

Victimhood, Separatism, and Anti-Intellectualism: In Defense of Black Culture

In 2000, an African American linguistic scholar, John McWhorter, entered the public discourse on African American student achievement with the publication of his book *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America*. McWhorter is characterized as offering “a daring assessment of what’s plaguing the children of yesterday’s affirmative-action babies.” In the preface, McWhorter states his core belief that serves as the impetus for writing the book: the belief that “white racism is the main obstacle to black success and achievement is now all but obsolete” (McWhorter, 2000, p. x). Instead, McWhorter believes that the main reasons for the struggles of Black Americans are primarily ideological and psychological. McWhorter’s argument was neither novel nor original. A decade earlier, Shelby Steele made essentially the same argument when he stated that Black students internalized a sense of inferiority that leads them to blame White people for their troubles and to form a victim’s identity (Steele, 1990). Building on Steele’s analysis, McWhorter provides a three-pronged argument that he argues is at the heart of Black students’ academic underachievement. His argument consists of what he characterizes as three troubling ideological manifestations: “Cult of Victimology,” “Cult of Separatism,” and “Cult of Anti-Intellectualism.”

CULT OF VICTIMOLOGY

McWhorter believes that Black Americans have been socialized to see themselves as victims of racism. This sense of victimhood has become a part of cultural Blackness and a core component of Black identity. He believes that Blacks fixate on racism so much that they are unable to acknowledge that racism is actually on the decline. He is careful to state that he is not arguing that there is no racism, only that racism is greatly diminished and not the problem that it once was. Furthermore, he argues that this sense of victimhood makes Black people hypersensitive to incidents that should not be seen as racist, or unable to objectively evaluate unflattering data about Black people without characterizing it as racist. Racism, he argues, does not explain everything, or even most things, related to the negative conditions of many Black people. Furthermore, he states that the majority of Black Americans live their lives largely unaffected by the

dire portrayal of trenchant racism that is repeatedly perpetuated by Black scholars, politicians, and other influential individuals.

To support his argument, he provides several examples and anecdotes, which he states rather derisively as being real (as opposed to fictitious stories of racism provided by the late legal scholar Derrick Bell). Of the many examples and anecdotes he provides, a couple in particular are worth noting as they illustrate the problematic nature of his first argument. He recounts a story in which a Black undergraduate student at Stanford stated that her White mathematics professor told her to withdraw from a calculus class because Black people were not good at math. McWhorter indicates that he simply does not believe her. Is it because he possesses information that the student is lying? No. Is it because he possesses information that the student misunderstood what the professor said? No. Did he talk to the student and find her to be unbelievable? No. He simply believed that the student is lying. Why? Because no White professor at an elite university such as Stanford in the late 1980s would dare make such a statement at the risk of damaging her reputation and career. So, because McWhorter could not possibly imagine that such a scenario would ever happen, he categorically dismisses the student's claim as an outright fabrication. The arrogance of McWhorter's statement is troubling, to say the least.

In the late 1990s, I was an assistant professor at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. During one of our faculty meetings, we were doing student evaluations. One of my advisees, a Nigerian student, was having a lot of academic and clinical performance difficulties in the program. After an extended conversation about him, the training director stated if he didn't get his act together, his "Black ass" would be kicked out of the program. I will never forget that moment. I have never had a professional experience where I felt more like a persona non grata as much as I did at that moment in time. I remember looking around at my White colleagues and no one would make eye contact with me. I was in such shock that I was speechless and was emotionally disengaged from the rest of the meeting. As soon as the meeting was over, I left without saying a word and walked across campus to the Black Studies department. I found one of my colleagues and told her what happened. She asked me if I confronted the individual, and I told her that I was in such a state of shock that I did not say anything. She strongly communicated that I had to confront this individual, which I agreed had to happen. The next day I confronted her, and it appeared that she was anticipating the conversation. She immediately apologized and stated that as soon as she said it she knew it was inappropriate. I communicated how inappropriate her words were and how uncomfortable I had felt. Ultimately, I communicated that I was disappointed in her (especially given her own marginalized status as a lesbian). At the next faculty meeting she apologized and took responsibility for her inappropriate words.

Using the logic of McWhorter, one could say that I am lying and this experience did not happen to me. One might also say that no professor would ever say something so inappropriate, and arguably racist, about a student of color in a

faculty meeting. Well, I did not fabricate this story. It happened, and I had witnesses. But whether there were witnesses or not does not give McWhorter or anyone else the right or authority to call me a liar without one shred of evidence to support this character assassination. Yet this is exactly what McWhorter did to this student. In his privileged and naïve world, learned White professors would never say such things because they are simply too smart and concerned with self-preservation to utter such offensive statements. This is probably the case for many White professors who hold offensive beliefs, but to think that there would never be an instance of this occurring is beyond naïve. It is intellectually lazy and dishonest. Even a cursory review of the psychological literature on racial microaggressions would reveal this to not be the case. Often the racial microaggressions are more subtle than the experience I had or what was reported by the African American student in McWhorter's anecdote. African American faculty have reported (1) being asked questions about race from their White colleagues that have no intellectual context but reflect assumptions that Black faculty are the possessors of all knowledge related to Black people, or (2) being called "neurotic" for trying to connect intellectual discussions to an African American context (Pittman, 2012). The racial microaggressions experienced by many African American faculty should not be surprising given the research, which shows how the authority and credibility of African American faculty is challenged by White students (Harlow, 2003; McGowan, 2000; Pittman, 2010).

Racial microaggressions also occur in the form of resistance of White students taking courses that address issues related to race and culture (Cokley, 2009; Helms et al., 2003; Jackson, 1999). In their qualitative study of racial microaggressions against Black counseling and counseling psychology faculty, Constantine, Smith, Redington, and Owens (2008) identified several themes reported by Black faculty, including (1) feeling marginalized/invisible as well as hypervisible, (2) having qualifications challenged by faculty, students, and staff, (3) expectations to serve on service-oriented roles with low perceived value, (4) difficulties determining whether discrimination was related to race or gender, (5) self-consciousness regarding choice of clothing, hairstyle, or manner of speech, and (6) coping strategies to address racial microaggressions. Most salient for my critique of McWhorter is the last theme. Among the strategies reported by Black faculty were interpersonal or emotional withdrawal from faculty perceived to exhibit racial microaggressions, and resignation that racist treatment will always exist in academia.

McWhorter is essentially trying to provide an analysis and commentary about the psychology of Black people without either (a) having an understanding of psychology, or (b) being knowledgeable about psychological and other social science research that would be relevant to the arguments that he makes. McWhorter's argument relies on the premise that Black students and faculty are essentially hypersensitive to racism, seeing racism where it does not exist, and exaggerating

the frequency and intensity of racist experiences because that is part of the cult of victimology ideology that has become a core part of Black (American) identity. The amount of social science research that challenges McWhorter's premise is overwhelming. Nevertheless, it is from this assumption and its supposed resultant cult of victimology that the next prong of his argument, the cult of separatism, is presented.

CULT OF SEPARATISM

According to McWhorter, the cult of separatism is the direct result of the cult of victimology. He defines separatism as "the sense that to be black is to restrict one's full commitment to black-oriented culture and to be subject to different rules of argumentation and morality" (McWhorter, 2000, p. 72). Stated another way, McWhorter is referring to the idea that Black Americans always see Whites as hostile and White culture as being inimical to Black culture, and thus Black people need to be separate from White people and White culture in every way possible. McWhorter says that the cult of separatism is manifested in three ways: (1) mainstream culture as White culture, (2) the ghettoization of academic work, and (3) the belief that Black people can do no wrong.

Regarding mainstream culture as White culture, McWhorter argues that Black Americans are largely averse to expressions of mainstream culture because these expressions are seen as White culture. Because of this, Black people supposedly will not read novels by non-Black authors, listen to music by non-Black musicians, do research on non-Black issues, or learn foreign languages that are not spoken by Black people. McWhorter sees these personal preferences by many Black people as a problem that ultimately limits the experiences and career opportunities for Black people. On the surface, it is difficult to argue with what appears to be rather sound logic. As psychological research has shown, individuals who are more open to experience are generally more creative (Leung & Chiu, 2008) and exhibit less prejudice (Flynn, 2005; Sibley & Duckitt, 2008). However, if one considers openness to experience as a dimension of personality, as psychologists do, openness to experience is often linked more to political ideology (Carney, Jost, Gosling, & Potter, 2008; Sibley, Osborne, & Duckitt, 2012) than to what might be characterized as favorable outcomes.

Thus my critique of McWhorter on this aspect of his argument is primarily because of two concerns. First, as related to my primary interests in Black academic achievement and McWhorter's concern about Black academic underachievement, openness to experience actually has a very weak correlation with academic achievement, according to a recent meta-analysis (McAbee & Oswald, 2013). So, Black people can choose to have "narrowly" defined Black interests and have it not be linked to their performance in the classroom and overall academic achievement. My second concern is that White people have

had narrowly defined interests for as long as the academy has been in existence; yet, there is no diminishment of their academic achievement, nor does McWhorter offer a critique of their narrowly defined "White" interests.

McWhorter goes on to characterize much of the work done by Black academics as ghettoized and minimizing logical argument and factual evidence because of a desire to essentially mythologize and idealize the Black present and past. He targets the intellectual paradigm of Afrocentricity and Afrocentric history, and cites as a primary example claims made about "Mother Egypt." He categorically dismisses Afrocentric claims as "primarily founded upon a fragile assemblage of misreadings of classical texts to construct a scenario under which Ancient Egypt was a Black civilization. . . . who therefore owed all notable culture to them" (McWhorter, 2000, p. 54). It is certainly true that some of the claims made by certain proponents of Afrocentric history are exaggerated, have little supporting evidence, are empirically unsound, and perhaps border on the incredulous. For example, the popular Afrocentric claim that Cleopatra was Black is dubious because it is based largely on flawed evidence from J. A. Rogers (1996, originally published 1946).

However, as evidenced throughout the book, McWhorter assumes that he can speak authoritatively about a topic for which he is intellectually and disciplinarily ill equipped to substantially address. For example, he belittles much of this work as another manifestation of the perpetuation of victimhood for the purpose of raising Black self-esteem. This cavalier and dismissive attitude is, I would argue, itself anti-intellectual because it does not engage the very serious research of the multitalented, interdisciplinary Senegalese scholar Cheik Anta Diop (e.g., Diop, 1974). Diop, who along with the Congolese scholar Theophile Obenga, provided very compelling (although disputed) evidence at the 1974 UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) Conference that the ancient Egyptians were Black. The hallmark of the academy is the ebb and flow of ideas that are supported through evidence and argumentation or refuted by the same. Scholars such as Diop are to be treated seriously, whether one agrees with him or not, and Black academics and students who are influenced by his scholarship should not be cavalierly dismissed as simply needing to believe in poor scholarship to boost their self-esteem. This attitude is arrogant and not befitting of someone who claims to be a scholar and intellectual.

There is another implication of McWhorter's characterization that is worth noting. The idea that much of the work of Black academics is ghettoized and lacking in logical argumentation is a not-so-slippery slope away from questioning the intelligence and methodological rigor of Black academics. While I am not suggesting that there are no examples of work by some Black academics that is underwhelming and not intellectually rigorous, the same observation can be made about any academic from any racial or ethnic background. There are

academics who are White, Asian, Latino, Native, and other backgrounds whose research and scholarship is subpar, and it is not related to their racial or ethnic heritage. The fact of the matter is that much of the work done by scholars of color that focuses on issues of race, ethnicity, and culture is marginalized and not respected in the academy. This attitude is deeply embedded within the culture of the academy, and penalizes "minority" scholars whose methodologies and scholarship fall outside of the realm of what is considered to be important, rigorous mainstream research.

This issue is very personal for me because of my recent experience with being promoted to full professor. I have a joint appointment in the Department of Educational Psychology and the Department of African and African Diaspora Studies; thus, I had to go through two separate but concurrent reviews for promotion. In the Department of Educational Psychology, I received a unanimous vote at the department level. I also received a unanimous vote at the College of Education level. In the Department of African and African Diaspora Studies, I also received a unanimous vote at the department level. However, at the College of Liberal Arts level, the vote was 8 for promotion, 12 against. It was apparently one of the most contentious cases evaluated. The dean of the college disagreed with the decision, overturned it, and ultimately recommended that I be promoted.

In my debriefing with him, he communicated that he thought I had a strong case; thus, he was surprised at the nature of the comments and critiques made about me. There were two primary areas of critique leveled against me. First, there were criticisms about the methodology I use in my research. Specifically, the criticism was that I did not conduct experimental research. My research is primarily correlational, and uses a range of intermediate to advanced statistical analyses (e.g., regressions, canonical correlation, factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, and path analysis). The commentary being made was that my research methods were very basic and not sophisticated (i.e., no experimental manipulation). No consideration was made regarding whether the methods were appropriate for the types of research questions that I was asking, or were consistent with my particular training in counseling psychology. Additionally, no consideration was made that the overwhelming majority of racial or ethnic minority research in psychology does not use experimental research.

Another criticism was that I did not publish in enough "high impact" journals, and that I was publishing too much in niche journals (e.g., Journal of Black Psychology). This was a curious criticism, considering that I had published in the Journal of Black Psychology only once during my time in rank as an associate professor (prior to being at the University of Texas, with an additional article in press). However, I did have one article published in the Journal of Black Studies (remember, I had a joint appointment in Educational Psychology and African and African Diaspora Studies). If the concern was about my ability to publish in top-tier, high-impact journals, then the fact that I was recognized as one of the top contributors to the Journal of Counseling Psychology between 1999 and 2009 should have assuaged that concern. I believe the real issue

is that the individuals not supportive of my case thought that I had not published enough in top-tier, high-impact journals (which also means that they did not consider niche journals such as the Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, Mental Health, Religion and Culture, Journal of Religion and Health, Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, and Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology) as important or impactful outlets for scholarship. The dean, understandably, did not want to acknowledge that some larger force of systemic bias may have contributed to the negative evaluations of my case; yet he appeared to be genuinely perplexed and was unable to explain the outcome of my case.

McWhorter's characterization of much of Black academics' work being ghettoized and lacking in logical argumentation is essentially the mind-set that contributed to the negative evaluation of my case, as well as the cases of so many Black faculty (and other faculty of color). Rather than carefully evaluating the specific theories, methodologies, analyses, and interpretations offered by a representative sampling of diverse Black scholars, McWhorter provides a broad, sweeping indictment of Black academics that makes for good tabloid journalism, but ultimately poor scholarship.

CULT OF ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM

McWhorter's diatribe on Black culture culminates with the third troubling ideological manifestation that he calls the Cult of Anti-Intellectualism. He characterizes this cult of anti-intellectualism as an internal, cultural trait that devalues learning. To set the tone for his chapter, he provides the following quote from an undergraduate Black student recruiter: "We're afraid that Black students who perform at that high a level aren't going to be concerned with nurturing an African-American presence at Berkeley" (p. 82). It is tempting to employ McWhorter's own tactics and simply dismiss this statement as never occurring. After all, he does not provide an actual name of the recruiter, which would at least give us the opportunity to contact the individual and verify the statement. One could make the argument that it would be easy to make up statements and incidents that cannot be documented for the sole purpose of increasing book sales. Because doing so would risk looking petty, I will not employ that tactic and will give McWhorter the benefit of the doubt that this statement was actually made. McWhorter obviously sees the statement as a perfect example of the supposed cult of anti-intellectualism. When I read the statement, I hypothesize that it is based on the recruiter's previous experiences with specific African American students who have perhaps excelled academically yet chose to not be involved in the African American community. The statement is impolitic, but it underscores an important concern regarding the importance of building a sense of community on a campus with a very small African American presence.

It reminds me of an incident that occurred when I was an undergraduate student at Wake Forest University. There was an academic scholarship for minority students, and a biracial student had applied for it. As the story is told, the director of minority affairs (who was responsible for choosing the recipients of the fellowship), met with the student and essentially asked him whether he was going to be Black or White during his time at Wake Forest. The director apparently was concerned about increasing the numbers of African American students on campus, and did not want to "waste" a scholarship on someone who was not going to be strongly identified as an ethnic minority on campus. The student's parents apparently were very upset by this, and after they complained to the administration, the Director was fired. It is easy to scapegoat the director and dismiss his comments as problematic and inappropriate. To be sure, the comments were politically unwise, to put it mildly. However, his concern was legitimate, and raises the larger question of whether a litmus test for racial identity should be applied to individuals applying for "minority" scholarships. The short answer is obviously no, because it introduces additional problems (e.g.: Who makes the determination of someone's "authentic" racial identity? What criteria will be used?). However, it should be noted that the student received the award, was not involved with the Black student community in any meaningful way, and, for all intents and purposes, primarily socialized with White students.

The point here is that McWhorter starts the chapter with this quote as though it is prima facie evidence of anti-intellectualism in Black culture, when a more culturally astute analysis would see the motivation underlying the quote being more about wanting academically strong Black students with strong Black identities. However, as is often the case throughout the book, McWhorter presents anecdotes with precious little data and even less understanding of the psychology and culture of African Americans.

McWhorter goes on to characterize Black undergraduate students at Berkeley as among the worst students on campus. He recounts several incidents involving Black students and poor academic performances (e.g., inadequate honors thesis, failing a midterm exam, difficulty in completing homework, failure to take a final exam, inconsistent class attendance, extremely late class enrollment). While acknowledging that he had White and Asian slackers, too, he noted that slackers was the norm for Black students. Anticipating the criticism that the behaviors he observed were not specific or disproportionately present in one group, McWhorter shared another experience that he believed would definitively support his premise. This experience involved his teaching a nearly all-White and Asian and nearly all-Black version of two classes. One of the classes was the history of Black musical theater, while the other class dealt with pidgin and creole languages, Haitian creole, and Jamaican patois. In the nearly all-White and Asian history class, McWhorter characterized the class as a success. He said that the students loved the class, wrote great papers, and kept in touch with him after the class concluded. However, his characterization of the nearly all-Black class

was quite different. He said that attendance was terrible, the students were not engaged in the material, and the midterm grades were bad. He noted that in the class dealing with languages, no Black student ever utilized his office hours for help, while pointing out that a White student did. These experiences reminded him of other teaching and educational experiences where he claimed to have observed similar behaviors. He dismissed the possibility that something about him and his teaching could be turning the Black students off because the predominantly White and Asian class had, according to him, thoroughly enjoyed the class (his exact words were "eaten up the same lectures and material") (p. 96). He definitively states that anti-intellectualism is "a central component of black identity" and that "black students do not try as hard as other students" (p. 101).

In my recent Politics of Black Identity class, I lectured on John McWhorter and his provocative commentary on Black students. As expected, the students had very strong and mostly negative reactions to his analysis. I also showed a YouTube clip of McWhorter involved in a panel debate on affirmative action (he is against affirmative action based on race). Interestingly, the students' negative reactions were even more intensified after observing him on the video. They found McWhorter to be very condescending and indicated that it was no surprise to them that Black students would act in the ways he reported. The students did not like his personality at all, and indicated that they would not want to take a class from him.

To demonstrate his racial bonafides, McWhorter acknowledges that racism is real (although greatly exaggerated and not responsible for the poor academic achievement of Black students), and proceeds to share his experiences of racism. McWhorter argues that other groups (e.g., Jews and Chinese) have experienced tremendous racism, yet they are still expected to have high academic achievement; however, a Black student who is called "nigger," is racially profiled, and is treated unfairly by teachers is doomed to forever be low achieving. McWhorter expresses righteous indignation over this and believes this to be an example of society underestimating Black people. To further support his point about the exaggerated impact of racism, McWhorter cites research by Lawrence Steinberg, who found that Latino and Asian students reported the same levels of racial bias, yet Asian students still excel academically. McWhorter conveniently does not address why Latino students do not also excel academically.

Teacher Bias

McWhorter then turns his attention to teacher bias as a factor in African American student achievement. He contends that this is a flawed argument because African American students do not fare any better in schools with mostly or all Black teachers. However, McWhorter once again misses the point. First, there is evidence for an effect of teacher race on academic achievement. For

example, research has found that Black students who have Black math teachers are more likely to enroll in advanced math classes (Klopfenstein, 2005). Cultural differences in teacher communication is also a factor in student achievement, where White teachers' communication styles and lowered expectations can negatively impact Black student achievement (Irvine, 1990).

Second, the real issue is not so much about the race of the teachers, but rather the expectations of the teachers. In this regard, the literature is unequivocal. Teacher expectations have been found to account for as much as 42% of the racial gap in abilities and grades (Wildhagen, 2012). The evidence for lowered teacher expectations of Black students is overwhelming. When Black students are labeled gifted, they can still be subjected to more discrimination (Rubovits & Maehr, 1973). Furthermore, even when Black students have similar levels of achievement to White and Asian students, they still encounter lower teacher expectations (McKown & Weinstein, 2008).

While Black teachers are not immune from the prejudices of other teachers, research has also shown that Black teachers typically have higher expectations regarding academic achievement for Black students than White teachers (Beady & Hansell, 1981). There is also a strong gender bias, with teachers having lower expectations for independent and nonsubmissive Black males when compared to Black females (Ross & Jackson, 1991). While Black teachers typically have higher expectations for Black students, they are not immune from racial biases against Black students. Studies have also found no differences between Black and White teachers when making referrals for special education placement (Bahr, Fuchs, Stecker, & Fuchs, 1991). Empirical research has supported the idea that teacher bias can contribute to the Black-White test score gap (Ferguson, 2003). Differences in perceptions of teacher bias have been found to negatively impact academic achievement (Thomas, Caldwell, Faison, & Jackson, 2009). To argue that teacher racial bias is minimal and inconsequential is very naïve. It is nothing short of willful ignorance, and coming from an African American scholar who considers himself to be a public intellectual is the epitome of intellectual irresponsibility.

To further drive home his point about the minimal consequences of racism, McWhorter points out that children of Black African and Caribbean immigrants typically do better than Black Americans, although they are subjected to the same degree of racism. He cites Abner Louima, the Haitian immigrant who was assaulted and brutally sodomized with the handle of a plunger by New York police officers, and Amadou Diallo, the Guinean immigrant who was shot 41 times and killed by New York police officers, as examples of Black immigrants who experienced the harshest forms of racism. His logic is essentially that Black Africans and Caribbeans experience similar degrees of racism, yet Caribbeans still value school more and make better grades. McWhorter assumes that the experience of racial discrimination impacts Black Americans and children of

neighborhoods, limited family resources, poor schools and teaching, and peers who are not invested in school all can undermine a Black student's identification with school. However, as the title of Steele's rebuttal article indicates, "Stereotyping and Its Threat Are Real" (Steele, 1998). McWhorter's analysis fundamentally misses the mark on an important finding of Steele's research: when stereotype threat is removed, equally skilled Black students (matched on comparable academic abilities) performed just as well as equally skilled White students. It does not make one a "Victimologist" to read the results of this study (and other highly controlled, experimental studies) and to conclude that stereotype threat is real and is of consequence in the academic performance (as measured by standardized test scores) of Black students.

Underfunded Schools

McWhorter continues along his mission to debunk all legitimate explanations of Black underachievement by briefly discussing underfunded schools. I emphasize briefly because he dedicates an entire five paragraphs to an issue that has been the focus of countless empirical studies. In his "review" of the literature, he cites 1989–1990 National Center for Education Statistics to show that minority school districts received more school funding than predominantly White districts. He argues that federal funding has greatly increased for inner-city schools, yet there is no significant improvement in their academic performance. Furthermore, he states that disadvantaged children from poor Southeast Asian refugees can be found in these schools, yet they still manage to excel academically.

It is important to disentangle multiple issues brought up in McWhorter's example. Yes, it is true that some school reform efforts that increased funding have not always been successful in improving academic outcomes. Some of these efforts have failed to significantly improve academic performance (e.g., Gross, Booker, & Goldhaber, 2009). However, there is also evidence that supports the importance of increasing school funding to improve academic outcomes (Henry, Fortner, & Thompson, 2010). School funding is often associated with issues of racial and socioeconomic segregation, such that schools with predominantly White and middle- to upper-middle-class students typically receive more funding than students with predominantly Black, Brown, and working-class or poor students. Using data from over 14,000 students in more than 900 high schools from the 1988 National Education Longitudinal Survey, researchers found that the socioeconomic level of schools was just as impactful on achievement as students' own socioeconomic status (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). This impact was found for both advantaged and disadvantaged students. McWhorter's minimization of the impact of school funding on school achievement is consistent with conservative arguments that increased funding has not resulted in significant improvement in achievement. Of course, disparities in school funding are often

inextricably linked to race and socioeconomic status. Black students are also disproportionately likely to be of lower socioeconomic status, which research has consistently shown to be negatively related to achievement (Sirin, 2005). However, McWhorter conveniently ignores these facts and their implications. Education scholars have long argued that funding gaps contribute to poor school performance and lower academic achievement for Black students (Ladson-Billings, 2007).

Tracking in School

McWhorter then turns his attention to tracking in school. Tracking is the practice of placing students in courses of instruction based on achievement or perceived skill level. The practice of tracking heavily relies on the use of standardized tests. McWhorter argues that, contrary to popular belief, there is no racial bias in tracking. He references four studies that support the idea that teachers do not place students based on racial bias, but simply by their prior performance. The studies he cites are in peer-reviewed journals, so it would seem that he finally has credible data to support his position. However, part of the issue here is around semantics. While it may be the case that there is no conscious racial bias involved in tracking (which I contend is still debatable), there is no question that there are racial disparities in tracking. In an ethnographic study, Childers (2011) found that there was racial stratification across three curriculums, with African American and other students of color being overrepresented in the lowest-level general college preparatory courses while advanced placement (AP) and international baccalaureate (IB) classes served primarily White students. Childers found that there were four reasons why racial stratification existed: (1) students chose to take lower level courses; (2) students of color needed to be directly recruited to apply to AP and IB classes; (3) African American students who applied for AP and IB classes coincidentally happened to not have the skills or abilities to be successful; and (4) recommendations against enrollment were perceived by students to be rejection, and thus they perceived that they were not allowed to enroll. Childers noted how discourses around individual choice and colorblindness dominated her discussions with White administrators when the issue of racial stratification was raised. Her observations of racial stratification in curriculum, and the reluctance to discuss reasons for racial stratification, is presented here as an example of a common experience in schools across this country. McWhorter argues that there is no racial bias in tracking, yet it is hard to determine whether this is the case when White teachers and administrators remain silent on race, or when they use the language of individual choice to suggest that the students want to be in lower-level courses. What he fails to do is to provide a deeper analysis that would ask why teachers and administrators find it acceptable that such racial stratification exists. McWhorter's