

With All Deliberate Speed: Reimagining Integration from a Racial Equity Frame

For many, 2016 marked a fundamental shift in the world. The outrage following the election of Donald Trump revealed our deep social slumber followed by our collective awakening to a reality that countless of vulnerable woke Americans had already known: The country is deeply divided, splintered along the fault lines of faith, ability, race, socioeconomic experiences, linguistic heritages, geographies, and other expressions of distance and difference that make the U.S. beautifully complicated and petulantly inequitable.

Prior to 2016 and since 1954, the most optimistic of us held onto the belief that the tides of history were pulling the nation, if not the world, forward, breaking down the invisible boundaries that held in place systems of confinement—the concentration of vulnerable people divided from the exclusive freedoms enjoyed by the privileged. This system, however—a system of segregation—was so deeply baked into the American reality that the years following 1954 would see segregation reimagined and reinforced. With it, the uneven distribution of education would continue, and those of us charged with seeking equity would find ourselves split between the goals of integration, which implied a more united populace, and the necessity for survival, which focused less on unitary aspirations than on resources.

The mistake of this first wave of integration and the ensuing fragmentation of equity work(ers) was seeing unity as only a march of flesh, divorced from the directionalities that define and represent enactments of power, privilege, and possibility. These enactments and the compass points to which they tug are where the real struggle for equity exists. Thus, integration has never been about sending Black and Brown children to school with white students; it has always been about a struggle against white supremacy, which is a struggle over power—the power to move and remain still, to live on ones' own terms, to choose, to gain access to the opportunities afforded the most privileged Americans while also seeing oneself represented in the creed of the country and the school curricula. From this perspective, integration is much about freedom—about bringing people together, allowing values, experiences, hopes, dreams, and so forth to transact liberally. But as Sonya Horsford (in this issue) so eloquently reminds us, “integration never happened.”

This issue of *Voices in Urban Education (VUE)*—the first issue published by the Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools at New York University—explores the question of integration from a number of perspectives. Each perspective seeks to reframe the integration debate, interrupting, for example, the Black/white binary—a schism that integration so often gets trapped into, reinforcing the exclusion of other races, such as Asians, from conversation on racial equity in ways that fracture possible coalitions for social justice (see Tanikawa, in this issue). Other perspectives in this issue of *VUE* seek to reclaim the concept of integration but from a racial equity basis (see Gonzales, in this issue), reimagining integration

as both having and needing all the ingredients necessary to advance social justice in education and beyond it. This issue of *VUE* also offers other reframings that challenge the construct of integration entirely (see Horsford, in this issue), raising questions such as “whose integration”?

These disruptions, reframings, and questions are crucial to advancing the cause of equity in education. By answering the question “whose integration,” for example, readers are invited to reflect upon, attend to, and contend with the ways that systems of ideology—white supremacy and racism—fabric our understanding of social change and blanket our thoughts about social progress. Such understandings lead us to fresh analyses of topics such as choice and displacement (see Kirkland and Cordova-Cobo, in this issue). They bring us face to face with the individuals most harmed by the social violence of segregation (see conversations with Jamal and Hannah-Jones, in this issue). If anything, they give us an intimate peek into a social system designed to subjugate some people while protecting the privilege of others, reminding us of why the question of integration is so important in the first place.

VUE is an ideal venue for hosting this reflection, with a special focus on the integration/anti-segregation work currently happening in New York City (NYC). NYC, what some see as “the mecca of segregation,” is the largest and one of the most diverse cities in the U.S. It is also one of the most segregated cities in the U.S. Like the city, NYC schools are highly segregated, most likely as a matter of policy rather than circumstance. In response to its segregation problem, NYC Department of Education (NYCDOE) released a plan in 2017 to increase the “diversity” of its schools. One significant measure of the plan called for a school diversity advisory council, more formally known as The School Diversity Advisory Group (SDAG). SDAG was composed of a broad coalition of advocates, educators, parents, students, and other community representatives interested in advancing equity in NYC schools by supporting NYCDOE in its efforts to create a more effective plan to integrate NYC schools. In spring of 2019, SDAG offered NYC’s mayor 67 recommendations for advancing equity and increasing integration throughout NYC. The mayor accepted 62 of the committee’s 67 recommendations.

Thus, it is not a stretch to locate NYC as ground zero in the current struggle to integrate schools. Therefore, contributors to this issue of *VUE* have been selected purposefully, as each shares some connection to NYC and unique insights into the question of integration. This issue, however, is not about NYC. It is about understanding the movement for school integration more presently through a chorus of contemporary voices—from parents and student activists to community organizers and university scholars. This multi-perspectival view into the questions of integration is an attempt to reframe a concept that has been itself recast, redesigned, and stubbornly (re)inscribed against the tapestry of a country. In this issue of *VUE*, we bring together commentary and conversation, concluding with data and analysis around the complexities of transitory bodies—some fugitive and others invasive.

In all, this issue of *VUE* responds to a kind of new *new* Jim Crow, which is really a continuation of old patterns of racial hierarchy and social subordination in the U.S. The response we feature here has been curated in a way that deals with the current moment, responding to this iteration of segregation by calling for a broader collective of voices, a reimagining of terms, and a texturing of players. It also calls for a willingness to let go of the past, suspending what we think we know about integration while holding on to futurities that allow integration to exist as something greater than mythology. As you hear each voice, hear also the fierce urgency beneath the words—the urgent cries of the voiceless demanding change to the status quo ... *with all deliberate speed*.