, I drove home from the University of Cincinnati, this time not as a student but as a research associate at the campus. I did not drive to my childhood home on Kerper Avenue, but to a suburban area - a quiet place unaffected directly by the unrest and civil disobedience in the inner city. The April 2001 unrest and demonstrations went on for several days as a curfew was enacted. In less then seven days the curfew was lifted, but there was need for the National Guard to remain.

What the city and I experienced in the sixties and what we experienced in April 2001 were not the same. The riots of the sixties were a forest fire. The unrest in 2001 was the flickering flame of a match. However, in the sixties, city officials and the protestors were willing to seek common ground and to look for solutions. In 2001, city officials and the protestors were unwilling to sit down together. Subsequently in 2001, Cincinnati Black United Front leaders called for a citywide boycott. The city and its economy suffered. The national image of the city was damaged and the racial divide continued. In 2003 the city manager described Cincinnati as the "6th most segregated city in America" (Lemmie, 2004). Currently, most of Cincinnati's African-Americans and Caucasians continue to live in separate parts of the city.

Causes and context of the 1960s riots

Among many socio-economic factors that contributed to growing racial unrest in Cincinnati in the 1960s, four were prominent:

1. African-Americans had little representation in city leadership - City Council and the Board of Education each had one black member. Not one of the 69 members of the twelve city boards and commissions was black.
2. There was disproportionate unemployment between blacks and whites. The unemployment rate for black Cincinnatians was 8%, but only 3% for whites. Black workers were underrepresented, especially in the building trades. Blacks were 25% of the city's population, but they made up only 12% of the 20,000 members of building trade unions.
3. There was excessive poverty in the African American community. In Cincinnati, 36% of blacks lived in poverty, compared to only 17% of whites.
4. Housing for blacks was substandard and only 14% of blacks owned homes.

The riots that occurred in Cincinnati in the sixties were part of a national picture. Riots were occurring in almost every major city - Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles, Cleveland and San Francisco. "Cincinnati was the second of 23 American cities to experience protests, civil disorder, and rioting in 1967" (Cincinnati Museum Center, 2001). "Inquiries into the causes of the riots pinpointed unemployment, bad housing, poor neighborhood conditions, and the lack of political representation" (Taylor, 1993).

The riots were a dramatic outcry for undelivered equality. The Civil Rights Acts said that Negroes were equal with white citizens, with equal rights and protection under the law. As the Civil Rights movement peaked, Jim Crow Laws, black codes and other forms of discrimination had faded. The U.S. Supreme Court struck down segregated schools.
However, lack of quality education was one reason a disenfranchised people took to the streets. In the 1960s, even though segregation had been outlawed, school districts had policies that effectively continued segregation. The practice of "ability

grouping" in elementary schools, and of "tracking" in secondary schools isolated black students, lessening the possibility and hope of a college education and putting them on a lifetime path of menial jobs.

Additionally, many teachers believed that black students could not succeed academically. Low expectations and isolation into "tracks" contributed to attendance and academic problems and high dropout rates. Cose (2002) writes "...public schools in poor urban communities often are nothing but factories for failure. Instead of taking black and brown children seriously, instead of treating them as human beings fully capable of success, they frequently treat them as dullards simply marking time until they are ready to collect welfare, or go to prison." Unequal educational opportunity for black students predicted unequal economic opportunity for black youth and adults. Unequal educational and economic opportunities boomeranged into chronic concerns of the inner city - drug abuse, teen-age pregnancy, single parent homes, and high crime rates.

Unequal educational and economic opportunities, and substandard housing and living conditions were major causes for the riots of the sixties. Many young black men especially felt these injustices personally and believed the only way to get the attention of the government was to destroy their own neighborhoods. They believed violence was a wake up call - a call to be treated as humans, with the same dignity afforded to white men. Each brick thrown symbolically broke the shackles of second-class citizenship. Riot flames that leapt into the air with the words "burn baby burn" seared away the stench of slavery, the memory of lynching, the brutality of police, and a dual system of justice - black law and white law (see e.g., Fogelson, 1969).

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had made significant advances with peaceful marches and inspirational speeches before his assassination. However, the message of Malcolm X was to use any means necessary to overcome. The Black Panthers fueled fires and emotions on the West Coast. Panthers Huey Newton and H. Rap Brown traveled across America proclaiming "Power to the People," "Black Power," "Black Pride" and "Black is Beautiful" - proclamations often accompanied by some form of civil disobedience.

All these actions were a reflection of a people who had been enslaved, disenfranchised and relegated to servitude and second-class citizenship. From the fires of rioting, new feelings of race pride and individual pride arose, replacing feelings of self-hatred and low self-esteem. The ashes left behind represented a chance of a better life in the 1960s.

Causes and context of the 2001 unrest

The conditions that sparked rioting all over America in the sixties are the same conditions that sparked civil unrest in Cincinnati in April 2001. The progress made by black Americans in the sixties and the seventies had slowed - perhaps even regressed. The attack on affirmative action set a national tone interpreted by many as turning back the clock and reversing progress. Self-motivation among blacks was strong and growing during the Civil Rights Movement, but this motivation had begun to fade into frustration, too often being replaced by drug and alcohol abuse. A desire for education among black males was replaced by an attitude that excellence in achievement was akin to acting "white," and was a feminine trait (Harpalani, 2002). High rates of suspension and expulsion, fueled by a dismal attitude toward education, had brought the black male's journey from poor attendance to high school drop out. Poor scores on standardized tests, and gaps in achievement between black and white students diminished hope among blacks that college could be part of their future.

As this uneducated and angry mass of mostly black men turned to the streets, the prevailing attitudes toward them were reflective of a system that had not found a way to bring social justice to all its citizens. Some police and government officials viewed blacks as a menace to society, and a drain on state resources (Cose, 2002). The shooting of an unarmed young black man in Cincinnati ignited injustices that had again been smoldering over time (Firor & Kurlantzick, 2001; Ripley, Dale, & Tortora, 2001). In truth, the root causes of the civil unrest of 2001 were no different from the causes of the riots of the sixties. At the core were inferior education, poverty, sub-standard housing (now grown into ghetto slums), and a disenfranchised people on the lowest end of the social, economic and political scale (Franklin, 2001; Kinney, 2001). Despair and frustration led this mass of black people to lash out at the system that seemed to oppress them in many ways. Many blacks were not able to see the promise that education held for them. Many asked why they should vote when their worth was not acknowledged and campaign promises were forgotten. Frank Raines, first black CEO of a Fortune 500 corporation observed, "Blacks are so suspicious of the establishment that, until the establishment demonstrates it will do something, the assumption is that it will not do something" (Cose, 2002).

Police profiling of black men, disproportionate shootings of black men, and finally the shooting of an unarmed black youth, were all symptoms of a greater problem of racial attitudes present from generation to generation. In 1999, the Sentinel Police Association - representing the city's black police officers - compiled a report urging city leaders to take immediate action, warning that something must be done "to quell the very tense and volatile atmosphere that currently exists between the police and the community" (Horn, 2001). The most frustrating part of the picture in 2001 was that, though the situation was hardly more 'tense and volatile' than it had been at any time since the 1960s, leaders, government officials, and influential community members still

could not find common ground that might have headed off the violence and led to systemic change in racial attitudes.

The impact of racial crisis and conflicts on urban schools

The after-effects of racial crises in our cities are long lasting, causing economic recessions and flight to the suburbs by businesses, families, and teachers. "It is clear that the demographics of the city have changed in the past few decades, with middle-class white voters fleeing the city for the suburbs ... and that is not likely to change" (Beaupre, 2005). As a result, urban school districts suffer from lower property values, the absence of involved parents, and of experienced, effective teachers. Reduced funding, changes in school staffing, and lack of parent involvement have major negative impacts that contribute to the failure of urban schools. African-American students are the majority population of many urban school districts. It is, therefore, African-American children, especially African-American males, who suffer most from the failure of urban schools.
Let us take a look at Cincinnati Public Schools and some of the ways that this urban district has failed, and continues to fail to meet the needs of African-American students. I will cite some past and existing programs, and our most ambitious project to date.

Focusing on education as a solution

Racial crises and conflicts must be addressed by all leaders (government, business, educational, and religious) and citizens of the community together. It takes a village to *educate* a child as well as raise one. I have come to this realization from a lifetime of personal and professional experiences in Cincinnati's educational institutions, having been Deputy Superintendent of Cincinnati Public Schools before my current appointment as an assistant professor in the College of Education at the University of Cincinnati.

Project Succeed and Project Succeed Academy

As deputy superintendent of CPS, one of my responsibilities was for discipline in a 45,000-student district. Numerous 'consequence' programs were in place for inappropriate behavior - all punitive in nature, lacking a holistic view of the student and not addressing the causes of disruptive behavior. I developed and implemented Project Succeed (PS) and the Project Succeed Academy (PSA). PS and PSA were based on the philosophy that some students need additional support services to experience success in school. I believe firmly that all students can adapt socially and academically to the school environment when provided with additional support services administered in a holistic manner.

The Project Succeed concept progressed from a summer school, multiple sites program to a single site, year-round effort - Project Succeed Academy - during the 1995 -1996 school year. The founding of Project Succeed Academy was greeted with enthusiasm and optimism by district principals, parents and community leaders.

The placement in PSA of students with the worst behaviors - without suspensions or expulsions - allowed other district schools to create a disciplined environment where students who came to school to learn could accomplish their goals. PSA would focus on the roots of disruptive behaviors, addressing the causes rather than the symptoms. Treatment of the whole child is essential in reversing disruptive behavioral patterns. PSA would offer an approach entirely different from other juvenile programs that were tied to Juvenile Court.

PSA provided at-risk students with intensive support in literacy, mathematics and science. Students need a clear understanding and appreciation of the immediate value of these core subject areas, and their life and career implications. Support services in core subjects were also designed to lead to academic success in line with recommendations for promotion according to the district's subject area rubrics, and with skills identified by the mandated Ohio State Proficiency Tests. Therefore, Project Succeed Academy would be a comprehensive, holistic, positive approach with a focus not only on behavior management, but also on improving basic academic skills.

The primary reason the Cincinnati Board of Education funded Project Succeed Academy was to reduce the number of non-mandatory suspensions and the numbers of expulsions. In a two-year period, PSA achieved dramatic reductions in suspensions and was at the heart of district's Comprehensive Plan to Address Discipline.

Additional Educational Initiatives

Since my appointment as an assistant professor at the University of Cincinnati, I have helped implement several more initiatives to address educational problems related to race in Cincinnati.

GEAR-UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs)

This program is a partnership between the University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati State Technical and Community College, Cincinnati Public Schools, the community and industry. Its goal is to increase the number of low income and underrepresented students who are prepared to enter and succeed in post-secondary education. It provides support, information, and a working system.

UEL (Urban Educational Leadership)

This is a practitioner-oriented doctoral program at the University of Cincinnati, the first of only a handful nationwide. The three-phased interdisciplinary coursework is designed to take graduate students from theoretical foundations in educational leadership to understanding, specialization and success in urban schools and urban communities.
Urban Technology Community Center - "Changing Hearts and Minds - One Block at a Time"
This is the most ambitious program being proposed in the city, currently in its initial stages and co-founded by myself and Randy Sandler**,** Cincinnati businessman and benefactor. It has grown from the efforts of educators, clergy and business leaders - 'the village' within our city. Plans are to create an Urban Technology Community Center in the Over-the-Rhine (OTR) area of Cincinnati. The Center will provide mentors for children, programs for parents, and technology training for children and parents that will enhance their future educational and economic opportunities. This training will take place in an environment where children and their parents can interact casually with each other and with Cincinnati police officers.

Students in the Over-The-Rhine area go home from school each day to deplorable living conditions. OTR is a decayed urban core area with many minority residents who are despondent and unemployed.

The UTCC will work with the University of Cincinnati, College of Design, Art, Architecture and Planning (DAAP), College of Nursing and Health, College of Education, and other local colleges with expertise in assisting the community. Corporate support in the form of technology donations, such as laptop computers, printers, scanners, and digital cameras, also will be solicited.

Technology Center Service Components include:

1. Access to technology and technical training
2. Access to GED training for parents and older students
3. Location of a police substation at the Center
4. Alternative learning center
5. Parent support center
6. Juvenile intervention

How can educators help eradicate racial crisis and conflict throughout the district?

The responsibility for this task begins with urban boards of education and district administrators, and some recent reform efforts in Cincinnati Public Schools have started the process in a positive direction. Such actions as closing and redesigning ineffective school buildings, striving for smaller class sizes in grades K-3, downsizing high schools, creating smaller schools within schools, and collaborating with the business community in new ways - such as the creation of the Robert A. Taft Information Technology High School in partnership with Cincinnati Bell - can provide a new context for the students within the system. Entirely new types of specialized high schools can also be created - such as Entrepreneurship High School - a place to prepare students for careers in small business enterprises. On the teaching side, reform efforts are focusing on a "pay-for performance" system.

Reforms must be given time to show results - stakeholders need to be patient. At the same time, they need to be persistent in their demands for reforms that will help students succeed. Ohio's African-American students scored 28.3 percentage points lower on state tests last school year than did white students, while Hispanic students scored 19.9 percentage points lower. Latino and African-American eighth-graders typically score more than three grades behind white classmates in math and science and more than two years behind in reading, according to a report by the Education Trust, a Washington-based advocacy organization for minority and low-income students. Kati Haycock, director of the Education Trust said that the gap is established by the time students enter kindergarten and widens as students progress through school. "The truth is we take these kids who have less to begin with and we give them less in school" (Mrozowski & Kranz, 2002). When Hispanic and African-American students drop out of school, or finish without the basic skills, their educational failure eventually becomes a major socioeconomic problem.

The importance of pre-school education in 'the village'

The years from birth to age five are critical for pre-school education. Parents are the child's first teachers, but extended family and the immediate community play major roles also. Day care staffs are prime early educators for many children. Some of these "teachers" have intuitive gifts for nurturing and contributing to the cognitive development of the young child. Others are trained to challenge curious, creative, resourceful and imaginative young minds. However, far too many young children, and far, far too many African-American children, have not had this advantage when they enter kindergarten. By not being ready to learn, these young children enter school already far behind. The difference can be insurmountable.

Early literacy at home

It is not difficult to develop early literacy in young children, but it must be deliberate and it must happen for all children. Fortunately, it involves doing many things that come naturally to parents and caregivers. "Pat-a-cake," "Humpty Dumpty," "Mother Goose" and the "ABC Song" are critical learning tools for children between birth and age five. Rhyming and knowing the names of letters are just two early literacy skills that are absolutely necessary for children to enter kindergarten ready to learn to read. All discussion of early literacy must emphasize the importance of surrounding children with print, of reading to children every day, and of having children follow along with the reader.

Reading instruction at school

It is clear that early reading instruction is not being handled successfully in America's urban schools. For students to succeed in other academic areas, reform must center on the approach to reading from kindergarten through third grade. "Four in ten of our fourth-graders lack basic reading skills. Tens of millions of adults are weak readers. Millions of children are needlessly classified as disabled when, in fact, their main problem is that nobody taught them to read when they were five and six years old. Many children who could have been taught to read...are assigned to special education classes, where they languish unchallenged for the remainder their school days. Rooting out failed methods of reading instruction from primary classrooms will not be easy. The roots run deep" (Moats, 2000).

There are specific proven strategies that are effective in a program of reading instruction. These must be followed to make certain all children learn to read and become readers. A reader is not someone who *can* read, but someone who *does* read; and, in a remark often attributed to Mark Twain, "The man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who can't read them." Classrooms in our country serve children of diverse ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds. All these students need sufficient understanding of the language they will speak, read, and write for effective communication beyond their own social group, that is, of Standard English.

Colleges of education must change how they train teachers if they are to step up to their role in lessening the racial learning gap. They have a responsibility to prepare teachers to be effective instructors of reading, and to emphasize to teachers of all subjects - including math, science, social studies, and music - that they will be more effective if they are skilled as reading teachers. Teachers of kindergarten through third grade especially need intensive and extensive preparation in how to create committed readers right from the start.

Recommendations

If neighborhoods, cities and our nation truly desire to address the causes of racial crises and conflicts, the reality of education as the solution must be recognized. Educators who teach young children to read must use proven strategies - giving them the skills to decode, to read with comprehension and fluency, and to love to read. These are the skills upon which the basics of their education will rest. I strongly recommend the Reading Recovery Program, which was successfully used as a supporting unit to the Project Succeed Academy kindergarten through eighth grade curriculum. Reading Recovery is a program designed to provide early intervention for students who are experiencing problems with literacy (Clay, 1990). At PSA, Reading Recovery specialists provided diagnostic assistance, innovative reading intervention and instructional strategies in the classroom, resources for storytelling and one-on-one attention for students. With this support, the classroom teachers utilized Reading Recovery methods and techniques to provide well balanced academic intervention across the curriculum.

All adults in neighborhoods, cities and the nation need to realize and accept their roles as "teachers of children." These adults include parents, grandparents and extended family, school personnel, university professors, museum staff, clergy and congregations, police, members of the business community, and members of health services and government agencies. In other words, all citizens of 'the village' needed to raise *and* educate each child. At the same time, going beyond basic education skills, parents, guardians, school personnel, clergy and others also have a critical responsibility to give children a sense of

responsibility, morality, honor, respect and values; a strong work ethic; the sense that all jobs are necessary in our society and that all work is honorable; the understanding that the language of their culture is to be respected, but that educational and economic success requires that Standard English be learned and used in certain situations and positions; that youth need to present a more positive, less threatening image; and that every member of the community is responsible for keeping the community clean and every corner drug free. Equally important, however, are teachers who do not understand the culture of poverty and the fear and hopelessness of these children. These teachers must address their own low expectations, receive training in effective classroom management and discipline strategies, and believe that these students can learn.

Dedicated volunteers give hours in schools reading to and tutoring children. Many others mentor students. All of these volunteer efforts are invaluable, and make a difference in the lives of thousands of students nationwide. Their efforts, however, cannot take the place of effective teachers in the classrooms. A large percentage of property taxes pay for public schools - and taxpayers include those who pay rent to landlords. What a difference it would make in the lives of students if all taxpayers in the urban school district found a way to hold the system accountable for successfully teaching children in K-3 - *all* children, whether rich, poor, black, white, Hispanic, or Asian - to read in the course of the school year.

I strongly recommend that neighborhood schools assume more responsibility for facilitating and coordinating the educational efforts of all adults, and that they provide more opportunities for parents and community members to learn from teachers and for teachers to learn from parents and community members. At Project Succeed Academy, encouraging parents' and other family members' participation in the education of their children was a primary focus at all grade levels. Daily Progress reports from teachers to parents were signed by parents and returned to school the next morning to be reviewed. Parents were scheduled for bi-weekly conferences, and the academic progress of students was shared with the parents by teachers at parent night meetings. Furthermore, teachers, in a team approach, provided classes to teach parents how to help their children at home. Activities focused on make it/take it projects parents could use with their children that evening. Parents, in turn, were encouraged to become active in all aspects of the schools' operation. The PSA Parent Association published a Parent Newsletter and distributed it monthly, describing parent activities and recruiting parents for upcoming activities. Parents were honored along with students at noon hour assemblies for their contributions to the school.

Project Succeed Academy facilitated community participation in the school in a variety of ways: an Advisory Council was formed by prominent physicians, attorneys, and businesspersons recruited to provide oversight leadership and to raise money for the school; University of Cincinnati professors provided in-service to PSA teachers and UC student nurses staffed the school's health and wellness program; an account executive from the city's largest public relations firm led the school's communication effort; lawyers, accountants, and other professionals offered pro bono hours to help with a range of school, school board, and city council issues related to opening a new year-round school; many businesses and individuals donated resources and thousands of dollars worth of in-kind contributions; and government, religious, sports, and business leaders served as tutors, mentors, and motivational speakers, contributing to the success of the school's after-school and Saturday enrichment programs and noon-hour and evening programs.

Communicating the importance of education is also the responsibility of print and television media, government agencies, places of worship, and groups who work for social justice - indeed all citizens and groups who have a voice in the community. Imagine the effect if the many influential and powerful African-Americans in neighborhoods, cities, and the nation chose to become the vocal for education. Imagine that there was a commitment from this group to be advocates for thousands and thousands of urban school children (West, 2001). Imagine that an influential and powerful vocal minority of African-American leaders led the charge for change in the way children in grades K-3 are taught to read? Without influential, powerful and vocal advocates, these children will remain in failing urban public schools for many reasons including that their parents have failed in the public school system, are intimidated by it, and do not understand it. Parents caught in the web of low-paying jobs or unemployment, feelings of hopelessness, drug addiction or incarceration, cannot be advocates for their children, and may even abandon them, literally or psychologically.

Signs of positive change

As I have shown, the underlying causes of the riots in both the 1960s and in 2001 were lack of representation by African Americans in government/leadership roles; disproportionate unemployment between blacks and whites; disproportionate poverty among African Americans; poor living conditions and lack of home ownership by blacks; and lack of quality education for African American children. But signs of positive change have been apparent throughout this period, and especially in the past 5 years.

As of 2005, the population of Cincinnati was 53% white and 43% black. In the election of November 2005, the city's first directly elected mayor was an African-American. Two African Americans were elected to city council. African-Americans hold the positions of captain of the fire department, assistant police chief (CPD report, 2005), health commissioner (Korte, 2005), and county coroner.

Some of the many successful African-Americans represented in the business community are a bank senior vice president, owners of a management-consulting firm, and owner of a wrecking company. The building of The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center was the project of a Cincinnati African American-owned construction firm (Goodman, 2005). African-Americans serve on the boards of Cincinnati hospitals, and as director of the Cincinnati Fine Arts Fund. An African-American is a member of the Cincinnati Opera board (Gelfand, 2005).

The areas of poverty and housing are still a challenge. Across the nation, 45% of our citizens cannot afford to rent a two-bedroom apartment, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, a Washington nonprofit advocacy group. Rental-housing costs have increased faster than wages, making it increasingly difficult for low-income families to afford even modest apartments. The group calculated that a worker paid the national minimum wage of $5.15 per hour would have to work 98 hours per week in Cincinnati to afford a two-bedroom apartment. The coalition says families should spend no more than 30% of their income on housing and utilities, a standard recognized by many experts. Under that standard, the coalition said it could not find a single county in the United States where a full-time worker making minimum wage could afford even a one-bedroom apartment (Coolidge, 2005). Cincinnati's overall rate of home ownership is even lower than the national average (“Business People,” 2005). In 2005, blacks owned 28% of the city’s homes, and whites owned 73%.

In the area of education, substantial progress is being made in providing African American children with a quality education. In the 2005-2006 school year, 23% of the students in the Cincinnati Public Schools were white, and 77% were minority, predominantly African-American (Amos, 2005). Three of seven members of the Cincinnati Public School Board are African-American. An African-American is superintendent of Cincinnati Public Schools. African-Americans hold 32% of central office administrative positions, and hold 50% of field administrative positions. Thirty-one percent of teachers in CPS elementary schools are now African-American. Five CPS elementary schools are rated "Effective" by the State of Ohio. In those “Effective” schools, 35% of the students are African-American. Six CPS secondary schools are rated by the State of Ohio as "Excellent" or "Effective”. African Americans in those "Excellent" or "Effective” schools make up 57% of the student body (Ohio Department of Education, 2005). Though gaps are still apparent in the achievement of black and white students in Cincinnati, all of these figures indicate that substantial improvements have been made since the 1960s.

Perhaps most impressively, the school district’s flagship college preparatory school, Walnut Hills High School, “has raised the academic level of black male students another level. The school has received the Schott Foundation of Massachusetts Award for Excellence in the Education of African-American Male Students. This spring, a black student will receive a $4,000 scholarship for the college of his choice. There are 99 blacks in the senior class at Walnut Hills and 44 are males. Nine black students in the senior class have been acknowledged by the National Merit and Achievement Scholarship programs as being in the top five percent of the nation's scholars” (Howard, 2005).

In November 2005, when Desmond Tutu, archbishop emeritus of Cape Town, South Africa, was in Cincinnati, he said, "It is an auspicious time to come to Cincinnati. Auspicious because of your African American mayor. Your city had a pedigree of racial tension. What we are seeing is the good fruit of initiative.” He continued, “We ought not to be scared of diversity. Being different is the reason we need each other. God created us for interdependence" (Goodman, 2005).

Conclusion

Up to sixty percent of students in large urban districts across the nation fail state mandated proficiency testing (Casserly, 2006). African-American students routinely score lower than white students - creating a "race gap." Many of these students eventually drop out, do not graduate from high school, and do not go on to college. This pattern of failure in urban public schools leads these students to a strong probability of working at menial jobs and gradually sinking into a state of frustration, hopelessness and anger. This syndrome often leads to a future influenced by drugs, crime, unplanned pregnancy, and poverty - a pattern that can persist from one generation to the next and contribute powerfully to racial crises and conflicts.

Education must be seen as the way to break the cycle of racial crises and conflict. The need is urgent. Dr. O'dell Owens, the African American Coroner of Hamilton County, Ohio, has said that most murders in Cincinnati are black-on-black, drug related crimes. The coroner makes his point to young people by saying, “If you’re going to buy drugs, hang around people who use drugs, sell drugs, you’ve got a good chance you’re going to come see me” (Girone, 2006). But Dr. Owens has also told teenagers at a Stop the Violence Youth Summit, "I think just because you're poor, it doesn't mean that you're destined to be a criminal or that your life is over. The bridge from here to where you're going is education” (Bolden, 2006), and he urges middle school students to

> Finish high school, then go to college and get a career. Not a J-O-B. A career. Put on a cap and gown - or wear the body bag. Eighty percent of homicides did not graduate from high school. People ask me "Was medical school hard?" No. Being poor was hard. Being on welfare was hard. Being teased was hard. I want to make sure each of

you has a dream. Don't let your past determine your future (Bronson, 2005).

The entire 'village' of Cincinnati - parents, families, communities, school systems, law enforcement, churches, businesses - must take responsibility for ensuring that all children come to kindergarten ready to learn, that they succeed throughout elementary school, and go on to high schools that will prepare them to enter the job market, or to attend college. When the above happens - and not until the above does happen - will all citizens of the 'village' have the opportunity to succeed socially and economically? In this environment, the former inequities that are the cause of racial crises and conflict will no longer cause pain to so many. The poor and uneducated are subtly or openly despised in our society, while their continued poverty is ensured through actions or lack of actions. Making the educational system fair and equal for all can change lives by giving hope and opportunity.

I strongly believe that the educational successes of Project Succeed Academy, an alternative school for at risk students in Cincinnati, can be translated into success for all urban schools. By focusing its academic efforts on literacy, mathematics, and science, and especially through its use of the Reading Recovery program, Project Succeed intervened early in the schooling of at-risk students to give them the basic skills they needed to succeed in high school and in their adult lives. But just as importantly, by focusing on its role as facilitator and coordinator of the education efforts of families and of the community as a whole, and opening its doors to interested and concerned parents and community members and providing them with opportunities to make a difference in the lives of young people, Project Succeed Academy gave real meaning to the phrase it takes a village to raise a child. Equally important, given the situation Project Succeed confronted, with successful adults leaving the inner-city for the suburbs and with those left behind mired in poverty and hopelessness, we can also say that it took a child to raise a village. Just as the school gave children at risk for educational failure a chance to succeed, it also gave parents and community members an opportunity to do something positive in their own lives and to make a difference in the life of the community as a whole.

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Lionel H. Brown, Judith Larsen, Ruth S. Britt, Yao Yao, Jean P. Brown, & Ryan Beck

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