
CONCLUSION

Baltimore School Desegregation, Liberalism, and Race

Chance played a role in how Baltimore desegregation ended. If the city suit had gone to a different federal district court judge, the court might have directed that administrative enforcement hearings proceed, and Judge Hackerman might have imposed integration requirements on Baltimore. Alternatively, if Judge Craven had not died, the Fourth Circuit would have ruled in favor of enforcement hearings. Besides chance, local circumstances influenced the course of events. Baltimore had a race-averse political culture that encouraged school officials to adopt a laissez-faire desegregation policy. The city's black leadership negotiated grievances with white officials, rather than battling in the open, and in any case, most middle-class blacks wanted free choice desegregation, so that no civil rights group had reason to sue the school system to do more. And the 1968 riots and aftermath broke up biracial support for integration and contributed to racial polarization that incapacitated the school board and gave control over desegregation to a mayor with little civil rights interest and hostility toward federal intervention.

Despite these idiosyncrasies, the course of Baltimore desegregation reflected the national conflict over race that Gunnar Myrdal characterized as an American Dilemma. School officials who espoused racial equality adopted and sustained a desegregation policy that eliminated some racial restrictions but tacitly maintained others. Crucially, school officials tried to desegregate schools without dealing with race. An important part of the explanation is that liberalism, the culturally normal American way of thinking about society and politics, presented an individualistic prism that made it hard to see and know about race.

Yet another part of the explanation is that all who had political or psychological motives not to talk or think about race could avoid the subject simply by following liberal common sense. Silence about the deepest meanings of race helped preserve domestic tranquility, but that came at the cost of the moral invisibility of black children's educational needs.

Black Children's Invisibility

By the time the U.S. Department of Education exonerated the Baltimore school system, a half century had passed since local black activists started campaigning for better education for their children. If they had been alive in 1987, they would have been pleased to see a succession of black superintendents and blacks' ascendance to power in the school system. On the other hand, schools were not integrated, and black students were not doing well academically in nearly all-black schools. Most black children suffered from a reconfigured segregation—attendance in city schools that were separate from and largely unequal to predominantly white suburban schools. Enrollment was 80 percent black, a mirror image of the district that was 75 percent white in 1937. In 2004, the fiftieth anniversary of *Brown*, city schools would be 89 percent black, and black children in Baltimore would have less chance of encountering white classmates than black students in any other large American school district. Although a 1987 observer would see a preponderance of black faces, what stands out in the decades of desegregation effort is black children's invisibility in school policy.¹

In *Brown*, the Supreme Court held that deliberately separating black students from white, even if schools were tangibly equal, made black children feel inferior and hindered their intellectual development. The Baltimore school board never considered this possibility as an urgent reason for mixing white and black students. Even if board members doubted such psychological arguments, they could see the tangible inequalities in schools and recognize their educational consequences for black children. But the board did little to equalize facilities under legal segregation and did not rush to improve historically black schools after *Brown*. Although school segregation was enmeshed in extensive social segregation, the school board adopted a voluntary individualistic remedy for this institutional problem.

It would be unreasonable to expect 1954 school officials to anticipate all the results of their actions, especially since they were moving in uncharted territory. It is impossible to know what the board could have accomplished if they had tried to root out the institutional underpinnings of segregation in the school system and devised more directive desegregation strategies. However, the board

never publicly considered such action, even though within five years members could see the limitations of open enrollment as desegregation strategy. Two superintendents excused the board from further action by disavowing an interest in whether many black and white children attended school together. Although individual board members rued black students' conditions, a series of boards collectively accepted them. In practice, "compensatory education" for the "culturally disadvantaged" became the main fix for the shortcomings of open enrollment as a strategy for improving black children's education.

How Free Choice Failed to Engage Segregation

Because the school board's free choice policy avoided direct explicit intervention in school racial makeup, the policy not only had limited efficacy in desegregating, but also hampered desegregation by contributing to white flight. These shortcomings can be understood by examining how the board, following liberal principles, created a market in school enrollments, in which individual preferences were regulated by voluntary mutual accommodation rather than government coercion. Market principles contained two flaws that limited desegregation. First, markets poorly fit the conditions through which education is "produced" and "consumed," and centrally, markets cannot force individuals to make choices they strongly dislike.²

Free Choice as a Misconceived Enrollment Market

The school board created a market in which the school system supplied enrollments and students bid on them. Because taxes supported schools, bids were free and all of equal value. System administrators regulated the market minimally. They halted bidding for a school when demand reached the supply of seats, though sometimes they responded to excess demand by increasing seats through part-time schooling. They reserved the right to reject any bid if they believed a request for a school was educationally unsound. The finitude of seats put students in competition for specific schools.

Normal market assumptions, however, poorly fit education. Unlike cars, for example, education is a service, not a good. It consists of—is created by—specific human relationships. The quality of education in a school depends on the teacher, the students, and their interactions—in addition to the adequacy of facilities, equipment, and materials. Automobiles are mass produced; all are presumably identical. Though drivers may use their vehicles differently, the nature of the car

itself is not affected by the driver's identity or relations with other drivers. A market for automobiles puts buyers in competition for a limited number of finished products. In contrast, a market for schools puts families into a complicated game in which the "product" (the quality of education in a classroom) is determined only after families have made their choices, and the range of possible "products" is large. Parents who understand these contingencies try to manage them by influencing who teaches and who sits in class with their child. These parents want their child to have relationships with specific individuals or categories of persons. In other words, in trying to determine the educational "product" children receive, "consumers" are not bidding on objects that are separate from themselves, but are bidding on relations with one another, parts of other "consumers."

With schools, as with cars, "consumers" have various preferences. Three conditions are necessary for an enrollment market to work to broad satisfaction. First, most teachers must be "good" according to widely ranging standards and must teach in adequate facilities. Second, most children must have attributes valued by parents of many other children. Third, parents must make compatible choices: parents desiring a certain type of classmate for their child can get what they want only if parents of the classmates they desire make the same choice. If the first two conditions prevail, an enrollment market will work more efficiently when a central agency collects and distributes relevant information about teachers, students, and buildings. Otherwise, families will rely on prejudices, limited informal networks, and proxy indicators of school and student characteristics, such as where schools are located or teachers' or students' race.

In addition, to work efficiently, an enrollment market, as any market, must overcome the influences of "prior determinations." Past public policy and private actions, customs, and historical accident affect the nature and distribution of products available in a market, as well as the skills and assets consumers bring to exchanges. Markets that allocate products among actors as they are, that ratify the effects of prior determinations through indifference to them, cannot widely satisfy individual preferences. Efficiency in matching preferences with goods and services depends on actions by a central agency to reduce and remedy past inequalities so as to increase choices and individuals' ability to choose.³

Segregation was an overwhelming prior determination. The school system created colored schools that were physically undesirable by widely held standards. Segregation created two classes of black teachers: a minority who received scholarships to study out of state at good institutions and a majority who trained locally at a poorly staffed and equipped normal school. Many of the latter did not satisfy general expectations. Segregation isolated black children in schools where they often had fewer learning opportunities than whites. Particularly if they were poor, they were unlikely to have the attributes that middle-class parents wanted

in children's classmates: cultivated intellectual skills, familiarity with "higher" culture, and connections to institutions of success.

These inequalities limited the efficiency of the enrollment market in providing families with choices that satisfied them. Beyond this, the market had a particular flaw as a means to desegregation, because families had conflicting preferences. Unlike a market for automobiles, which works when consumers have preferences for different products, a market for enrollment can desegregate schools only if "consumers" have similar preferences. While some black families wanted their children in schools with white classmates, most white families wanted their children in all-white classrooms. The chances that whites and blacks would choose compatibly so as to desegregate schools were small. Almost no whites used the market to choose historically or predominantly black schools. A small, growing number of blacks chose historically white schools, but as blacks moved in, whites moved out. After a decade of free choice, Baltimore schools were largely segregated and would become increasingly so.

Paradoxical Results of Free Choice

These flaws in free choice were not accidental. School officials valued a noncoercive policy on the assumption that voluntary desegregation would scare off the fewest whites. And yet, not only did open enrollment not significantly desegregate, but it also failed to deter white flight. White families left city schools even when their children had few black classmates. As late as 1972, when enrollment was 70 percent black, 81 percent of black students attended schools at least 90 percent black; two-thirds of white students attended schools at least 80 percent white, and half were in schools at least 90 percent white. Even when blacks and whites went to the same school, tracking often kept them apart.⁴

Whites left city schools for many reasons. The first moves, when the G.I. Bill let returning soldiers buy suburban homes, had nothing to do with race. Whites left Baltimore, where only 19 percent of 1940 residents were black and housing segregation limited whites' contact with them, to acquire American Dream homes. Federal Housing Administration discrimination ensured that suburbs would be white, and as blacks grew to 24 percent of the 1950 population and blockbusters stirred up anxiety, the suburban move gained racial meaning. Even so, white city public school enrollment increased until 1957.

The first declines in white enrollment were modest, less than 2 percent annually from 1957 to 1964, when the drop reached nearly 3 percent and began rising unevenly to 4 percent in 1967. However, the percentage decline diminished in 1968 and 1969 before rising to 4 and 5 percent in 1971 and 1972, respectively. Thus three years after school desegregation white enrollment started dropping,

moderately. The rate of decline increased after the board's 1963 new desegregation policies but dropped the year of the riots. It rose again three years later. Undoubtedly white departure from city schools reflected unease about blacks. Time lags between desegregation actions and rises in white departures probably reflected some parents' decisions to let children finish neighborhood elementary schools before leaving. However, white departures increased at times when most white students attended class with few black students. For some white families any black classmates were unacceptable. Perhaps families whose children had more contact with black students were particularly likely to leave. Nevertheless, school desegregation was just one part of a larger calculation, in which neighborhood change, the civil rights movement, black power, and the riots also figured.⁵

Free choice contributed to white departure, however, not just by allowing black-white contact in schools, but also by adding to racial anxiety. A basic fact about the enrollment market was that no one was in charge: anyone could end up going to school with anyone. Thus a policy intended to affect race relations minimally unsettled race relations by transforming a situation of near certainty (Poly was the sole exception) into one of great uncertainty. White parents who might want or be willing to send their children to a nearby racially balanced school could not make a decision with any confidence about what the makeup would be when the school opened in the fall or how long those conditions would hold. They had little idea what other parents would choose and, in any case, no control over them. Free choice created a turbulent setting that left no place for rational individual action. In this context, a normal market strategy of choosing so as to maximize satisfaction made less sense than a strategy of trying to minimize (seemingly ubiquitous) risk. Parents might quickly shift from a desire to enroll their child in the neighborhood school to a plan to move to the suburbs. Thus a desegregation policy that avoided dealing with race increased racial anxiety and encouraged whites to leave.⁶

Baltimore school officials received national plaudits for adopting free choice right after *Brown* but two decades later became a target of federal civil rights enforcers. Three contexts make the course of events understandable. An examination of the national politics of school desegregation indicates why Baltimore started desegregation quickly, proceeded undisturbed with a modest policy for a long time, and then got into a confrontation with the Office for Civil Rights. A look at of the culture of Baltimore as a border city sheds light on why the Baltimore board took moderate steps when it started, why local officials resisted federal intervention, and why blacks did not sue. A review of liberalism shows how school officials' focus on individual choice limited their intervention and avoided overt consideration of race in policy while tacitly reinforcing racial discrimination.

The National Politics of School Desegregation

Geography, timing, and local culture mattered in school desegregation. Many districts in border states moved right after *Brown*. Because, like the South, they had legally segregated schools, the ruling required them to change enrollment practices. However, because they were geographically, economically, and culturally close to the North, they had significant numbers of liberal whites who wanted to end segregation. Wilmington, subject to the *Brown* decision, was already desegregating when the Supreme Court ruled. Although Washington was also one of the five school segregation cases, its move to desegregate in the fall of 1954 could be considered somewhat voluntary when contrasted with resistance in two of the other four districts, in Virginia and South Carolina. Baltimore, St. Louis, and Kansas City, three border cities, acted without a push.

Districts that desegregated in 1954 were trying something unprecedented, and no one could know what results specific strategies would bring. Washington, Wilmington, Kansas City, and St. Louis drew school zones, though Kansas City and Wilmington continued policies allowing students to transfer and St. Louis added transfers in 1963. Baltimore was the only early district adopting free choice alone as a desegregation strategy. Civil rights advocates, despite high hopes for desegregation, were uncertain what standards to use to measure the early efforts, and they gave generous benefits of doubts to those who acted first. Once a school board ended segregation policies, even if segregation continued, many local residents, particularly whites, thought of the schools as desegregated, and civil rights interests tended to give them a pass. Against the backdrop of entrenched segregation and determined defiance around the South, even modest changes seemed significant, and activists focused on districts engaged in massive or passive resistance.

The civil rights movement, the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the Office for Civil Rights, and the U.S. Civil Rights Commission changed expectations of desegregation in the 1960s. In 1961, the NAACP opened a campaign against segregation in Northern and Western districts. Gradually, the NAACP, OCR, and the Civil Rights Commission soured on free choice, and in 1968 *Green* rejected it unless it actually, and widely, integrated schools. In 1971, *Swann* required districts that had been legally segregated to prove that vestiges of segregation were gone and authorized busing and gerrymandered zones to integrate. Southern districts that had resisted desegregation and Northern districts that had avoided attention until the late 1960s or early 1970s confronted increasingly specific and stringent standards for implementing *Brown*. The NAACP forced court scrutiny

of policies and practices that maintained segregation, and it sued Chicago, Philadelphia, Denver, Detroit, Boston, and other Northern districts, getting rulings requiring extensive desegregation.

Baltimore, as other districts that acted early, faced new challenges as the political and legal climate changed. In the late 1960s, OCR held administrative enforcement hearings to cut off federal education funds from Kansas City because schools were not desegregated very much. In response, the city ended transfers, reassigned teachers to create racial balance, and adopted a districtwide busing plan. By the late 1970s, the city concluded it could not desegregate schools two-thirds black without suburban involvement and initiated a suit that led to a metropolitan arrangement with voluntary black transfers to the suburbs and creation of magnets to attract whites into city schools. In St. Louis, parents sued the district in 1972 and were joined by the NAACP in broader litigation in 1977. The federal judge negotiated a settlement between the city and suburban districts that produced arrangements similar to those in Kansas City.

While federal laws, officials, and courts required districts to do more and more to desegregate, Baltimoreans remained committed to the open enrollment that received early national approval, despite growing segregation. Within that framework, the school board experimented with magnet schools, but no one took steps to develop metropolitan arrangements. The board refused to bus elementary school students to integrate, and it went along with union resistance to integrating teachers. Because no one ever sued school officials, no court held Baltimore to account against rising integration standards. The absence of such litigation led to the confrontation with OCR. However, without court involvement, as in Kansas City and St. Louis, OCR had limited negotiating leverage against Baltimore.

Baltimore Culture and Strategies for Racial Peace

Baltimore differed from other school districts in two respects. A liberal board that wanted desegregation adopted a free choice policy that did not produce it and adhered to the policy despite this inefficacy. Black leaders encouraged and endorsed open enrollment, continued to support it despite its failure to end racial separation, and never sued the board to integrate more actively. These peculiarities reflected both distinctive local circumstances and common American efforts to avoid conflict over race.⁷

Racial Laissez-faire

When national conflicts over slavery threatened to tear Baltimore apart in the mid-nineteenth century, Baltimoreans sought to maintain peace by adopting a laissez-faire policy on race. Private citizens were free to pursue their own positions for and against slavery, for and against segregation, but the government would not deliberately intervene in race relations. When the city government did adopt a policy that discriminated against blacks, it did so as an endorsement of private preferences or actions, not as an autonomous initiative. The 1911 racial zoning ordinance, for example, was framed as simply codifying private decisions, not enacting any new distinctions. School segregation was couched similarly as a formalization of community norms.

The 1954 school desegregation policy continued an historic open enrollment policy but also followed the tradition of racial laissez-faire. The Public Schools and the Housing Authority desegregated their facilities in the same month, and both gave their clients free choice about mixing. Whatever the historic precedents and philosophical justifications for open enrollment, it removed school officials from responsibility for determining or regulating school racial makeup. The policy put the onus for racial mixing on families, mainly black families.

Black leaders supported the enrollment policy for practical reasons. After nearly a century of government restriction of black education, free choice seemed the most emancipatory alternative. Rather than rely on mostly white school officials to set new rules controlling enrollment, black leaders believed self-reliance offered the greatest opportunities. Middle-class and elite black families had the confidence and resources to move their children into historically white schools. Laissez-faire, particularly if only a minority of blacks participated in it, seemed the approach least likely to arouse white resistance. And a policy that avoided a public position on the racial makeup of schools kept race out of public discussion, removing a spark to white opposition.

In general, Baltimore blacks' customary strategy of negotiating grievances with white officials used the laissez-faire political culture by establishing new private positions to which public officials might respond. That approach, coupled with the fact that most middle-class blacks liked free choice, kept civil rights activists away from the courts with regard to school desegregation. Thurgood Marshall, who would have been most likely to litigate, had left Baltimore for the New York NAACP offices in 1936 and from there took a national perspective on school desegregation. Although the Baltimore branch and the *Afro* talked about suing in 1975, by then the black constituency for integration was small.

Racial Ignorance and Silence

The quickness of the school board vote to desegregate on June 3, 1954, could be seen as a reflection of members' moral confidence in their action, but it can also be taken as a measure of their fear of talking about race. No one knew whether whites would react violently to ending segregation. In this context, the board's swift action followed the Baltimore habit of keeping peace by not letting race into public discussion. From that time on, officials suppressed talk about race in connection with desegregation in several ways.

First, on a number of occasions, the board and administrators simply ignored what many knew about racially unequal schools and anxious race relations. Superintendent John Fischer declared that transfers were unlikely because white and colored schools were equivalent. His facilities director said that the only challenge of desegregation was to accommodate growing enrollment; he saw no problems with school conditions. Probably most, if not all, of the white board members knew something about black school conditions, and all were aware of racial tensions. Perhaps they found these things too much to do anything about. Realistic action would have required campaigning for school bonds, taking on the teacher unions, and opening and managing public discussion. Apparent ignorance avoided even talking about these issues.

In addition, school officials directly and explicitly discouraged racial talk. When voting to desegregate, the board allowed no public discussion. In choosing a policy, the board endorsed Fischer's recommendation that "the race of the pupil shall not be a consideration" in enrollment decisions. This language rejected the strictures of segregation, but it also precluded taking students' race into account in devising remedies, thus eliminating racial talk in desegregation. Fischer warned that race-conscious integration efforts were dangerous "social engineering." School officials' view that desegregation meant simply removing restrictive laws avoided considering de facto segregation as a problem and made it unnecessary to examine race relations in schools. When the 28 Parents charged the system with de facto segregation, board member William Stone admonished his colleagues to stop talking about race and integration and keep to "educational" issues. When city solicitor George Russell Jr. stated that *Green* made the free choice policy unconstitutional, city council president William Donald Schaefer argued against reviewing the policy because doing so would require talking about race. When board president Mark Joseph retired in 1980 after the court battles with the federal government, he urged his colleagues to avoid controversy associated with race.

Stone's letter represented a third way of avoiding race: changing the subject to "education." This position asserted that racial issues such as desegregation had nothing to do with education, the only proper subject for school board

deliberation. Stone said that racial talk just led to conflict that hindered school improvement. Even after the Coleman Report found that integration aided black children and after Baltimore test data showed that black students, most in segregated schools, performed lower than whites, those who raised the "education" flag still insisted on not talking about race. Rather than analyzing whether segregation contributed to racial educational differences, and whether integration would improve black children's education, school officials devised "compensatory education" for black students in predominantly black schools.

Liberalism and a Raceless Attack on Segregation

Baltimore officials also kept race from public debate simply by relying on liberalism in defining issues and making policy. Sociological individualism, an ethical emphasis on rights, and government minimalism focused diagnosis and prescription on whether raceless individuals were free to choose schools. This perspective served Baltimoreans who wanted to avoid conflict over race, but the liberal premises that obscured race and restrained government action also limited the scope and impact of desegregation policy. Moreover, people continued to think about race even if they did not talk about it, and liberal school officials who avoided overt racial discussion ended up unwittingly admitting invidious racial distinctions into their vocabulary and policy. Liberal-thinking officials failed to get a grasp on race as either an instrument of or obstacle to desegregation.

Liberal Resistance to Integration

Most Baltimore school officials' emphasis on the liberal concept of individual liberty—freedom from external constraint—led them to define segregation as the imposition of limits on students' enrollment and to define desegregation simply as the removal of restraints. They focused on legal policies that limited enrollment for several reasons. First, these policies were the most explicit and visible constraints on black children—more explicit than policies on districting overcrowded schools or locating new facilities and more visible than the historic racial identities or climates of schools. Second, recognizing and dealing with the latter constraints required looking at and talking about race, which liberals could barely see and did not consider important. Third, *de facto* segregation, because it resulted from limits on blacks as a group rather than black children as individuals, was a collective, rather than individual, condition, and liberals thought in terms of individual opportunities rather than group opportunities. Finally, *de facto* segregation referred to an outcome of enrollment decisions, rather than

the process of enrolling students, and liberals were not directly concerned about outcomes. For all these reasons, liberal officials did not consider the deliberate mixing of black and white students that constituted integration as a goal of desegregation. Integration was a communal condition requiring individuals to have specific social relations, and recognizing a citywide interest in integration would require acknowledging children's race and limiting their choices according to their race.⁸

Liberalism as a Means of Resisting Desegregation

Not only did liberal board members focus narrowly on *de jure* desegregation, but when they rejected a public interest in racial integration and framed desegregation as a matter of individual rights, they gave whites language and authority for resisting desegregation. Thus some white Baltimoreans opposed desegregation by asserting a right of free association, a right to select their child's classmates. Soon after *Brown*, a *Sun* letter-writer defended segregation in these terms: "One of our highest rights in this country is that of every man to dislike and avoid whom he pleases." White parents protesting the appearance of black children at historically white elementary schools in 1954 carried signs proclaiming "We want our rights." Over the years, white families and neighborhood associations repeatedly invoked their "rights" in opposing desegregation. In 1974, when southeast parents resisted desegregation plans, they justified school sit-ins as protecting families' "rights" and said parents would take their children to "the school of their choice."⁹

The school board's language of rights had no explicit link to race. Thus desegregation opponents could invoke rights to segregated schooling without speaking of race or expressing racial animosity. The school board consistently gave in to southeast demands to reduce racial mixing. Part of the explanation was adept community organizing. Part may have been board members' sympathy for working-class whites, who bore the brunt of white participation in integration. However, in the end, the rights language of free choice left no alternative. Integration is a matter of degree, but rights are absolute. Moreover, they are undiscussable and nonnegotiable. If a right doesn't exist absolutely, it isn't a right. Hence the board, up against HEW demands to integrate and aware that yielding to desegregation opponents would hurt the city position, could not resist.¹⁰

How a Raceless Educational Strategy Reinforced Racial Discrimination

Free choice left many black children in predominantly black schools, and many of these students had academic problems. In the late 1950s, and increasingly in the 1960s, as poverty became a national concern, Baltimore school officials gave

attention to poor black children with academic problems. Although *Brown* had identified segregation as an obstacle to black students' development, some Baltimore educators of both races adopted newly current terms that diagnosed problems in ways that had little to do with segregation or race and put blame on the students. These school officials labeled poor black children as "culturally disadvantaged" or "culturally deprived" and prescribed "compensatory education" in predominantly black schools as the remedy. The "cultural" language and "compensatory" strategy fit a liberal approach to educational policy in several ways.¹¹

In general, the liberal perspective fit well with conventional images of education, which featured an encounter between two individuals, a teacher and a student. In this view, education depended simply on a teacher's skill and devotion and a child's motivation. A student's classmates, for example, didn't matter, and thus the racial makeup of a classroom was far less important than what a student brought into it. The new cultural language depicted poor black children as individuals whose families lived apart from mainstream society and failed to give their sons and daughters the culture and motivation to learn. If anything, coping with poverty led the poor to develop ways of thinking and habits that diverted them from success. In any case, it was poverty, and not race, that limited their ability to learn.

References to culture and poverty might lead to analysis of how social institutions constrained black children, but conventional usage of the new language connected most readily to a simplistic economic image of a world that held opportunities for all individuals who had the skills and motivation to struggle against circumstances. Hence Baltimore school officials simply aimed to alter black children through programs that "compensated" for their "disadvantages," without any consideration of how society or school system culture and practices limited black children's learning. With the untested assumption that economic opportunities were open to those who took them, "compensatory education" fit the liberal premise that unencumbered individuals rose or fell on their own. In addition, compensatory education could be used as a rationalization for not taking more forceful measures to desegregate schools. Although Houston Jackson took black children's "cultural deprivation" as an argument for integration, John Fischer and others saw the children's "culture" or "disadvantage" as an individual handicap that the system could hope to remedy without any institutional change: ending tracking, integrating teaching staffs, training teachers to work with racially mixed classes, and integrating student bodies were unnecessary.¹²

Corresponding to the "culturally deprived" label for black children was a related term often used for whites: "middle class." In a typical instance, when the Baltimore lawyer reassured Judge Hackerman that city officials wanted integrated schools, the attorney argued for moderate measures that would not drive

out "middle class people." "White" was understood. The phrase both avoided race and indicated that any group differences were matters of economics. However, though the language of "class" might imply that society was structured in ways that offered different opportunities to different groups, typical usage gave a simple individualistic meaning to this term as well. "Middle class" referred to essentially autonomous individuals who had a culture and income that made them reasonably well off. Thus both "culture" and "class" bolstered the view of children as race-free individuals.

And yet the labels "middle class" and "culturally deprived" did more than just graft onto liberal individualism new ways of referring to racial groups without using racial language. Connotatively, the two phrases affirmed an old Manichaean distinction between good, industrious whites and bad, uncultured blacks. "Culturally deprived" echoed the Europeans who first encountered dark-skinned Africans and concluded that they were "heathens," not disciplined by religion or culture. American whites thought that blacks, lacking culture, following their animal instincts and emotions, had little chance for economic success because their passions got in the way of calculating their self-interests. In the mid-twentieth century, Edward Banfield drew together these assumptions about blacks while simultaneously denying that race mattered. Blacks' troubles, he argued, were merely the result of their poverty, and the reason many were poor was that they lacked a "culture" of "discipline" and "rationality." Without it, they succumbed to economically unrewarding "impulsive" "action."¹³

The language of "culture" and "class" worked against black children's interests in two ways. First, it tacitly endorsed moral distinctions between races that put blacks beneath whites. This racial dichotomy raised emotional doubts that blacks could learn or that they were suitable classmates for white children. In addition, the language affirmed the liberal norm of suppressing passions and governing action by reason. In this view, ignoring emotional impulses is essential for economic success, and the good individual does as much as possible to remain unaware of feelings. Because the idea of race, as Myrdal observed, emerged from "irrational," "impulsive" passions, the admonition to think only rationally encouraged ignorance of the origins and meanings of race and emotional and moral interests in it. Consistently, liberal Baltimore school board members (as their counterparts elsewhere) avoided examining the irrational thinking that led whites to resist contacts with blacks, the passions that posed the central obstacle to desegregation. Board presidents, certain they could not control emotional expressions, did all they could to suppress them. Instead, policymakers accepted assumptions about race as an ineffable given, which they would neither analyze nor try to change. The board took whites' unease about blacks as a parameter limiting action alternatives, within which officials considered incentives to

influence families' behavior. In these ways, a language of "culture" and "class" both hindered overt recognition of race and reinforced black disadvantages.

Liberalism and the American Dilemma

In 1903, W. E. B. DuBois predicted that "the problem of the color line" would be "the problem of the twentieth century." Forty years later, Gunnar Myrdal affirmed DuBois's forecast and interpreted the problem as an American Dilemma. He described the dilemma as a conflict in Americans' hearts and minds between liberalism, a progressive, egalitarian, reasoning tradition with which he identified, and another tradition that he abhorred: many whites' assumption that they were morally superior to blacks and free, or even obliged, to degrade them. Myrdal was of two minds about remedies. On the one hand, he had faith in the power of education gradually to subjugate ignorance and prejudice and create a more equal society. On the other hand, he recognized that many whites had deep emotional interests in seeing blacks as inferior and that these wishes resisted gaining the realistic knowledge on which social reform depended.¹⁴

Thus Myrdal, an Enlightenment liberal, saw the Dilemma as a contest between reason and passion. And yet, in noting Americans' belief in ignoring statutes, such as antidiscrimination legislation, that violated their notions of higher, natural law, he recognized that liberalism had two strands. One emphasized the equal worth of all individuals; the other emphasized individuals' equal liberty. The latter allowed individuals wide freedom to act on their desires and anxieties before authorizing government restraint. Northern liberals, with their minds fixed on equality, put extraordinary faith in the power of reason eventually to discipline individual freedom. Southern liberals, in contrast, lived in explicit racial inequality and understood how untrammelled individuals indulged their desires in whatever ways society allowed.¹⁵

In other words, though Myrdal formulated the American Dilemma as a struggle of liberalism against ignorance and emotion, the dilemma was inherent to liberalism itself. Finding a way out required coming to terms with the ways that the castelike relations of race encumbered individuals and understanding the desires and anxieties that defined individual relations racially. Liberalism developed the emancipatory modern concept of the individual, but liberal premises are clearer on why individuals should have freedom from others than why and how persons should accept responsibility for and make common cause with one another. Liberalism is a philosophy of moderation, respectful of differences, concerned with balance, but establishing the American Creed in schooling demanded simultaneously respecting black and white concerns and articulating

how all had interests in giving priority to black interests in equality over white interests in liberty. There were no clear paths.

Those who made policy on school desegregation needed answers to the original liberals' questions: how to understand human nature, how to demarcate individual liberty, how to resolve conflicts justly, and how to design social arrangements that elicit and serve what is most constructive in human beings. However, twentieth-century liberals lacked the moral language and conscious understanding of passions that informed their predecessors. They imagined ways of balancing the interests of individuals who happened to be white or black, while avoiding knowledge of the emotions that made them white or black. They held onto abstract liberal principles, but these, split off from the knowledge of human beings that gave rise to them, availed little.¹⁶

School desegregation involved more than a battle of ideas. The course of events was shaped by whites' wish to see themselves as good by seeing blacks as bad, the rationalization and institutionalization of this desire in slavery and segregation, and all ensuing anger and guilt. Liberalism provided the argument for black emancipation, but it also offered a way of thinking that hindered knowing about race. For policymakers who feared political conflict and for individuals who feared their own moral and emotional conflicts, thinking liberally was a culturally normal, commonsense way of avoiding talking or even knowing about race. Gunnar Myrdal put his hopes for enactment of the American Creed in reason. And yet, while he held out faith that conscience could remake social institutions, he concluded his study cautiously: "What we usually call 'social trends' have their main significance for the Negro's status because of what is in white people's minds." Extending black freedom and increasing equality required realistically confronting race, human desires, and anxieties, and the liberal dilemma to devise imperfect but good enough steps forward.¹⁷

Appendix

Table 1. Baltimore city public schools enrollment

YEAR	WHITE		BLACK		TOTAL
	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	
1923	82,222	83%	16,807	17%	99,029
1933	92,138	77	26,759	23	118,897
1943	77,286	71	31,287	29	108,573
1953	86,206	62	51,827	38	138,033
1954	75,624	60	57,064	40	143,688
1955	87,913	59	61,870	41	149,783
1956	88,083	57	66,913	43	154,966
1957	87,312	55	72,415	45	159,727
1958	85,988	53	77,611	47	163,542
1959	84,194	51	82,525	49	166,719
1960	82,588	49	87,634	51	170,222
1961	81,772	47	93,492	53	175,234
1962	80,822	45	99,216	55	180,032
1963	79,216	43	105,650	57	184,866
1964	76,903	41	111,584	59	188,487
1965	74,010	39	117,076	61	191,086
1966	71,534	37	120,882	63	192,416
1967	68,616	36	124,150	64	192,766
1968	66,826	35	126,224	65	193,050
1969	64,970	34	128,180	66	193,150
1970	63,035	33	129,852	67	192,887
1971	60,363	32	130,464	68	190,827
1972	57,295	31	129,711	69	187,006
1973	54,167	30	128,744	70	182,911

Sources: Baltimore City Public Schools, *Informational Materials for Desegregation Task Force* (Baltimore: BCPS, 1974); Board of School Commissioners, Baltimore City Public Schools, *Annual Report* (Baltimore: BCPS, 1945); Julia Roberta O'Wesney, "Historical Study of the Progress of Racial Desegregation in the Public Schools of Baltimore, Maryland" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 1970).

Table 2. Percentages of schools with different racial compositions

YEAR	100% WHITE	>90% WHITE	80-90% BLACK	>90% BLACK	100% BLACK
1953	60%				40%
1954	33				37
1955	26				39
1956	20	44%		39%	32
1957	20				33
1958	19				30
1959	20				31
1960					
1961		30		44	
1962		30		46	
1963		23		46	
1964		22		48	
1965		21		50	
1966		20		53	
1967	6	20		54	23
1968		19		54	
1969		18		54	
1970		18		56	
1971		18		57	
1972		16		55	
1973		17		57	

Sources: Baltimore City Public Schools, *Informational Materials for Desegregation Task Force* (Baltimore: BCPS, 1974); Joel Acus Carrington, "The Struggle for Desegregation of Baltimore City Public Schools 1952-1966" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 1970); Julia Roberta O'Wesney, "Historical Study of the Progress of Racial Desegregation in the Public Schools of Baltimore, Maryland" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 1970); Parents Committee, *Seven Years of Desegregation* (Baltimore: Parents Committee, 1963).

Table 3. Percentages of students attending schools with different racial compositions

YEAR	100% WHITE	>90% WHITE	>80% WHITE	>50% BLACK	>90% BLACK	100% BLACK
1954		96% of W students		97% of B students	97% of B students	
1955		84% of W 86% of W elem. stds.; 100% W sec. stds.		97% of B	91% of B	
1956		81% of W elem. stds.; 77% of W sec. stds.			87% of B	
1957		81% of W elem. stds.; 71% of W sec. stds.			85% of B	
1958		78% of W elem. stds.; 64% of W sec. stds.			82% of B	
1959	34% of W	70% of W elem. stds.; 65% of W sec. stds.			80% of B	55% of B
1960		74% of W elem. stds.; 61% of W sec. stds.			82% of B	
1961	26% of W	65% of W	97% of W	87% of B	80% of B	45% of B
1962	27% of W	64% of W	93% of W	90% of B	80% of B	41% of B
1963	19% of W					39% of B
1965		57% of W elem. stds.		92% of B elem. stds.	84% of B elem. stds.	
1972		49% of W			81% of B	

Sources: Baltimore City Public Schools, *Informational Materials for Desegregation Task Force* (Baltimore: BCPS, 1974); Julia Roberta O'Wesney, "Historical Study of the Progress of Racial Desegregation in the Public Schools of Baltimore, Maryland" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 1970); Parents Committee, *Seven Years of Desegregation* (Baltimore: Parents Committee, 1963); U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Racial Isolation in the Public Schools*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: USCCR, 1967).