Introduction

Jericho

> It's one of the most racist places I've ever, ever encountered . . . I was born in the South and traveled to the South with my parents every year, for some kind of occasion, and even in those days—you know, the late 50's were still very much a Jim Crow era—"Colored" washbasins and drinking fountains—I never experienced what I've experienced since I've been here. In a town that's so educated, so supposedly cultured, so liberal, it has just been an amazing experience.
>
> —Dr. Mae Collins,
> Jericho Public Schools Chief Academic Officer,
> on her few years in Jericho

Wasn't That a Mighty Day

It was a cloudy, dull Monday morning in fall 2002, and I was driving south on the freeway. Off to my right, white billows of pollution pulsed from tall grey smokestacks and merged with the white exhaust of cars into the overcast sky. A plane bore down overhead, preparing to land nearby. I was on my way to my first full day at what was reputed by the local newspapers, people at the central office, and White people generally as the "worst" of Jericho Public Schools' (JPS) high schools: Martin Luther King, Jr. High School. It was described, alternately, as "troubled," "struggling," "chaotic," "dangerous," "violent," "poor," "bad," "failing," and "Black." MLKHS was situated in the middle of the city's predominantly Black neighborhood and abutting its Sa'moan and Southeast Asian neighborhoods. As I turned onto Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, it was calm and quiet, cars moving at a reasonable speed, occasional people entering the few businesses around. Mothers and young children, older women and men waited at bus stops. Some of the buildings showed wear, others were boarded up, but still others were well kept and

active. I crossed the intersection directly behind the MLKHS campus and noted the four surveillance cameras; it was one of the few surveyed intersections in the city of Jericho, an ever-present reminder to the community that policing was an inevitable part of their lives. Entering the student parking lot at the back of the school were the typical range of teenage cars—from shiny SUVs to clanging beaters—some energetically booming bass, others quietly filing in. It was no different from high school parking lots I would drive into later in the year in other parts of the city—with the significant exceptions that it was peopled entirely with Black and Brown children and it was heavily patrolled. Two police cars waited along opposite sides of the street next to the lot. Two other officers rode on horseback around two sides of the building and the lot itself. And, one officer stood across the street at a bus stop, occasionally stopping students crossing the street at the surveyed intersection.

Once inside the school, I pulled out my map and began walking the hallways looking for the room of the first class I planned to observe. It was a clean, nondescript building—neither new nor old. As with many schools, some adults greeted students in the hallways, while others remained well inside their classrooms. When I found the room I was looking for, I introduced myself to the White male teacher, then sat down in a chair offered to me by a student in the back of the room. This was a senior-level, core subject-area course.

Martin Luther King, Jr. High School was the symbol of the racialized achievement gap in the district. It maintained the lowest test scores, grades, and standards, among other measures used across the district. Schools like MLKHS exist in every mid- to large-size urban district in the United States. The proverbial racialized achievement gap is unique neither historically nor regionally. It is a pervasive, consistent pattern and it is borne out in the quantitative data of districts and research of scholars nationwide (Berlak 2001; Farkas 2003; Orr 2003). This gap is the annual measure and symptom of what Ladson-Billings (2006) defines as the "education debt." This longstanding debt has historical, moral, economic, and sociopolitical components, and what we call the achievement gap is a tangible manifestation of those legacies and practices. The achievement gap is *what* is happening in our public educational system. Black and Brown students are being failed.

This book is an exploration of *how* the racialized achievement gap is produced and reproduced in JPS. After a year-long, multisite ethnographic investigation—including interviews with students, teachers, principals, union representatives, school board members, central office personnel, and the superintendent—it became undeniably evident that the reason Black and Brown students are failing in Jericho Public Schools and in school districts around the nation is both singular and complex: racism. I say this not to

state the obvious, but to distinguish this project from those that decenter or differently understand racism.

Racism is produced by and produces structural racial domination. Racism is not the errant psychological workings of individual members of society (Bell 1992; Bernal 2002; Crenshaw 1995; Guinier 2004; Harris 1993; Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995; Lynn, Yosso, Solórzano, and Parker 2002; Omi and Winant 1994; Tate 1997). Racism, as Guinier (2004) writes, is "the maintenance of, and acquiescence in, racialized hierarchies governing resource distribution" (98). She argues pointedly that racism "has not functioned simply through evil or irrational prejudice; it has been an artifact of geographic, political, and economic interests" (98). In accordance with this definition, which I will elaborate throughout this book, this Critical Race ethnography is an investigation of our nation's pernicious and powerful system of racism in schooling. Without knowing how a system is failing its children, we cannot begin to challenge that system and to promote change. The people in this study are not isolated, individual players in unique scenarios of schooling and failure. They are in fact part of the larger system of racism to which they variously contribute and against which they variously struggle.

So, sitting in the back of that classroom at MLKHS, I asked myself "how?" But my thoughts were soon interrupted by the daily work of classrooms. As a former high school teacher, I had offered to help the teacher out during any part of the class. On this particular day, as on many others I would observe throughout the year, this White male teacher was working diligently to promote an antibias curriculum. The students had been discussing news media presentation of information and had been given topics to choose from—police racial profiling, war, environmental degradation, and so on. They were then asked to read and produce written summaries of brief newspaper articles provided by their teacher. They were asked to compare these to other information they had read on those same topics from alternative news sources, also provided by their teacher. During the initial discussion portion of the class I had identified a young, Black man named Joshua as someone with whom to work. I had noticed Joshua was very well-spoken, commanding vocabulary in classroom discussion that exceeded that of many of the undergraduates I had taught. So, I wanted to meet him and find out what about schooling had worked for him. How had he excelled in an environment where many who shared his race, gender, and class identity were being failed by the system?

The answer is the crux of the story of this book.

Smart, well-spoken Joshua—tall, dark Joshua—could not read. He was seventeen years old, and when I sat down with him to work on the article summary, he asked me to read it for him. When I said sincerely, "Why don't you read it," he looked at the paper, looked at me, took a shot at first

one word, then another. And nothing worked. He could not read. In the self-styled progressive city of Jericho, in the twenty-first century, during his senior year of high school, Joshua had to pass six classes without being able to read two consecutive words.

In that moment of injustice, Joshua leaned his head against his long-fingered hand. His brow pressed into his palm, and he listened as I quietly read the article. Then he jotted seemingly illegible notes to himself. The class reconvened, and Joshua went on to present a sharp critique of news media distortions of racial profiling. When the bell rang, he flew into the hallway with his friends, smiling and laughing. In the instant quiet of the room I said to the teacher, "Did you know Joshua can't read?" "Oh," he said, "I'm not surprised."

Joshua's teachers, schools, and district had completely failed him. Joshua was abandoned by the system. That his teacher was unsurprised and in fact did not even know about and did not feel responsibility for Joshua's situation was illustrative of the larger institutional practices and relationships that worked to undereducate Joshua and many other Black and Brown children in Jericho.

The teacher went on with his work.

No walls came tumbling down.

Martin Luther King, Jr. High School and Jericho Public Schools

The primary school-based site of my multisite ethnographic research during the 2002–2003 school year was Martin Luther King, Jr. High School, situated in Jericho's Southend. There I conducted formal and informal interviews with students, teachers, staff, and administration. Two separate people at the district central office encouraged me to spend time at MLKHS. My contact person in the department of research and assessment who approved my study proposal asked me specifically to look qualitatively at the racialized achievement gap in Jericho and directed me to MLKHS. My other contact directed me to Angie Davis, a counselor at MLKHS, who arranged a meeting between Principal Velma Smith and me. Principal Smith invited me to work at her school and offered me access to any and all classrooms, meetings, and materials.

Jericho Public Schools operated under a school choice policy, which I will explore in detail later. MLKHS was one of ten comprehensive and six alternative high schools from which students could choose. Consequently, the chosen students at MLKHS were: 60 percent African American; 25 percent Asian American (primarily Sa'moan, but including a very small number of other Pacific Islander and Southeast Asian groups); and 7 percent Latino. The remainder was Native American, African "refugee" or immigrant, and

White. MLKHS was home to around seven hundred students, with an annual transfer in/out rate of five hundred, and the highest truancy rate of any Jericho school. Although approximately 90 percent of students attending seven of the district's comprehensive high schools were at their first choice of school, fewer than 40 percent of MLKHS's students were at their first choice. Of that student body numbering around seven hundred, I saw only five students who I perceived to be White during my entire year at the school. White students constituted 40 percent of the district's total number of students. MLKHS's students had the highest average enrollment in the free and reduced lunch program in the district, a strong indicator of the family and community material poverty experienced by the students. The school was statistically positioned at the bottom of the academic rankings of the city's ten comprehensive high schools, including lowest cumulative GPA, test scores, etc. As a JPS central office administrator said to me, "This school has historically been the lowest achieving." On what I will call Standardized Test 2, a tenth-grade, state-mandated test that JPS planned to use to determine graduation by 2008, just below 15 percent of all MLKHS students passed in 2002. That same year, only 8 percent of African American students districtwide passed this high-stakes test. Of the thirty-three students who took the SAT at MLKHS in 2002, their verbal average was 387; math: 427. The resulting combined average was 814. In fall of that year, the combined average SAT score for the entering class at the local public university—which sat just a few miles from MLKHS—was 1180, with an average GPA of 3.67 (a number determined by a formula that *reduces* GPAs for underperforming high schools such as MLKHS). Of almost 5,000 first year students at the university that fall, 447 (or approximately 9 percent) were described by the university as "underrepresented": African American, Latina/o, Native American, and Pacific Islander, combined.

The perception, both within and without, was that MLKHS was a "Black" school. While in fact MLKHS was very racially diverse, the defining function of the Black–White binary (Stefancic 1998; Valdes et al. 2002; Wing 2003; Yosso 2005)—and the cultural racism toward Blackness (Ferguson 2000; Haney López 2007) in Jericho—transformed schools where the population of African American students reached an arbitrary critical mass, and the student performance on standardized measures reached a crushing low, into "Black" schools. Inside the school many of the teachers and staff regularly referred to the school as "Black." A Latina guidance counselor, who had constant access to school demographics, said in a staff meeting, "We need a school that's diversified. It's all Black—all one culture now."

Conversely, the teaching staff was predominantly White. In fact, at this "Black" school, 62 percent of the certified staff was White. More significantly, all but one of the certified staff teaching in the core subject areas—math,

science, language arts, and social studies—was visibly White. Two others were identified as mixed. There were no African American or Latina/o core subject-area teachers. There were no Sa'moan teachers at MLKHS, although there was one Sa'moan staff member who worked as a school–community liaison and student support person.

Achievement, practices, and policies at Martin Luther King, Jr. High School were shaped by and contrasted with the larger district. Jericho Public Schools maintained a relatively stable cohort of White middle-class students. For the purposes of describing their racial population and its relation to individual school demographics, the district broke down students into the two categories "white" and "non-white." White students constituted about 40 percent of the district population, and non-White students about 60 percent. However, as evidenced by the case of MLKHS, those numbers did not remain consistent across schools. Northend high schools were peopled more heavily by middle-class White and high-performing (and often middle-class) Asian American students, while Southend high schools were attended largely by poor and working-class children of Color.

The achievement gap in Jericho during the 2002–2003 school year appeared quantitatively across numerous measures such as standards, testing, enrollment in honors and Advanced Placement, GPA, and discipline. The mean high school GPA for Whites was 3.04, for African Americans 2.44, for Sa'moans 2.39. For non-Islander Asian Americans, it ranged widely with Chinese Americans constituting the largest subgroup and earning the highest mean of 3.4. However, the pan-ethnic lumping of all "Asian" students in the publicly aggregated data served to reinforce the Black–White achievement binary, by creating the appearance that White students maintained the highest achievement, and by making particularly invisible Sa'moan students whose deflated scores matched their African-American counterparts. This promoted an understanding in Jericho of the achievement gap as an issue of Black student failure. Although more than 70 percent of White students were passing the single, high-stakes test soon to be tied to graduation, 92 percent of African American children and 88 percent of Sa'moan children were failing it. On a ninth-grade standardized test used as a student competency measure of the district's high-stakes standards, 51 percent of Black, 66.7 percent of Sa'moan, and only 9.8 percent of White children were below standard. The expulsion rate for Black and Sa'moan students was triple that for Whites, with Sa'moans experiencing the highest rate in the district. The official dropout rate for African Americans hovered over 40 percent for a number of years. Strikingly, dropout rates for Sa'moan youth were unavailable. Additionally, there were prodigious racialized differences in enrollment or availability of honors, graduation rates, truancy, SAT scores, and disciplinary action. Notably, the certified staff in Jericho were: 10 percent African Ameri-

can; 78 percent White; 9 percent Asian American (a number that included no Sa'moans or Pacific Islanders); 2 percent Chicano/Latino; and 1 percent Native American. And, as with the data on teachers inside MLKHS, this was a set of information that did not carry with it the detailed statistical markers of failure and success attached to the data on children.

Policy Context

Partly, this imbalance is what has been normalized across the nation, through ideological mechanisms, such as meritocracy, and policy enforcements, including No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reporting mandates. The telescope is focused, sometimes ruthlessly, on children. In JPS, the focus of this telescope was fixed by multiple districtwide policies, among them school choice and decentralization. Although I am focusing on the local particularities of policy and power in JPS, the policies I examine are reflective of power dynamics endemic to NCLB (Gonzales and Rodriguez 2007; McDermott and Jensen 2005; McDonnell 2005). More precisely, the local policies and NCLB are ideologically mimetically related. So, although the inception of many of these policies predated what has been called the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)—NCLB—they contained the fundamental conceptualizations and implementations of power and organization. As a high school English teacher in the 1990s, I remember being surprised when my ninth-grade students took a state-mandated standardized test in the early fall, and their scores—along with those of their counterparts at high schools across the city—were posted in city paper under content-area teachers' names. It was clear to many of us then that those scores were not meant to be used by me and my colleagues to reflect on our curriculum and pedagogy for the year and identify the areas in which students might need support. Instead, the testing and public disclosure were meant in some ways to police our practice and our relationship to our students, to identify stark contrasts in academic "performance" among schools and teachers, and to solidify dominant beliefs about the relationships between and among race, class, achievement, and ability (Rodriguez 2007). This type of practice became increasingly federalized and linked punitively to funding among other sources of support through NCLB. But the dominant belief systems that made NCLB possible were already in place and in many cases had become seemingly intractably commonsense.

So, this analysis of schooling in Jericho is local and specific, but it is inherently a critique of the mutually reinforcing local and national ideologies that sanction and enforce NCLB and other national policy movements. One of those policy movements, which was solidly in place in Jericho Public Schools, was school choice. Choice policies publicly position schools as

competing, autonomous entities, but implicitly position children and their families as wholly responsible for the quality of schooling they supposedly *choose*. Choice, as a national policy movement, was inspired by a market model of schooling meant to reduce, if not eradicate, what proponents felt was unnecessary bureaucracy in schooling, and to promote competition that would purportedly contribute to the improvement of schools. The logic was that as schools vied for students, they would compete to offer better quality educational services. Some of the most well-known proponents of choice policies suggest that by dismantling what they call "democratic governance" districts could embrace a marketization of schools. Tellingly, these proponents say the choice model "is not built to enable the imposition of higher-order values on the schools, nor is it driven by a democratic struggle to exercise public authority" (Chubb and Moe 1990, 189).

The policy of choice in Jericho accomplished just that. Although there have existed four typical versions of school choice programs in the United States—those organized primarily around education, economics, policy, or governance (Levin 1999, 269)—most actual implementations incorporate characteristics of each. This policy was articulated to me and to the public by the JPS central administration as education driven—in that some schools offered unique academic programs—but also as governance driven. Choice in Jericho was a districtwide policy, which meant that all schools were purportedly open to all students. In other words, any high school-age student was supposedly able to attend any district high school, without the provision of transportation. Given the hourglass geography of the road system in Jericho, the organization of the public transportation system as a wagon wheel, the prohibitive cost of transportation, and the segregation of communities, Southend youth would have had to personally drive through the eye of the needle during rush hour in order to attend the superior Northend schools. All high schools were ostensibly open until enrollment reached capacity—a condition determined by each principal. Preference for attendance was awarded on the basis of sibling enrollment, neighborhood (or geographical proximity), and admission to special programs, among other factors, all of which contributed to the geographical racial segregation of schools. Consequently, high-performing Northend schools enrolled higher percentages of White and East Asian American children, whereas Southend schools were almost entirely of Color.

In Jericho, the adoption of a choice policy resulted not only in the racial segregation of students, but in the entrenchment of racially determined tracking and the creation of new schools and new programs within existing schools that served high-performing White children. This pattern bears out the warnings of scholars who have studied choice programs and raised concerns about the potential for this policy. Witte (2000) argues that choice "accelerate[s] the growing racial balkanization of our schools and country"

(203). Whitty et al. (1998) documented in choice schools an increased "catering" to White parents in tandem with a decrease in services to children of color and a commodification of education. Dr. Hamer—a Black, female member of JPS senior leadership in Jericho Public Schools—said to me that Jericho is "a district that caters to White privilege." Significantly, she added, there is "an unwillingness for us to walk the talk." This dynamic of choice and its relation to the differential outcomes of schooling for youth in Jericho echoes Williams' (1991) description of the function of choice across U.S. systems and institutions:

> In our legal and political system, words like "freedom" and "choice" are forms of currency. They function as the mediators by which we make all things equal, interchangeable. It is, therefore, not just what "freedom" means, but the relation it signals between each individual and the world (Williams 1991, 31).

The discursive framing of "choice" neutralizes the inequitable sorting system it describes. In signifying relation to Southend youth of Color, choice both masked the structural barriers to equitable schooling and explained the impact of these barriers instead as individualized decisions.

Decentralized governance is a key component of choice and was so in Jericho. Decentralization in JPS was defined by the central administration as a two-pronged policy. First, it was outwardly structured such that decision-making authority apparently resided within schools. Second, it located accountability for educational quality and tasks, such as closing the achievement gap, with each school. The notion of decentralization, and the superintendent and school board president's fervor in promoting it as equity-based, drove the choice policy and practice in JPS and informed the consequent breakdown of the choice program for children of Color. But choice and decentralization also drew on larger ideological frames of schooling as inherently meritocratic. As such, these policies created not just a policy context, but also an ideological context for schooling and achievement in Jericho. Behind the horrific data on "achievement" is the story of a district failing its children. How this happened, how this failure was produced and reproduced through the policies, practices, and relationships that organized Jericho Public Schools, is the story of this book.

Class, Socioeconomics, and Race

"It's a class issue now," said one teacher to me in response to questions about racial inequity in schooling. Throughout the process of this study, many

White people I encountered consistently asserted to me that race no longer held determinative sway and that class, in fact, was the overriding force in creating societal and academic disparities. Strikingly, class in this discourse was separated from race and used as a tool of colorblindness (Gotanda 1991; Guinier 2004; Haney López 2007). I repeatedly noted White participants either being inured to or denying the entrenchment of a racial hierarchy by articulating an exclusive class-consciousness (Bettie 2003). The arguments, both clear and implicit, were that class sees no color. Or, at best, that class overrides color. This argument frames the dominant national conversation about race. So, I include brief statistical data that begin to speak to the fallacy of extricating class from race. The following data provide a cursory and illustrative (not explanatory) glimpse of the racial nature of American economic hierarchy (Marable 2000). In the context of a confused national discourse, the data demonstrate the ongoing linkages between race and poverty. I deploy these data cognizant that the use of data to describe Black people has origins in the constellation of supremacist movements meant to degrade and even eradicate African Americans. My effort here (as above) is to use these data in the context of an analysis of White supremacy to highlight the magnitude of the material mechanisms and realities of racism. As I will elaborate shortly, White supremacy describes the White sociocultural, material domination that structures the United States. Racism is a mechanism of White supremacy; it operates as the means of participation in the larger structure of White supremacy. In this national context, the following data represent pressing material and structural conditions faced by our children.

The Whole Forty Acres: Poverty Nationwide

Before examining the localized specificities of race and poverty, it is important to contextualize them by foregrounding nationwide trends. Anyon (1997, 2005) so trenchantly illustrates for us that it is what she calls the "extreme" racial, political, and economic isolation of cities that not only contains but also informs schooling and any potential for reform. The following data explore Black poverty specifically, as it was in the context of the dominant framing of Black and White children bookending the achievement gap that the policies and practices of Jericho Public Schools were envisioned and implemented. It is also true that by numerous and exhaustive measures Black children are proportionately among our nation's poorest children.

In spring 2002, just prior to the fall I entered Jericho Public Schools, the U.S. Census reported that 30.2 percent of Black American children were living below the poverty level, whereas only 9.5 percent of White children suffered the same fate (US Census Bureau 2003). The number of Black children living in extreme poverty (below the fiftieth percentile of poverty,

or, in 2001, below a $7,064 annual income for a family of three) hit a record high since collection of data began twenty-three years earlier (Children's Defense Fund 2003). Whereas 4 percent of children of all races *combined* lived in extreme poverty in 2001, 8.4 percent of Black children alone did. And, as their ranks increased, government support plummeted, such that in 1990 62.7 percent of extremely poor Black children were boosted above half the poverty line by Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF); however, in 2001, only 12.9 percent were moved up into the upper half of poverty (Children's Defense Fund 2003). Furthermore, the poverty rate of children was higher than for any other group and increased in both rate and number between 2002 and 2003 (DeNavas-Walt et al. 2004). In 2002, the U.S. government's Office of Management and Budget defined the average poverty threshold (accounting for inflation per the Consumer Price Index) as the following annual household incomes: $18,392 for a family of four; $14,348 for a family of three; $11,756 for a family of two (Almanac of Policy Issues 2003). Translated: whereas more than 30 percent of Black children lived in households below the above-detailed definitions in 2002, numbers more lived just above that arbitrary threshold, still just struggling to get by. In fact, in 2001, "the average net worth of black families was only 16 percent of non-Hispanic white families' average net worth" (Crockett and Coy 2003).

Furthermore, by calculating eligibility for and use of free and reduced lunch—a standard measure of student material poverty used by school districts nationwide—the extent of Black child poverty becomes increasingly clear. In 2003, 75.8 percent of Black fourth-grade, urban students in the United States were eligible for free and reduced lunch, whereas only 24.4 percent of their White counterparts were eligible. Although the numbers shifted slightly to 71.7 percent and 29.8 percent, respectively, for rural areas, the remaining spread of 41.9 percent debunks the myth that rural poverty is a White problem and that it somehow balances out the more obvious racialization of poverty in urban centers (National Center for Education Statistics 2004a). Furthermore, Black children are more likely than White children to be "concentrated in high-poverty schools" and less likely to attend schools where there are low rates of children from low-income households (National Center for Education Statistics 2004b). Pertinent to the understanding of Jericho Public Schools, 61 percent of Black children enrolled in "central city" schools nationwide in 2003 were in the "highest-poverty schools," whereas only 12 percent of White students in the central cities were so enrolled (National Center for Education Statistics 2004b). Enrollment in high-poverty schools is an indicator of the material poverty level of the neighborhoods in which children live. In contemporary American society, this segregated, racialized poverty is sustained by "residential apartheid" that is evidenced in

part by the fact that Whites will move away from neighborhoods in which the percentage of their Black neighbors surpasses 8 percent (Hacker 1995). Segregated Blacks—unwillingly or not—reside in neighborhoods that have a low dollar value precisely because of their Blackness, which ensures a widespread removal from capital: the inability to procure business or house loans and the subsequent inability to revitalize communities, for example (Ford 1995; Meyer 2000). Widespread housing discrimination, which forces low-income Black Americans into highly segregated, high-poverty neighborhoods, results in the collapse of public and economic systems necessary for moving out of poverty (Turner 1997). Unemployment predictably soars, with no clear option for reversal. This is not to suggest that White neighbors are a desirable or viable solution to racialized residential poverty. Rather, this picture is a cursory description of the overlapping maps of racial economic power wielded by Whites.

Critical to interpreting all of these facts is that they are *trends*, which remain relatively consistent over time, with the exception that Blacks are hit harder than Whites during economic slumps and Whites benefit more during times of economic gain. As Guinier and Torres (2002) point out, "race in this society tracks wealth, wealth tracks education, and education tracks access to power" (48). The situation appears particularly bleak for Black children. In Jericho, that economically bleak status extended to Sa'moan youth, families, and communities, as well.

And yet, as evidenced by the presence of Black principals, central office administrators, and teachers in this book, there are, of course, Black Americans who are members of the middle class (Guinier 1991, 2004). It is to those few that conservatives and liberals point when wanting to argue that all is not so bad. Race, they say, still pointing, is no longer a "hurdle." The recent election of Barack Obama has solidified this post-race stance for many. However, it is the nature of capitalist systems that a small number of individual members of a structurally disadvantaged class will experience upward mobility. It is that very potential, limited though it is, for mobility that props up the reigning ideology of meritocracy—that the successful have earned their benefits from their own hard work and that the unsuccessful could do the same. The exceptions prove the rule. The dominant narrative can then point to all the social programs in place as evidence of the generosity of the successful toward those who, with effort, could rise up. Programs, however, are meant to assist those struggling, not to alter the structures that cause struggle. Homeless shelters, for example, provide a warm, safe bed in the winter (for those who are lucky enough to get in), but do not alter the sources of homelessness. However, in the bootstraps ideology, there is a denial of such structures and a belief that the individual homeless person could, with the helping hand of the well-off, get herself off the street, into a job,

and into a successful life. If she cannot, she must have a mental problem or a drug problem or lack the hallowed work ethic of mythical America. And even were an individual poor Black child—apparently so advantaged by all the programs available—to make it to the middle or upper class, as Connell (1995) illustrates with Black men, individual renown or wealth "has no trickle-down effect; it does not yield social authority to black men generally" (81). Successful Black individuals are "disregarded or lauded as an aberration" (Delgado 1995, 30). Race, in fact, mitigates any potentially beneficial force of class, and Black class achievement is always individualized. The convoluted logic then is that those Black Americans who do make it are exceptions to a cultural collective that is fundamentally flawed. Yet, those same economically successful Black Americans are used to suggest that race no longer matters. It is this schizophrenic, simultaneous, and polar use of race that tangles our national efforts at educational transformation and that contextualizes the stories of this book.

The notion of a Black middle class is used to excuse the deeply racist structures that ensure widespread, disproportionate Black poverty. In fact, the U.S. Census does not define the middle class in dollar terms (U.S. Census Bureau 2004), which means that the news media and many scholars have included in their analyses of the Black middle-class four-person families with an annual income of twenty thousand dollars. If that were not such a travesty, it would seem absurd. In fact, the Black middle class is small, struggling, and shrinking, and, regardless of its ups and downs, it cannot close the gap with the White middle class (Crockett and Coy 2003). Most significantly, however, this book demonstrates that the authority of middle-class Black individuals can be easily undermined. It is a fragile authority, contingent on the whims of White systems to bestow it or to dismantle it. For example, notwithstanding income, education, and position, the Black principal at MLKHS found herself subverted at every turn, unprotected by class against racism and White supremacy. Ultimately, no amount of money can purchase protection from racism. Individual affluence is not a shield from systemic racial oppression. And, far more often, racism is accompanied by and inextricable from the punishing power of economic oppression.

Racism is a constant, but its form adapts to sociocultural or socioeconomic pressures (Guinier 2004; Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995). To suggest that class is now primary simply because Black individuals have entered the class structure in new ways, and because the racially hegemonic structure of class has been reorganized but not dismantled, disregards the adaptable nature of structural racism and fails to explain the huge disparities in societal power outcomes for people of Color who participate in previously segregated class systems. The ideological primacy of class fails to acknowledge class as a component of race, as itself an everchanging structural facet of racism

(Guinier 2004). I do not suggest here that a scholarly emphasis on class is problematic. What I do argue is that scholars' (Lareau 2002; Wilson 1980) efforts to separate race from class, and in fact to suggest that the salience of one in social structure indicated the decline, instead of transformation, of the other is both partial and limiting. More dangerous, this scholarly discourse finds unrivalled traction in dominant ideology, reifying colorblindness and so entrenching and ultimately protecting structural racism.

Critical Race Theory: Answering the Call

Critical Race Theory (CRT) fundamentally reframes the sometimes-dichotomous scholarly discourse around structural power. Although it situates race at the center of its analysis, it does so in a manner that incorporates (rather than competes with) multiple structural analyses. Here, I briefly describe the CRT movement and its importance to education.

With a single statement, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) simultaneously exposed an egregious absence in educational scholarship and laid out a critical charge for educational researchers. Race, they wrote, "remains untheorized." By way of beginning to address this disturbing silence in the discourse, Ladson-Billings and Tate introduced CRT and catalyzed a movement toward the project of building theories of race in education. Tate (1999) and Ladson-Billings (2000) encouraged scholars to cultivate an educational theory aimed at challenging racist disparities in schooling. This book is, in part, an answer to that call and an effort to contribute a small piece to the larger and collective project of building a Critical Race Theory of Education.

CRT originated in legal studies, where scholars of Color found themselves confronted by both conservative and critical scholarly traditions and movements that failed to analytically understand race and racism. Initially, this collective of scholars responded to Critical Legal Studies (CLS), a critique of legal scholarship and practice that was influenced largely by the Frankfurt School and class-based notions of societal inequity. CLS scholarship suggested legal discourse was false and the law indeterminate, without exploring alternatives or legitimate avenues for change. Critical Race scholars argued that to radically dispose of law without consideration for the impact on already legally and institutionally disempowered people was itself an act of privilege. Furthermore, they suggested that CLS failed to theorize power hierarchies in ways that take race into meaningful and explanatory account. These early CRT scholars formed a brilliant conceptual body of work that provides the theoretical frame for CRT (Bell 1987, 1992; Crenshaw et al. 1995; Matsuda et al. 1993). In addition to developing complex conceptualizations of race and

racism, these scholars worked to describe the emerging body of scholarship. The following is a compendium of those primary tenets:

> CRT posits that racism is endemic to the United States, and a permanent factor of American social and political life. So, a formative CRT focus is how to understand the function of racial oppression through ideologies and institutions that are integral to the dominant notions of America. Chief among those in education are ideologies and institutions of meritocracy, individualism, and colorblindness.

> CRT both disputes and interrogates claims to positivistic, neutral knowledge, particularly ideologies of race and equity that are ahistorical and bereft of social analysis. CRT assumes that because racism is constitutional to societal inequity, adequate explanations of contemporary conditions require contextual and historical analyses of race and racism.

> CRT privileges the voices, stories, and epistemic knowledge generated by the lived experiences of people of Color. CRT scholarship implements counterstorytelling—a methodological practice of honoring and legitimating stories that counter the masternarratives—in this spirit.

> CRT is an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and multidisciplinary scholarly movement aimed at disrupting oppression through radical societal transformation. As such, CRT rejects liberal projects of incremental change within existing power structures (see Dixson and Rousseau 2006 for further discussion of tenets).

Out of this powerful taxonomy, CRT burgeoned into a conceptually and discursively rich body of legal scholarship that included LatCrit (Delgado and Stefancic 2000; Delgado Bernal 2002; Gomez 1998; Haney López 1997; Stefancic 1998), Critical Race Feminism (Wing 2003), and many others. A second generation of CRT scholars further enriched the conversation, by taking on the perceived Black–White binary in earlier work, engaging emerging discourses of globalization, and struggling with the political vicissitudes of antiessentialism (Valdes et al. 2002). There has also been compelling CRT scholarship in specific areas of law, such as corporate and tax law (Brown 2004; Wade 2004).

In education, there were early forays into CRT that primarily emphasized counterstorytelling as a significant methodological tool (Parker, Deyhle, and

Villenas 1999; Parker and Lynn 2002; Smith-Maddox and Solórzano 2002; Solórzano and Delgado Bernal 2001; Solórzano and Yosso 2002, for example). Taylor (1998) and others pursued the conceptual links between CRT in legal studies and education. More recently, education scholars have begun to probe the conceptual frames tendered at the start of the movement (DeCuir and Dixson 2004; Dixson and Dingus 2007; Dixson and Rousseau 2006; Vaught 2009; Vaught and Castagno 2008). They have explored the methodological implications (Chapman 2007; Duncan 2005; Vaught 2008). And, they have wonderfully complicated the movement by exploring differences across sites, disciplines (Taylor 1999), and cultural and ethnic epistemologies (Brayboy 2005; Ladson-Billings 2000; Yosso 2005).

My aim in this book is to contribute to this most necessary of scholarly conversations, with a particular focus on the conceptual frameworks delineated in the original writings of CRT. I draw on these original concepts because they are most explicitly aimed at explaining and challenging the structural, material conditions and relationships I explore in this book. Although complex understandings of antiessentialism, distinct from intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991), are significant to much important work on race and schooling, I share Matsuda's (2002) concern that, in the context of work on material racial inequity, too much deconstruction might inadvertently feed into the hands of dominant and powerful promoters of reactionary colorblindness (Haney López 2007). In other words, if race is positioned as such a social construct that it becomes utterly meaningless, we then in fact betoken an unwanted ideological alliance with the power brokers of colorblindness. As Matsuda illustrates with the *Hopwood v. Texas* case, the court found favor with the argument that Blacks and Latino/as constituted such internally diverse groups that they could not legitimately stand as essential categories and so could not legally be identified by the University of Texas as part of its attempt to diversify. This antiessentialist argument, she points out, is not reductively resonant with the important scholarly work of antiessentialism in CRT. Instead, she offers it as a cautionary tale. So, as it is important to struggle against essentialism in scholarship and in society, there are multiple purposes and types of scholarship within CRT. Some should and do deconstruct the oppressive force of essentialism. However, we do not need to simultaneously discard constructs such as the Black–White binary. This paradigm need not be understood as ignoring or eclipsing non-Black people of Color. Instead, this frame, like other strategically essentialist frames (Spivak 1987), can help to disrupt colorblind mechanisms of White supremacy. Using the paradigm does not necessarily elide complexity.

This was true on the ground in Jericho. In discussing family or personal relationships, participants, both White and of Color, expressed complex understandings of the intersectionality of identity. Some White participants

were able to describe Whiteness in a disrupted, messy way in these self-reflections. And, they were mostly able to understand the ways in which class, sexuality, gender, and religion destabilized categories of identity. People of Color were mostly acutely aware of and adept at talking about racial identity in antiessentialist ways. But when it came to describing themselves in the context of institutions, all participants mobilized essentialism. The purposes ranged from racist to resistant, but the shift was universal. When the essentialism was critical, it did not eclipse simultaneous antiessentialist discourses. For example, many participants of Color could talk about MLKHS as a "Black school" in the context of the school district, while addressing the racial diversity of the student body and the internal diversity of the primarily Black and Sa'moan student body. Critical participants clearly shifted discourses when moving between discussions of identity and those of material, structural concerns. This valuable complexity and skill has always existed inside U.S. communities of Color (DuBois 1989; Haney López 2003). So, in the spirit of challenging the racial hierarchies that both rely on the Black–White paradigm and are resisted through it, and in keeping with the policies and attendant practices of Jericho Public Schools that I am critiquing here, I will both challenge and adopt the Black–White binary throughout this book. And, because I am not focusing analytically on the identities of participants, but the functioning of systems, this choice is not intended to dismiss or avoid complexity, rather to challenge dominant ideologies. In some cases, this challenge requires using the Black–White binary: to demonstrate the pervasiveness of structural racism; to uproot colorblindness at its base; to understand centuries of Whiteness propped up by its enormous and relentless degradation of African Americans.

In this book, then, I draw on a number of the original arguments in CRT, augmented by more current discussions, to issue a material, structural critique of schooling in Jericho Public Schools. Specifically, in each chapter I explore at least one major conceptual component of CRT, articulating and demonstrating its explanatory capacity in qualitative educational research. I begin with district policies and practices and end inside the classroom at Martin Luther King, Jr. High School. Although this is by no means a traditional policy study, CRT—positing racism as structural—inherently requires the incorporation of ethnographic analyses of policies that inform and produce racism on the individual, classroom level. So, in Chapter 1, The Color of Money, I examine the interconnected policies of school choice and student funding within Jericho Public Schools. In this chapter, I illustrate the ways in which Black children are commodified by these two policies because they reinforce Whiteness as a form of property tied to rights. In the next chapter, The Jeremiad, I explore the ways in which a policy of decentralized governance deregulates democracy and entrenches a racialized tyranny of the

majority. In Chapter 3, Martin Luther King, Jr. High School, I investigate policy and individual practices of colorblind racist hate speech. In particular, I trace how individual acts of colorblind racist hate speech are reinforced by district policy and practice. Ultimately, I demonstrate how Jericho Public Schools operates on a structural pattern of White supremacy, and that it is only by creating an understanding of these structures, manifest in policies and practices, that change for students and communities of Color is possible.

Taken as a whole, these chapters constitute a Critical Race ethnography (Duncan 2005). Duncan argues that a Critical Race ethnography should undertake "the analysis of the various ontological categories that inform the way race functions as a stratifying force in school and society" (95). This means including multiple types of data, in part to counter the frequent denial from should-be progressive allies and the flat out rejection from self-named conservatives that the horrors of racism in schooling really exist as counter-stories indicate they do. I suggest that Critical Race ethnographies should also distinguish between counterstorytelling as a methodology and CRT as a theory. Although counterstorytelling is a powerful methodological act, it needs to be framed analytically by the rich conceptual structures of CRT.

Counterstorytelling and Critical Race Ethnographies

In the wake of September 11, numerous news and fictional stories emerged that depicted the disturbing Taliban practice of public execution, described as conducted in old sports stadiums and in front of large crowds of onlookers and revelers. The mainstream American response was rightly one of horror at the executioners and crowds, and absolute pity and grief for the executed. The brutality was shocking. Then Stanley Williams, like many other men, was quietly murdered in our society's own stadium of execution. "The room where Stanley Tookie Williams was killed Tuesday morning is set up like a theater," writes *LA Times* reporter Lopez (2005), "with neat rows of spectators sitting or standing on risers to view the execution." Although he character-izes Williams' life as "barbaric" and is strikingly certain of his guilt, Lopez describes the execution itself as "barbaric": "Williams was led in by guards, and the midnight show began—a dark, sinister, medieval drama in an archaic prison." Describing the process of Williams' execution, Lopez writes, "I watched the executioners struggle to tap a vein, digging into Williams' arms for minutes that seemed like hours." Whether through a killing stone-blow to the head in an old soccer pitch or an uncertain needle bruising a vein in a dingy, cement, California prison, the complex tangle of fear and oppression, of revelry and grief, of complicity and subversion are parallel. Yet, with striking dissonance, the American masternarratives (Ladson-Billings 2000) are bereft of a tale of compassion for Stanley Williams. His dehumanization,

through the specific attachment of innate guilt to male Blackness, and his consequent subjection to "justice" are normalized in White, national ideologies. So, the act and story of American execution are accepted by many as logical narrations of justice, in spite of the fact that their brutality matches that of the Taliban's executions.

I tell these parallel stories because they illustrate the essence of counterstorytelling (Ladson-Billings 1999, 2000). Counterstories challenge the logic and normativity of dominant narratives. They ask us to reconsider how we tell and understand cultural narratives of truth and justice. Authentic counterstorytelling is not merely an effort at reversing the masternarratives by promoting an oppositional or opposing worldview. As Anzaldua (1987) so smartly reminds us, to stand in opposition is simply to engage the dichotomous game of the masternarrative. Masternarratives succeed because they operate in dichotomies and dualisms, because they elicit sharp opposition. The question is not simply whether Stanley Williams was guilty of murder or not. The transformative potential in authentic counterstorytelling lies in complexity, in uncertainty and multiplicity, in unmasking the steel face of domination.

Counterstorytelling is used to challenge grand narratives of Whiteness and its self-characterization as the norm (Ladson-Billings 2000). These grand narratives, masternarratives, or "majoritarian stories," as they are alternately called, retain ideological defining power and so promote and maintain the domination of Whites over people of Color (Harris 1993; Lynn and Parker 2006; Solórzano and Yosso 2002). Counterstorytelling was adopted as a CRT methodology for a number of purposes: first, in the hope "that well-told stories describing the reality of black and brown lives can help readers bridge the gap between their worlds and those of others" (Delgado and Stefancic 2001, 41); second, it provides people of Color a means by which to "name their own reality" (Choe 1999; Hermes 1999; Ladson-Billings 1999); third, counterstories can disrupt and challenge the totalizing, erasing discourse of dominant White society in transformative and liberatory ways (Parker and Lynn 2002). Bell (1992) suggests that counterstorytelling is a powerful method for drawing attention to contradictions and violences normalized by the repeated exercise of entrenched narratives rationalizing domination.

Counterstories are also vulnerable. Chiefly, they can fall prey to the "empathic fallacy" (Delgado 1996; Delgado and Stefancic 2001). False empathy describes a mechanism by which societal change is sought through the activation of White sympathies. It is "the belief that one can change a narrative by merely offering another, better one—that the reader's or listener's empathy will quickly and reliably take over" (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001, 28). Counterstories delivered in the spirit of changing hearts and minds, and playing on good will, will more likely be absorbed into the masternarrative.

In fact, false empathy represents the limitations to and dangers inherent in dominant empathy. This empathy exists inside a supremacist framework and cannot disrupt it. White members of institutions may, for example, reject biologically deterministic explanations for societal conditions linked to race, such as the exponentially disproportionate incarceration rates, but embrace cultural explanations. They may "feel sorry for" young Black men in ways that continue their oppression. Take, for example, the following data from the U.S. Department of Justice: "At yearend 2006 there were 3,042 black male sentenced prisoners per 100,000 black males in the United States, compared to 1,261 Hispanic male sentenced prisoners per 100,000 Hispanic males and 487 white male sentenced prisoners per 100,000 white males" (U.S. Department of Justice 2008). Troublingly, this fact of racial oppression is often empathically read as the struggles of Black men who suffer inside a culture that lacks communal ethics, that propagates violence, and that is defined by dysfunctional families. In response to this supposed empathy, White institutions and individuals can then promote programs that help young Black men *make better choices*.

The documentary "The Boys of Baraka" and its institutional subject, the Baraka School, are a dramatic example of false empathy at work. The school for middle school boys—located in rural Kenya and run by White Americans—was introduced to a group of Baltimore school boys as a way to avoid their other options: winding up in an orange jumpsuit or a casket (Ewing and Grady 2005). The responsibility for avoiding incarceration or death was laid at the feet of eleven- and twelve-year-old boys.

In a PBS interview, one of the two, White female documentarians explained the school:

> The theory of the Baraka school is that if you take a group of at-risk boys who have a lot of potential, who want to change themselves, and you remove them from negative surroundings, difficult households, drug-infested blocks and overcrowded class-rooms, and give them a chance to learn and be out of the mix for a couple of years, that they can turn themselves around and come back home to go on to be extremely productive members of society (pbs.org 2006).

Although she and her colleague were generously welcomed into the homes of many of these young boys and granted interviews and observations with multiple family members and in quite private circumstances, she describes the households as part of the problem, along with drugs and poor school-ing, and vague "negative surroundings." Nowhere does she suggest that the source of these conditions is structural oppression. In her telling, these factors are the problems, and constructed as such, they are their own source. The