

Still Separate: Black Lives Matter and the Enduring Legacy of School Segregation in Rural Georgia

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Citation: Wilcox, S. M. (2021). Still separate: Black Lives Matter and the enduring legacy of school segregation in rural Georgia. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 37(7), 23–33. <https://doi.org/10.26209/jrre3707-04>

The purpose of this article is to critically probe racial discourse around how the convergence of Black Lives Matter (BLM) and white nationalist organizations complicate the reality of segregation, education, and social change in a rural community in Central Georgia. Critical race studies ground the work, using narratives as a device to frame and examine what school transformation can look like for Black people living in rural communities. The method for this study is a critical ethnography that draws on census data, school district achievement data, and informal conversations and interviews conducted in person and through social media. The findings from this research suggests that some African Americans in this rural community are beginning to embrace forms of segregation as a reparative compromise to dealing with racism in their community. The implications of this study contribute to the literature on race and education in rural schooling and community.

“They had ‘whites only’ signs for years but have the audacity to be offended by Black Lives Matter shirts.”
–Local Black woman participant

The purpose of this article is to critically probe racial discourse around how the transformative work of Black Lives Matter (BLM) complicates the reality of segregation, education, and social change in a rural community in Central Georgia. The Black mother quoted in the epigraph was reflecting upon the confusion she has experienced when local whites¹ claim that Black Lives Matters is a racist terrorist group, when history tells us that white supremacists have terrorized Black communities for decades. Although *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) made school segregation illegal in the United States, students in Cedarville (a pseudonym), Georgia, watch films and read books that depict armed federal troops enforcing the law

¹ I adhere to the Du Boisian tradition of capitalizing the B in Black. Please see language policy for further details.

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This article is part of a special issue of JRRE that explores Black Lives Matter and rural education. Click [here](#) to see the full issue.

JRRE is associated with the Center on Rural Education and Communities at Penn State, and is a publication of Penn State Libraries Open Publishing.

against illegal opposition of white people who do not want their children to attend school with Black children from Little Rock, Arkansas, to Montgomery, Alabama (Gillen, 2014). Education and community in a rural context have embedded within their history racialized inequalities and education policies that problematize this relationship.

Social behaviors in rural schools demonstrate that marginalized groups are excluded and limited in receiving equal educational opportunities because of longstanding histories and practices of racism and inequity in rural areas (Tieken, 2014). Social exclusions tend to highlight systemic inequity rather than the people who are being marginalized by this exclusion (Mills, 2003). Historically, elite white Southern planters and white urban industrialists did not approve of an equitable universal education system for Black communities. They believed that Blacks should remain marginalized and that whatever education they received should position them to become better economic producers (Anderson, 1988). This social vision for Black people by whites demonstrated that the only value they saw in Black people were as technologies of economic growth just as they had been in slavery.

Education policies, consolidation schemes, desegregation mandates, and funding formulas problematize rural schooling. School reforms mean reforms of culture and society in rural places. The findings from this research suggests that some African Americans in this rural community are beginning to embrace forms of segregation

as a “reparative compromise” to dealing with school segregation in their community.

Race, Rural Education in the South, and the Black Lives Matter Movement

Public schools have been charged with reducing racial achievement gaps to help mend relations between descendants of enslaved Africans and their former masters (Noguera & Wing, 2006). Guinier (2004) explained why legal recourse alone is not enough to abolish inequities and academic disparities in public schools. Rather, there must be community-based interventions that do not depend entirely on the government or law enforcement for assistance. Bell (1980) argued that *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) was not centered on a social justice framework that could move beyond calculated special interests of whiteness that preserved traditions in American history that treat Black civil rights as expendable. Southern whites and Blacks believed that it was important to educate their children. The quest to see who would control the education system led white Southerners to rally around a single ideology of white supremacy (Anderson, 1988). Leonardo (2004) explained that white supremacy involves actions and policies that whites enact to maintain dominance and privilege associated with whiteness. School contexts are places where the rights of marginalized students are subjected to a racialized hierarchy that privileges whites. White privilege does not solely refer to how whites are advantaged systemically over other racial groups, but how social ordering and power structures provide them with those advantages (Escobar, 2008; Harrison, 2019).

What do integration and equality mean when considering the kind of sociopolitical will needed to abolish systems of oppression? Fannie Lou Hamer’s definition of equality in the U.S. context and her desire to center human rights over the rhetoric of equality is a more comprehensive pathway. In 1964, a reporter at the Democratic National Convention asked her if she were seeking equality with the white man. Hamer answered, “No. What would I look like fighting for equality with the white man? I don’t want to go down that low. I want the true democracy that’ll raise me *and* the white man up ... raise American up” (Harding, 2010, p. xix). Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1968/2010) said that many whites in America struggled to treat Black people with a degree of decency, not equality, after the march on Selma and the passing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The notion of equality that was prominent during the Civil Rights era was a performative rhetorical distraction that concealed human rights violations that Blacks experienced then and continue to experience now. Dr. King posited that segregationists and other white citizens had more in common with each other than with Blacks, and that withholding state-sanctioned

violence from Black people temporarily was not the same as building a brotherhood. The social pathology that exists in public education systems in the United States reflects the persistent values and commitment of structural racial oppression.

“Black lives matter” as a slogan has disrupted uncontested beliefs about the rationale of equality, justice, and human freedom in the United States and globally (Davis, 2018). The rhetoric of terrorism has been assigned to the Black Lives Matter movement to discredit its antiracist work. Hate groups like the Klu Klux Klan, Skinheads, and Proud Boys—who are agents of violence—have never been labeled as terrorist organizations by the United States. The legacy of Jim Crow segregation and displacement is still present in the U.S. South, operating through structural racism that uses violence to oppress Black people and sustain a hierarchy of white male dominance over all others (Inwood, 2011).

White dominance has produced a political imagination that distorts the way whites perceive citizenship as a pathway to institutional political power over the racial other (Hooker, 2017). White grievance appears during times when white privilege is in crisis and white dominance is perceived to be threatened. When white citizens are indifferent to the suffering of Blacks and other marginalized groups, their response to this suffering becomes a sense of white victimhood (Hooker, 2017; Mills, 2007). White privilege rests on a legacy of white supremacy, which as a political economic system is founded on white racial domination (Litwack, 1998; Mills, 2003; Von Eschen, 1997). The problem of social transformation is its focus on resistance strategies against white citizens’ investments in racial politics that are antithetical to racial and social justice.

Reparative Compromise as a Conceptual Intervention That Rejects the Logics of the Persistence of School Segregation

Some Black scholars believe it is possible that a predominately white teacher workforce can effectively educate students from culturally and racially different backgrounds (Henfield & Washington, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2006). However, white teachers are not adequately trained to teach students across identity and difference within multiracial classrooms because they live segregated lives, which has implications for racial achievement and opportunity (Picower, 2009). Guinier’s (1994) notion of majority tyranny illustrates how racial dominance is designed to exclude non-white groups from becoming the ruling majority group in spaces of governance in order to ensure that white dominance is permanent.

Majority tyranny explains what the logics are systemically that inform segregation. Educators in the

United States, despite discursive contradictions, have not dedicated themselves to improving education for the poor (M. L. King, 1968/2010). Black teachers and administrators are woefully underrepresented in public schools (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). Narratives around the lack of Black teachers and administrators do not consider how the interpretation and implementation of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) pushed out many of the Black teachers and administrators who worked in the pre-*Brown* segregated school system. Black educators and leaders in the South before the *Brown* decisions were advocating for a type of school integration that would allow them to advocate, aspire, and access resources to educate Black children. However, Black educators and leaders found themselves in a predicament where what was supposed to serve and protect Black children became a mechanism to preserve the rights of white children (Heller, 2019; Siddle Walker, 2018)—what education historian Siddle Walker (2018) called “desegregation compromise.” The language of desegregation nationally was maintained while policies were designed and implemented to destroy any chance of Black educators and leaders’ receiving a fair desegregation (Heller, 2019; Siddle Walker, 2018).

Reparative compromise is an intervention that rejects the logics of school segregation that sustains Black suffering. It provides a grammar for thinking and talking about an organic process in which Black families in a rural community choose to move their children to a segregated school district in order to preserve their humanity and dignity, which allows them to achieve academically. A reparative compromise as conceptualized in this article is a sociopolitical performativity of Blackness that does not negotiate with and is not centered under the norms of whiteness. Sithole (2020) asserts that Blackness that is located outside whiteness in terms of political opposition is a threat to white liberals because white liberals desire politically to decide what Blacks can and cannot do. Black Lives Matter is a grammar and methodology for liberation in the rural community of Cedarville whereby the Black people there can heal from racial trauma in rural public schooling.

The Black Lives Matter movement has invigorated some Southern Black communities toward a kind of reparative compromise. Reparative compromise is also a grammar that allows scholars to talk about school segregation in the present tense and engage with the idea of what *separate but equal* really means. Students are taught that *Brown v. Board* (1954) made school segregation illegal in the United States while they are sitting in segregated classrooms (Gillen, 2014).

The Black Lives Matter movement is a transformative project in rural Cedarville County. It offers Black students and their families a framework for how to talk back to racial

oppression and create a transformative rural educational space that is absent of racial violence. This cultural politics of Black education creates a setting of healing from the Black suffering that some teachers and students experience through the pursuit of integration policies (Dumas, 2014). A new political imagination is required that espouses a vision for a desegregated education system that values the humanity of everyone and abandons discursive deliberations about best practices for social stratifications that leave Black children and their families struggling for basic human rights.

The injury of racial injustice produces anti-Blackness, dehumanization, and reduced social and economic opportunities for non-whites (Harrison, 2019). Segregation is a major factor in the preservation of racial inequality (Massey & Denton, 1993). Opponents to school integration resist policies that would change the current structure of public schools, which heavily advantages white students over all others. Integrationists believe that racial balance in public schools would also provide an even distribution of resources—one of the issues that the *Brown* cases hoped to remedy.

Legal scholar Lawrence (1980) said that the purpose of school segregation is to subordinate Blacks in society by providing them with inadequate resources and teaching them to feel inferior to whites. He posited that all whites benefit from segregation policies that reduce the educational opportunity of Black students. He asserted that white school officials are complicit in maintaining segregation systemically through school board policies. Lawrence believed that the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision ushered in a post-racial way of thinking about race in America both within the legal system and society. The purpose of post-racial logic is to neutralize the power of systemic racism and eliminate discursive engagement concerning race-based remedies (Cho, 2009). Post-racialism is reinforced by denying that structural racism exists.

Methods and Data

The research presented in this article is part of a larger ongoing critical ethnography. That project explores politics and cultural context of schooling in small urban and rural settings and interrogates systemic discriminatory institutional practices that harm and disadvantage students. Critical ethnography requires the ethnographer to have a certain command of theoretical knowledge that is used to comprehend, critique, and communicate what they engaged with and inhabited in the field (Madison, 2019). The researcher is a participant observer within the research site. Data reported in this study are preliminary findings in a larger longitudinal critical ethnography. The names of all participants and places are pseudonyms.

Research Questions

The two research questions of this study are as follows.

1. Can school segregation in a rural community offer a reparative compromise to Black families and students?
2. What does BLM look like in a rural community?

Site Description

Cedarville County is in the center of the state of Georgia; the population is 47,546 people. Cedarville County has two school districts. Cedarville County School District serves students who live in the more rural parts of the county while Cedarville City School District serves students who reside in the city of Cedarville. According to U.S. Census data from 2019, Black people make up approximately 38% of the population, and whites constitute 60%. The average annual household family income is \$37,369, and approximately 25% of people live in poverty.

Students who live in the most rural parts of Cedarville County are assigned to Cedarville County School District ($N = 6,958$); approximately 63% of the student body is white and 30% is Black. Students who reside within the Cedarville city limits attend Cedarville City School District ($N = 2,540$); 92% of the student body is Black and 3% is white. Most of the teachers who teach for the county school district are white, and all school board members and the superintendent are white. The city school district's teachers are predominately Black, and the school board and superintendent are Black as well. Cedarville City School District falls within the 90%–100% racial isolation rule of non-white students concentrated in a public school, which depicts serious school segregation (Mitchell & Mitchell, 2012).

The county school district's four-year graduation rate from high school is 87% while the city school district broke a record in 2020 with a four-year high school graduation rate of 92%—the highest graduation rate either school district has ever had. This achievement is important to note because academically Black and Latinx students did well on standardized tests during the 1970s and into the late 1980s, when integration efforts were at their height. During the 1990s, however, Black and Latinx students' test scores began to decline when there was a resurgence of school segregation (Anderson, 2004). Rosiek (2019) reported that Black children who attend segregated schools perform worse on standardized tests and have lower graduation rates, but the Black students who attend the segregated school district in this research study contradict that finding.

Study Participants and Data Sources

Research participants were selected using convenience sampling. Data were collected online during the 2020 calendar year and took place strictly online due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. Data were drawn from U.S. Census reports, Cedarville County academic district reports for both school districts, informal interviews, local media reports, and conversations with participants on social media. Participants granted consent to participate in the study online as long as their identities remained anonymous. All participants were adults and parents in the school districts included in this study.

Social media platforms such as Facebook have become an important tool for Blacks in Cedarville to provide and receive information about community happenings. The transformative work of these kinds of digital Black publics (Squires, 2016) within the rural Black community of Cedarville allow members of the community who once lived there and those who have remained to organize and communicate with each other in the long struggle for Black equality.

Researcher Positionality

I am a Black working-class woman who was born and raised in Cedarville County, Georgia. As a Black feminist scholar-activist, my interest in school racial oppression stems from my own experiences attending school in Cedarville County School District. During my sophomore year of high school, I was suspended from school for a week for “sassing” or talking back to my history teacher, who was an older white woman. She taught the class that Black people were happy as slaves until the Yankees came along and messed everything up. I disagreed with her, and she then told the class that the only reason I was intelligent was because my skin was brown and that meant that I had white blood in me. Only three Black students, including me, were in the class, and all were female. I stood and called her a liar and told her that she was unfit to teach. She sent me to the office to receive a paddling for talking back to her. Cedarville County School District is the number one school district in Georgia that uses corporal punishment. I refused to accept the paddling, and the principal called my grandmother, with whom I was living at the time, to pick me up.

When my grandmother arrived at the school, she found me waiting for her in the office. The principal told her what I had done, and she asked him about why the history teacher was allowed to talk to me like that. The principal said that because my grandmother did not have a college degree, she was in no position to question anything the teachers taught

in their classes. I was furious! My grandmother gave me the death look and told me to be quiet. When we got into the car, she told me I needed to choose my battles better, or I would be hanging from a tree for “talking hard to white folks.” I told her that I did not fear white folks. She said that it was important to live to see another day so that I could continue to fight.

Later that night, I overheard her talking to some of her friends on the phone. These ladies had all grown up during the Jim Crow era in Cedarville, and their grandparents had all been former slaves in Cedarville who were freed through the Civil War. My grandmother’s friends called her by her nickname, Zeke. One of the ladies said, “Tell us what she told that white *omen* [woman]?” My grandmother responded, “She told her *youse* a lie and *youse* unfit to teach.” The ladies burst into laughter in the sheer delight that I sassed a white woman. They keep repeating what I had said and laughing about it.

I was in the back bedroom, devastated that I had been dehumanized by teacher. Talking back is a political act of resistance that challenges systems of domination that seek to dehumanize and silence the oppressed (hooks, 2015). This study encompasses the histories of Blacks who have suffered and fought systemic oppression not only in the quest to become educated in rural formal educational settings, but to be considered full citizens of humanity.

Analytical Lens: Post-Racialism

This article uses the concept of post-racialism as a discursive lens to understand what the qualitative data in this research imply. Cho (2009) posited that post-racialism eclipses the centrality of race and racism in society and is a dangerous ideology that seeks to forge a national rhetorical strategy to get the public to abandon race-based remedies on the grounds that racist eras of the past have ended. An example of this type of national rhetorical strategy came from the White House in September 2020, when former President Trump signed Executive Order 13950, banning diversity and anti-racism trainings within federal agencies and agencies funded by the federal government. In the order Trump called these trainings “divisive” and “un-American,” asserting that the ideology behind these trainings is “rooted in the pernicious and false belief that America is an irredeemably racist and sexist country.” Courses on critical race studies were specifically called out and deemed to be un-American.

The discourse of white school officials regarding a racialized incident in the Cedarville County School District is aligned with post-racial ideology. Cho (2009) asserted that post-racialism as an ideology serves to sustain unchallenged white normativity and insulate it from criticism, which

ultimately restores whiteness to its full pre-Civil Rights value. Racial remedies and conversations about race and racism are contested along with acts of collective political organizing and resistance from groups who are injured from systemic racism. Here is where a clear distinction in the debate about the categorization of white nationalist groups and the Black Lives Matter Movement emerges.

The slogan “Black lives matter” is antithetical to the purpose of segregation, which is to render Black people inferior to whites. The slogan was not designed to be inclusive of everyone because everyone is not targeted for state-sanctioned violence and death—as Black people are in the United States (Khan-Cullors & bande, 2018). Post-racialism as a discursive analytic will provide a lens to draw inference and meaning from the qualitative data in this study and help illuminate some possible reasons why the national political will to end school segregation does not exist.

Language Policy

A language policy is a means of language planning that describes the influences and context of how and why language is organized in certain ways (Johnson, 2011). Therefore, I do not capitalize the term “white” when using it to describe a racial category unless it is the first word in a sentence. Here, I follow the Du Boisian tradition of capitalizing the word Black to acknowledge and render respect on the page for African Americans. Comments by research participants were cited as written and brackets are used to for comprehension and clarity in certain places.

Findings

The findings in this study suggest that the academic and social achievement of Black students is the result of the reparative compromise that is reflected in the organizing discourses of Black mothers who enact some of the core principals of Black Lives Matter to reveal how post-racial ideology of school districts harms Black students and their communities. This section provides an example of what the Black Lives Matter movement looks like in rural Cedarville County. The reparative compromise is a way for Black people to conceptualize their own political imagination for how they want to organize themselves both in society and within institutions where they can be treated and valued as equal human beings. This political imagination is not possible if the central methodology for achieving it is solely dependent upon the current racial system of exploitation and white supremacy. Black people in Cedarville are embracing the notion of separate but equal by modeling how Black segregated classrooms can be reparative against institutional racial violence.

“Defacing a PUBLIC School Bus”

A few days after the 2020 presidential election, a local Black mother was driving to work and saw a Cedarville County School District bus with pro-Trump and MAGA messages painted on the windows. This mother took pictures of the school bus with her cell phone and posted them (Figures 1 and 2) to Facebook with this comment:

“Wow...on my way to work and I pass a Cedarville County school bus with this Trump 2020 and MAGA Gang.”

This mother shared these images on Facebook to let others in the Black community in Cedarville know what happened. The MAGA slogan is a coded message to those who espouse beliefs about white power and identity (Demby, 2013; J. E. King, 2017), and to many non-whites it represents sentiments of anti-Blackness. After the mother posted the

Figure 1

MAGA Slogan Written on County School District Bus



Figure 2*Pro-Trump Writing on County School District Bus*

photos on Facebook, a community conversation emerged about the racial behavior between the predominately white county school district and the mainly Black city school district. All the participants in the conversation below are Black mothers from the local community.

Meka: Idk [I don't know] who thought that defacing a PUBLIC school bus with ANY political affiliation was ok...Cedarville County Board of Education, this should be looked at EXPEDITIOUSLY!! It's bad enough the things I hear about kids being taunted, but this is a mess!!!! Smh [shaking my head]

Sheneka: The sad thing is that I can pretty much guarantee that nothing is going to be done about it. The trump [participant did not capitalize name] 2020 was painted on the front two windows & if that bus has a camera the camera doesn't pick up those seats & nobody is going to snitch on who did it. Therefore, CCBOE is only going to put out a half ass apology. What's even more sad is that the bus driver probably allowed it.

These comments suggest that public acts of racism against Blacks in Cedarville County School District are normal, and that members of the Black community do not expect that anyone will be held accountable for this kind of behavior.

Meka noted that she has heard “about [Black] kids being taunted” within the school district. It is public knowledge that Black kids in the county school district often experience racial bullying by school officials and some white students.

The conversation also suggests that Black parents do not trust school officials to protect their kids against racial violence. The discussion continued with comments from other community members.

Renee: [responding to Sheneka] the bus driver was the team’s coach and I also heard the team had a send off this morning.

Pam: The sad part is I’m sure there were some adults, including the bus driver, who saw this before they even pulled off...Completely Unacceptable because if it was the other way around...well lemme hush...I just hope this situation is handled correctly! They know better!

I tagged a county school board member on the thread, asking if he or any member of the school board had heard of the incident. The school board member messaged me privately to say that he had not heard of it. He said that he was a new member of the board and that his role would not start officially until January 2021, but he would call other board members to discuss it. Comments from other community members included the following remarks.

- Cedarville City High would never!
- If you don’t want a racist bigot allll on the bus windows COME TO CEDARVILLE CITY HIGH in Suge Knight voice.
- No one should EVER!! Idc [I don’t care] who supports who, it should NEVER be allowed to be written all over a PUBLIC school bus!! Even if all the students were Trump supporters that is not the time nor the place to display support no matter who it is!!

A Black participant stated, “Cedarville City High would never!” The reason for this response is that Cedarville City High has a predominately Black student population and school leadership team. During the pre-*Brown* era, Black students attended what is now Cedarville City School District. Blacks have organically segregated themselves back to the school district they once had, but now they have public resources to support educating their children. The fact that commenters emphasized the word “public” reveals that participants were aware that the school bus is public property and is funded with public money.

The final sentence quoted above underscores a sentiment that Black community members of Cedarville feel—that everyone understands that systemic racism has always been prevalent in the county and within the educational system, but boundaries should be exhibited when displaying public acts of racism within our shared social and political institutions. The public school bus is a symbol that represents the longstanding historical entanglement of racism and rural schooling. Some Black mothers posted the following comments on Facebook regarding the incident.

- Girl I saw this mess...if that’s how our taxes being spent, I want a refund...whoever did it should be fired...cause they know better!!!
- They were traveling to a cross country meet. The coach was the bus driver and aware of it all as well as the parents that were there for the send off.
- Oh wow!!! A coach did that? Does anyone know what the school has said? This isn’t called for. Children who don’t know anything about politics shouldn’t be sporting it like they do..in a school setting at that!

After the photos of the school bus were posted to Facebook, some Black community leaders got involved and asked Cedarville County High for an apology. This incident is an example of what the Black Lives Matter movement looks like in rural Cedarville: Black community members in Cedarville post information on Facebook about Black people undergoing racial duress, and the Black community collectively takes action and calls for redress.² The Cedarville County High School principal posted this statement on the high school’s Facebook page 24 hours after this incident occurred.

Today, a bus carrying [Cedarville] County High School’s cross country team members travelled down the interstate with political references written on the windows. The students decorated the bus for their ride to the state meet and did not understand the inappropriateness of displaying political statements on school property. All writings have been removed from the bus and we regret this incidence occurred. At [Cedarville] County High School, we try to maintain a positive, neutral learning environment for all our students.

² In other situations, community members have called for boycotts of businesses that discriminate against Blacks in town, and everyone acts as one to support the boycotts.

During the time of this incident, presidential election votes were being counted, and it looked like Georgia would flip from a red state to blue. Georgia did flip to blue, and the Electoral College votes went to Joe Biden. In the ensuing months, Trump supporters have been holding rallies in support of his election fraud claims to overturn the results. The Cedarville County High School students' actions showed their support for the Trump campaign. The principal's statement revealed what the politics of rural schooling looks like through a post-racial lens. Race and racism do not exist because we have Civil Rights-era legal decisions and laws that make school segregation illegal while students who attend segregated classrooms write racist political graffiti on the public school bus declaring support of a racist presidential candidate.

Discussion

The school-community narratives around the school bus issue reveal the racial division of rural public schooling in Cedarville. These narratives highlight how local citizens assign belonging and ownership to the schools in both districts and determine what behaviors are deemed acceptable. Rural identity is shaped in part during the schooling experience (Wilcox, 2020). As one participant said, "Cedarville City High would never!" Cedarville City High School is a Black majority school. School desegregation efforts began in Cedarville during the early 1970s, and many Black students in the county at large did not want to integrate. Cedarville County School District has had a reputation for racial bullying, while Cedarville City High and the school district as a whole belong to Blacks.

Black parents often move their kids from the county school district when racial bullying becomes too extreme. Black parents' decision to remove their children from the county school district is a reparative move to place their children in an educational setting that is not dehumanizing to them. Mette and colleagues (2016) have researched other rural school districts that struggle with similar issues of school belonging and ownership. Post-racialism discourse presents race and racism as harmless and seeks to neutralize the effects of racial injury while perpetuating activities that define equality on white terms in the name of unity (Cho, 2009).

An example of this phenomenon is found in the statement issued by Cedarville County High School's principal regarding the bus incident. The principal said that the students "did not understand the inappropriateness of displaying political statements on school property." However, the school officials and parents who were present and allowed them to do it knew better but did not stop it. One study participant said, "they were traveling to a cross country meet. The coach was the bus driver

and aware of it all as well as the oparents that were there for the send off." The principal's post-racial discourse regarding the incident insulated and neutralized the racial act from criticism by placing responsibility on the students' ignorance. The principal concluded the statement by saying that all the writings had been removed from the school bus. "At Cedarville County High School, we try to maintain a positive, neutral learning environment for all our students." Post-racial rhetoric retreats from the idea that race and racism is present systemically. There is no need for racial remedies and discourses in "neutral learning environments" because racism does not exist. It provides an illusion of a false racial universalism whereby everyone is treated equally.

Conclusion

The discussion in this article grapples with the operationalization of racial oppression in rural schooling that creates and maintains the purpose of segregation. The underlying question of whether a sociopolitical will to improve race relations and truly integrate our public school system *still* remains. Black Lives Matter as a social movement has pronounced a declaration that Black people's lives matter and that cuts through the heart and purpose of segregation.

BLM has also provided a methodology for some Black people in rural areas like Cedarville to embrace aspects of segregation in social and public life in order to restore and sustain their humanity. History tells us that Black parents and community members have always supported the education of their children by founding schools, providing financial and other supports to existing schools, participating in school boycotts, and using lawsuits to fight for educational equity (Anderson, 1988; Siddle Walker, 2000). For race relations to improve in our society, the first steps require white people to take responsibility for their own complicity in, and benefits from, structural forms of racial inequality (Dumas, 2013). The rural Black community in Cedarville is taking a reparative approach to envisioning school transformation and a political imagination of racial remedies that position them socially and structurally in society as full human beings.

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