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INTRODUCTION

The reason that kids fail is that there is not a lot of home support. Education is not important.

—Teacher, Franklin Junior High School

They [teachers] only see the Black kids as "deprived." They don't see kids' strengths . . . Teachers need to understand Black kids better. . . . These are issues we would be dealing with if we were serious about [racial] disparities. We deal so much with discipline that we don't get on with the real restructuring. We need time in the team for the larger issues but we don't think about our strengths. If you look at the agenda it's always about so and so student. Each teacher is doing their own thing. They've just taken the path of least resistance and each one is just going back to his or her own style or philosophy

—Teacher, Gates Junior High School

They [teachers] spent a lot of time training, worked night and day to put the program together. They did everything but tap dance. We've done our level best. Teachers gave up their time during the summer, but as soon as we go out on a limb, they [the school district] cut it off. It's racial. That's what the whole thing is about. They try to cover it over by talking about the quality of the program but the real issue is heterogeneous grouping. It's going to take generations, lifetimes, for things to change.

—Administrator, Franklin Junior High School

Some [upper-middle-class White] parents think that when their kids get to junior high school they will be able to say that they are supporters of the public schools, and they'll put their children into the public schools, but that their kids can be isolated and tracked. The real bottom line is that they don't want their kids going to school with Black kids. That's what we're fighting. . . . They try to discredit and destroy what you're trying to do. The problem in this community is that it's a very difficult context in which to make reforms. No matter what, you always have to deal with this opposition and they try to wear you down.

—District administrator, Riverton Public Schools

The issues and contradictions resonating here are ones I heard and saw played out over 3 years as I followed the progress of school restructuring in one city and its implications for African American students. Race, social class, and power. Isolation and division as well as collaboration. Cultural models of African American students as deprived and deficient counterposed against appreciation of strength and possibility. These were the themes echoing in voices of teachers and administrators, manifest in decisions on educational practice and policy, and salient in the responses of various members of the community. They reflect a web of cultural and political contradictions in the schools and in the broader contexts in which schools are embedded.

The Education of African American Students and School Restructuring

In this book I examine how these contradictions shaped educational change. On one level, the book is a story about two schools in a medium-sized Southern city with a limited vision of school restructuring. On another, it is a story with broader implications because life in U.S. schools generally is shot through with these same issues of power rooted in race, class, gender, and ethnicity, in teachers' ideologies and school culture, and in broader social structures. It is the specific questions this book takes up that make it relevant in the current educational and social context. At the heart of the book is the intersection of two central issues in American education today: the failure of schools to educate students of color and school restructuring.

The overwhelming failure of schools to develop the talents and potential of students of color is a national crisis. The character and depth of this crisis are only dimly depicted by low achievement scores and high rates of school failure and dropping-out. More profoundly, these outcomes are indicators of deeply alienating and unjust educational experiences. These experiences, in turn, point to a wider set of oppressive social and economic conditions, cultural marginality, racism, and disempowerment that is daily reality for millions of children of color in the United States today.

At the same time, the demands of a postindustrial age, the explosion of knowledge in all fields, and a flourishing of curricula aimed at higher forms of literacy are creating a mandate from inside and outside the educational establishment for sweeping educational change. Proponents from a wide range of social positions argue that even students who are successful on conventional measures of achievement are failing to develop the skills and dispositions needed for the 21st

century. Since the early 1980s, much of the impetus for education re-
forms has come from corporate interests that have tied the global
decline in U.S. business competitiveness to a decline in academic "ex-
cellence" (Business Higher Education Forum, 1983; National Commis-
sion on Excellence in Education, 1983). But educational researchers
and advocacy groups have also argued that serious inequalities in
educational experiences and outcomes (Firestone & Rosenblum, 1988;
Quality Education for Minorities Project, 1990) and the failure of schools
to produce "thoughtful" students (Sizer, 1984) demand fundamental
changes in the content and structure of schooling. Moreover, the chang-
ing demographics of the school-age population (and demands of
marginalized groups) have pushed educators and concerned policy-
makers, to reshape schools in ways that are more responsive to racial,
ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity.

The compelling idea that schools must be fundamentally re-
structured has given birth to countless local and national efforts. As
changes in organization, governance, the role of teachers, curricu-
lum, instruction, and assessment have begun to unfold, the central
question is: Will they make a qualitative difference in students' edu-
cational experiences? In particular, in this book I ask, will these
changes make a difference in the education of those children whom
schools are most failing—especially low-income working-class chil-
dren of color?[1] Will reforms challenge educational inequalities and
move beyond narrow definitions of individual achievement toward
preparing children for participation in democratic public life? Un-
derlying these questions is a broader vision of education that works
against inequality, honors multiple perspectives—particularly the
knowledge and experiences of marginalized groups, and helps stu-
dents become active participants in shaping a more just and demo-
cratic future for themselves and society as a whole. It is this vision
that motivated me to write this book.

The book challenges common assumptions about the potential
for organizational change and teacher empowerment to engender
change in educational practice and policy. In particular, it questions
the relationship between these reforms and change in the stance edu-
cators take toward educational experiences of African American stu-
dents. The book brings to the foreground the relationship between
school restructuring and the constellation of social forces that shape its
direction—teachers' ideologies; the culture of the school; how reforms
are framed; and the historical and present socioeconomic context,
particularly structural inequalities and relations of power in schools,
school districts, communities, and the broader society.

I take up these issues through a case study of two urban, junior high schools, which I call Gates and Franklin, located in a Southern city I call Riverton. (All proper names and places throughout the book are pseudonyms.) I describe and compare the process of educational change in these two schools. My interest is in the relationship of the changes in school organization, teacher collaboration, and teacher-led initiatives brought about by restructuring and the intellectual and social experiences of students. In particular, I focus on the role restructuring played in teachers' beliefs about and practices with African American students who, as a group, were intellectually, culturally, and politically marginalized and who were in greatest danger of school failure, alienation, and dropping out.

This study encompassed a short span in the life of an educational reform. Both schools were in the beginning stages of restructuring during the period of my research, and the book is limited to educators' ideologies and practices as I understood them in this initial phase. Because it was premature to analyze the effect on students, I concentrated on the impact on educators. Nevertheless, by tracking the evolution of educators' practices and beliefs, as well as changes in school policy, I infer consequences for students. On the basis of studies of race, class, and education, I go on to surmise what some of the implications of these consequences might be for low-income working-class African American students.

The educators in this study brought to their daily work with students and with each other their social identities and complex ideologies and their normalized ways of viewing students who were often very different from themselves. I describe ways in which teachers' and administrators' educational and social beliefs and commonsense understandings, their racial and class identities, and their relative positions of power within the school influenced their attitudes toward students, their educational practice, and their response to reforms. I was especially interested in studying dialogue and collaboration among teachers of different backgrounds and perspectives. More broadly, I examined the ways in which teachers' and administrators' actions were mediated by the cultural, social, economic, and political contexts within which they operated. In Riverton, parents, community members, and teachers viewed restructuring through the long lens of historical struggles over race and class, and the dynamics of reform were played out within present-day relations of power and privilege.

Race and class interests were so intertwined in Riverton that it was difficult to separate them and to say which had a greater impact on the schools and the events I describe in this study. The influence of upper-middle-class White parents surely accrued from their social class

positions as a local ruling elite of corporate lawyers and businesspeople with connections to city and state political leaders. They not only secured privileged positions for their children within Riverton's public schools but were perhaps the dominant force on the school board. Maintaining political stabilty was certainly in their class interest, and representatives of this group were quite explicit about the need to improve the quality of the schools to attract investment to the city. Yet, the salience of race and the dominance of White interests was also clear. Prominent influential parents and local elites belonged to the all-White country club and all-white social clubs, and some African American students from professional families experienced what they described to me as racist treatment, particularly in unfair discipline actions. Riverton was a city seared by legendary resistance to desegregation. Race—racial divisions, power, and privilege—was the leitmotif that seemed to run through both the talk and the silences of nearly everyone I encountered over 3 years in Riverton. How race and class relations and the schools' and community's cultural norms affected the actions of educators and the potential of educational change became a central issue.

Although this book is a critique, it also illustrates the possibility of transforming schools. In the Riverton context, there were teachers who embodied in their educational philosophy and practice and their beliefs about African American students the seeds of a more culturally responsive and enabling educational experience. This book is about them also—their role in school change and the consequences of their role for a dialogue about the purposes of restructuring. It is part of my argument that educators, such as these teachers, represent potentially transformational leadership for school change.

My overarching concern is how educational reform may prompt educators to transform beliefs, practices, and policies in ways that nurture, intellectually challenge, and promote the agency of all students, but especially those whom schooling, as it is presently constituted, has most failed. Hopefully, what I have learned through this case study can inform projects that will lead toward more transformational change elsewhere. Finally, by examining restructuring in a specific social context, which is embedded in wider national contexts, I wish to focus attention on the necessary connection between educational and social change.

Education Reform and Social Transformation

There may be little teachers can do to alleviate the social and personal crises many children face. The litany of problems—unemployment, growing impoverishment, lack of adequate health care and

housing, violence—is familiar. These are symptoms of profound eco-
nomic and social dislocations which require far-reaching economic and
social transformation. Schools alone cannot ameliorate these condi-
tions. In fact, contrary to the rhetoric of influential national reports of
the 1980s that blamed schools for the nation's economic difficulties
(Business Higher Education Forum, 1983; National Commission on
Excellence in Education, 1983), the current state of American educa-
tion is itself in many ways the product of economic and political policies
and actions of U.S. monopoly capitalism. The political and economic
system—not the schools—should be held accountable for the current
economic and social crisis.

   However, schools are not neutral. Critical studies in the sociol-
ogy of education (Apple, 1995; Giroux, 1983) hold that schools are
"contested terrains," crucial arenas in which the struggle over ideas,
values, and power in society are acted out. In the politics of everyday
life in schools, in the ideology and practice of curriculum and social
interaction, dominant social relations are both reproduced and con-
tested, influencing curricular and policy decisions and institutional
norms and values (Apple & Weis, 1983). For example, schools are key
institutions in which the knowledge of those who hold economic and
social power is transmitted and legitimated (Apple, 1979). And the
knowledge and dispositions, or cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977), of
dominant groups is rewarded while that of subordinated groups is
negated (Keddie, 1971). Through differential distribution of knowl-
edge and skills, schools socialize and sort students for unequal posi-
tions within the social division of labor, thus helping to reproduce
social inequality (Oakes, 1985). And schools legitimate inequality along
lines of class, race, ethnicity, and gender. But in the sense students and
teachers make of what goes on in schools, they may resist and disrupt
these processes (Apple, 1995). There is always a struggle. Teachers and
students may acknowledge diverse lives, histories, cultures, and mul-
tiple sources of knowledge and redefine curriculum to bring the expe-
riences of women and marginalized racial and ethnic groups to the
center (McCarthy, 1993). Teachers may quite consciously support edu-
cation as transformative social practice by helping students critically
examine dominant culture and power relations and by taking a critical
stance toward knowledge (Freire, 1993; McLaren, 1989). Thus, the
contest over what knowledge is legitimate and how student identities
are constructed, as well as which groups of students have access to
what knowledge, is central to what goes on in schools.

   Schools are also neither neutral nor passive in the face of social
crises affecting youth from marginalized communities. Through

miseducation and institutionalized failure, schools contribute to students' alienation, dropping out of school, and lack of a sense of power to act on the world (Fine, 1991), thus reproducing social inequality and disempowerment. Alternatively, schools can be centers of democracy and community coherence, building students' intellectual and cultural resources for social change in partnership with parents (Giroux, 1988; Gutstein, Lipman, & Hernandez, 1997; MacLeod, 1991). Education can be a tool to strengthen the efficacy of persons of color on behalf of their communities (King & Wilson, 1990, Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1990). In this light, educational reforms that benefit working-class students and students of color and that promote their sense of personal and social efficacy may also contribute to community renewal and collective empowerment.

The issues I take up in this book—race and social class, teachers' ideologies and the culture of schools, the influence of power relations on individuals' actions and on institutional reform—transcend education policy and practice. They reflect broader social issues. Although education is just one arena where they are played out—it is a significant one. It is because of the importance of schools as sorting and socializing institutions and as sites where knowledge is constructed and student identities are formed that fundamental change in schools has wider implications. Accordingly, the potential significance of school restructuring is both its impact on individual students, teachers, and schools, and its broader social consequences. Schools that "prefigure the [democratic, multicultural] society we want rather than reinforce existing social and political arrangements" (Perry and Fraser, 1993, p. 17) are a step toward creating that society. An education that supports personal and social action is also essential to the development of leadership within disempowered communities and for the broader society. Thus, transforming the educational experiences and promoting the intellectual, social, and cultural excellence of marginalized groups is both an educational goal and an aspect of economic, political, and social empowerment. The possibility that educators and schools can play an active role in the process of emancipatory social transformation is a starting point for this study.

The Social and Economic Context of Educational Reform

School restructuring has specific meanings in relation to local settings—particular teachers and students, schools, and communities. But these meanings are also embedded in a wider social context, particularly an historical moment of profound economic and social

transformation, crisis and opportunity. Indeed, the challenges facing U.S. schools today are shaped by three powerful inter-related societal trends: (a) the transition to postindustrialism and the decline of U.S. global economic hegemony; (b) growing economic and social polarization along lines of race, class, and ethnicity; and (c) an increasingly diverse, multiracial, multicultural population.

It is hardly necessary to point out that low achievement, disproportionate assignment to low academic tracks and special education classes, high drop-out rates, and academic disengagement and alienation of students of color continue to be critical issues. Many of the compensatory and entitlement programs of the 1960s and 1970s were directed to reducing inequalities and improving achievement of students of color. Despite these efforts, and allowing for improvement in achievement and school completion rates of minorities since the early 1960s (Jaynes & Williams, 1989; Smith & O'Day, 1990), if current trends hold, many students of color will continue to face these problems (Joint Center for Political Studies, 1989; Quality Education for Minorities, 1990). In fact, according to the Education Trust, despite a 50% decline in the achievement gap between African Americans and Whites during the 1970s and 1980s, the gap increased between 1990 and 1994. In 1996, African Americans had the lowest average composite ACT and SAT scores of any nationality group (ACT, 1996; College Board, 1996). In 1994 only 40% of African American recent high school graduates not in college were employed as compared with 72% of Whites (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1996).

However, there is a qualitative difference in the current challenge to provide an equitable and empowering education to low-income children of color. Both the obstacles and the educational needs faced by people of color are being reshaped by profound macro-economic and social changes caused by the transition to postindustrialism and the decline of U.S. economic hegemony. A host of ruinous corporate and government policies over the past 45 years,[2] compounded by the revolution in information-based technology and new international centers of economic power, have engendered profound economic and social dislocations. These dislocations are reflected in the dramatic deterioration of industrial regions and urban infrastructures, a two-tiered economy, growing impoverishment, and crises of direction and values in social institutions, including schools. As a whole, these phenomena are, in general, severely undermining the standard of living and sense of future of working-class people (Rubin, 1994).

Growing economic and social polarization, by race and class, is manifested in trends in wealth and income distribution. While the top

20% of the population gained just under 99% of the growth in market-able wealth between 1983 and 1989, the remaining 80% of the population gained only a little over 1% (Wolf, 1995, pp. 12–13). Income also became more concentrated with the top 1% of households receiving most of the gain in income and the bottom 80% sustaining almost all the loss in income (Wolf, 1995, pp. 11–12). The effects of these trends are manifested in the growing impoverishment of children. Poverty is particularly acute for African American and Latino children who in 1994 had poverty rates near 42% (U.S. Dept. Of Education, 1996). In 1990 the poverty rate for African American children under three was 52% as compared with 42% for Hispanic children and 15% for White children (National Center for Children in Poverty, 1992). Low educational outcomes are one component of this acute economic and social crisis gripping poor students of color (Haynes & Comer, 1990).

For African Americans, ongoing racial discrimination is compounded by the economic and social transitions underway (Wilson, 1987). The revolution in technology places higher educational demands on workers, posing serious problems for unskilled and undereducated workers who no longer have access to high-paying, entry-level manufacturing jobs. At the same time, high-tech jobs have moved to suburban areas or other regions less accessible to inner-city residents. While some African Americans benefited in the 1970s and 1980s from affirmative action and enhanced opportunities for higher education, and went on to become professionals or win solid working-class jobs, today many working-class African Americans have experienced downward mobility, plunging into the ranks of the unemployed or underemployed (Rubin, 1994). Meanwhile, urban tax bases have eroded and with them physical infrastructures and access to decent schooling and health care (Kozol, 1991). Inner-city residents—overwhelmingly people of color—experience increased social isolation and threats to their communities from gentrification, marginalization from the mainstream, and political and social disempowerment. Despite the gains of the civil rights movement, current economic hardships and uncertainties have also begotten intensified racism, as reflected, for example in anti-immigrant legislation, African American church burnings and racial incidents on campuses, and efforts to roll back affirmative action. The implications of these trends for the entire society are a deep and growing polarization between haves and have-nots that is both interracial and intraracial.

Moreover, the nation as a whole is becoming increasingly multicultural and multilingual, with a growing proportion of the population composed of people of color and people whose first language is

not English. By the year 2010, 38% of K–12 enrollment will be "minorities," and by 2020, 48% will be children of color (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). African Americans and Latinos already are a majority of the students in most large city school systems (Quality Education for Minorities, 1990, p. 15), and people of color are a majority in many urban areas. In the future, Euro-Americans will be a numerical minority in the United States, and the proportion of those who speak English as a first language will also decline. Clearly, the education of students of color and language minorities has serious implications for the society as a whole.

While students are becoming more racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse, the teaching force is overwhelmingly White. In 1996, 89% of teachers identified themselves as White (Feistritzer, 1996), and many teachers say they prefer not to teach in low-income, urban schools (Zeichner, 1992). Nevertheless, there are also many dedicated teachers who choose these settings because they "want to make a difference." However, given the racial, ethnic, and class segregation in the United States. and the parochialism of many teachers' own educational experiences, most teachers are unprepared to teach children whose racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural background is different from their own (Zeichner, 1992).

But greater diversity presents fresh opportunities as well as challenges. A multicultural, multilingual population is a rich source of knowledge and talent for the society as a whole. Diverse cultures and social experiences enrich a nation's aesthetic, political, and ethical dialogue and its approach to social questions. Exclusion impoverishes us all. The African American experience and liberation struggle, for example, has deepened and expanded the moral and political vision of our society as a whole (Harding, 1990). In this context, schools must find ways to capitalize on the knowledge and culture of all children and to develop them to their full potential. Moreover, in a democratic society, equality and inclusion are moral imperatives. Justice requires not only equal opportunity but equality of social, economic, political, and cultural resources and participation. Beginning with the strengths of students' backgrounds, educators need to help students develop the knowledge, competencies, and sense of agency to participate fully in shaping our collective future (Trueba, 1989).

A measure of the relevance of educational reforms is the extent to which new initiatives address the challenges posed by structural change and growing inequality and by the extent to which they confront central issues of race and class inequality, racism, and the need to teach to racial and ethnic diversity. Whether educational initiatives

address these issues head-on, or whether educators and policy makers choose to side-step them, their impact on students' educational experiences and life chances is inescapable. Although these issues are central to our collective future, in the lives of working class students and students of color they are immediate and urgent. Their immediacy and their relevance to school restructuring is born out by this study.

The Social Construction of Public Problems and Public Policy

The public discourse about social problems and public policy is also part of the context of educational change. Public policy itself may be understood as a set of discursive practices that shape our thinking about public problems and define the universe of possible actions and practical choices. From this perspective, policy shapes how we define complex social issues and the range of solutions that appear rational. The essence of debate in public life, then, is over the construction of social problems and the broader cultural meanings various constructions evoke (Edelman, 1964; Reich, 1987). Although local discourses, policies, and interpretations owe something to a community's particular history and social relations, they can only be fully understood in relation to the broader, national discourse about public issues. Indeed, this national discourse, elaborated in popular media and policy analyses, is a potent cultural force shaping how we understand local problems and our response to them. In this way, it is part of the cultural context of educational reform in Riverton. Here I focus on the way desegregation has been framed and the national discourse about African American and "at-risk" students. The construction of these issues had an important effect on both the Riverton community and school district and on the direction of the restructuring project itself.

Analyzing the history of school desegregation since *Brown v. Board of Education*, scholars have argued that desegregation policy has been framed by what is in the interest of whites, has abstracted equity from excellence in education, and has been constructed as racial integration, thus avoiding the central problem of institutional racism.[3] For example, Bell (1980) argues that the history of school desegregation policy has not been formulated to ensure equal educational outcomes for African Americans and other "minority" groups. Instead, the remedies that have been devised are those that satisfy Whites. This "interest convergence principle" (Bell) (Whites support desegregation when it converges with their interests) resulted in magnet schools that provide quality education for Whites within contexts of racial integration and busing plans in which African American students bore the burden of

relocation to White schools. Levine and Eubanks (1986), in their dis-
cussion of magnet schools for desegregation, conclude that generally
Whites have not enrolled voluntarily in magnet schools they associ-
ated with a minority community, and upper-SES (socioeconomic sta-
tus) Whites have refused to attend magnets located in lower-SES
neighborhoods. Orfield (1978) notes that many excellent schools have
been under-enrolled by Whites for this reason. Magnets have only
been successful in attracting large numbers of White students when
minority enrollment is less than 30% (Rossell, 1979). Metz (1986) ar-
gues that in the context she studied the magnet school strategy was
successful in meeting the short-term goal of preventing White oppo-
sition by directing attention away from the goal of desegregation and
focusing instead on educational alternatives that would attract Whites.
The history is significant here because projects for educational change
cannot escape the concrete realities of school districts shaped by de-
segregation policies and the ways in which these policies have en-
sconced the interests of Whites over African Americans and other
people of color.

   Moreover, desegregation policy has been constructed as racial
balance, rather than equal access to quality education. Reviewing the
history since *Brown*, Judge Robert L. Carter, who was the NAACP
general counsel and leading attorney in the *Brown* case, said, "While
we fashioned Brown on the theory that equal education and inte-
grated education were one and the same, the goal was not integration
but equal educational opportunity" (Carter, 1980 p. 27). Framing de-
segregation this way substituted formal equality for universal access
to educational excellence.

   Kohl (1996/97) also argues that by constructing the issue as ra-
cial integration, we have ignored the main problem—institutional rac-
ism. Integrated schools remained White-dominated institutions (Scherer
& Slawski, 1979)—a characteristic of the schools in this study. Integra-
tion in the United States has been a one-way street. "African Ameri-
cans have been asked to go into schools with a dominant white culture
and power structure. That racism did not disappear when the schools
were integrated" (Kohl, 1996/97, p. 26), and it is one reason desegre-
gation, to the extent it occurred, did not lead to equal and quality
education for African Americans and other people of color.

   A second contextual feature is the national discourse about Af-
rican Americans as problems, or "problem people" (Height quoted
in West, 1993, p. 2). Scrutinized on TV and in public policy analysis,
African Americans are discussed, analyzed, counted, and displayed.
In popular culture, African American inner-city neighborhoods are

demonized as pathological, dysfunctional, and violent. The media is saturated with images of young African American males, as amoral menaces to (White, middle-class) society (Haymes, 1995). These images magnify deeply ingrained racist stereotypes and obscure the real strengths of supportive African American communities, families, and institutions. They also deepen the wedge between low-income African American communities and the rest of U.S. society, further fracturing a sense of public, collective responsibility for the socioeconomic conditions these communities are battling (Wallis, 1994). Missing from much of the public discourse about African Americans is recognition of the strength of solidarity, rooted in survival, that has characterized African American social life (Stack, 1974). This cultural onslaught against Black identity in the popular media negates the historical resistance, vitality, collectivity, and dynamic resilience of African American communities—strengths that have nurtured African American children and which are the core of continuing struggle (Haymes, 1995).

A related issue is the way in which public policy has constructed low-income and children of color as "at-risk." The "at risk" label operates as if it were a scientifically determined trait of youth who embody a diffuse set of supposedly perverse personal and social characteristics (teen pregnancy, drug use, resistance to school, school failure, dropping out, etc.). In popular use, "at risk" has become a signifier for race and class and a badge of deviance to be pinned on urban youth. Marking African American and other youth in this way provides two popular explanations for low school achievement: The students themselves lack ability, motivation, and character, and their families' social pathologies and deficiencies prevent them from succeeding (Cuban, 1989).[4] Thus, naming children "at-risk" directs attention away from institutional practices, policies, and ideologies and implies that widespread school failure is a rather natural consequence of these students' characteristics.

Education policies devoid of social justice, the demonization of African American youth as social problems, and the construction of equity as relevant to Whites only to the extent their interests are served—all are part of the fracturing of U.S. society. By portraying the economic and social crises, unjust education, and racism experienced by African American youth as African American problems, we reject our collective responsibility for each other and deny our interconnectedness (Wallis, 1994). One challenge of educational reform, at all levels, is to reframe these issues and to propose policies that generate a discourse of community and commitment to social justice.

Themes of Restructuring

Restructuring is ubiquitous in the current rhetoric of school-based educational reform. Under this slogan emerged national reform projects, the overhaul of some of the country's largest school districts, and thousands of local efforts. Organizations as diverse as the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, on the one hand, and IBM and the Business Roundtable, on the other, have produced their own blueprints.

The term *restructuring* implies a fundamental redefinition of the means and ends of education (Schlecty, 1990). However, in practice, restructuring carries a variety of meanings. Site-based management, steering committees of teachers and parents, collaborative management by principals and staff, instructional teams, reorganization of schools into houses or clusters, coordination of schools and social services, scaled-down bureaucracies—all have become common organizational features of schools that claim to be restructuring (Clune & White, 1988; Elmore & Assoc., 1990). Restructuring may also include national and local curriculum projects which redefine teaching and learning to emphasize problem solving and students constructing their own knowledge, interdisciplinary studies, and performance-based assessments of students' knowledge (David, Purkey, & White, 1989; Elmore & Assoc., 1990; Newmann, 1990). It also generally involves teacher participation in educational change and in the overall direction of the school as well as increased collaboration among educators.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, national commissions, policy groups, and teachers' organizations called for expanding the professional competence and authority of educators at the school site (Holmes Group, 1986; Shanker, 1990; Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, 1986). This enhanced role for teachers or "teacher empowerment" has become a major theme of school restructuring, creating new forms of organization for professional collaboration, teacher leadership, and expanded professional development (David, Purkey & White, 1989; Lieberman & Miller, 1990). In contrast with mandated, top-down reforms of past decades (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978), educators at the school level are encouraged to collaboratively plan and develop innovations in teaching and learning and other aspects of life in schools (Sirotnik, 1987). The goal is to give those who work directly with students the authority and flexibility to exercise judgment and creativity and to generate change from the bottom up.

Proponents of teacher-centered change (Holmes, 1986; Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, 1986) and of decentralizing schools and

school systems (Schlecty, 1990) argue teacher-centered reforms will facilitate innovation and result in improvements in teaching and learning. Although these reforms might be expected to revitalize teachers' work life, implications for students are not yet understood. and it is the consequences for students that are most critical. Certainly, restructuring must be evaluated by its enhancement of students' personal, social, and educational life in school and by the extent to which it increases their intellectual and social efficacy (Newmann, 1990). In my view, it must also be judged by its ability to address entrenched inequalities, ideologies, and practices that marginalize and alienate those students schools are most failing.

The schools I studied were just beginning to restructure. For these schools, restructuring meant reorganizing students and teachers into teams, teacher-led initiatives and greater teacher participation in school-level decisions, and teacher collaboration. Although there was discussion about redesigning instruction and curriculum, and organizational changes were meant in part to facilitate this, a framework for transforming teaching and learning was not at the center of their work, as is more typical of some national projects such as the Accelerated Schools (Levin, 1988) or the Coalition of Essential Schools (Coalition of Essential Schools, 1989). Consequently, this book does not focus on some of the issues and possibilities posed in those contexts. Rather, it addresses the kinds of organizational changes and teacher collaboration that the literature suggests are common in many restructuring schools. Although the particularities are specific to Riverton, I believe the representativeness of restructuring there makes this study relevant for similar efforts elsewhere (Schoffield, 1990). Moreover, as I have said, the dynamics of race, class, and power, so central to educational change in Riverton, are at the core of what happens in schools throughout the United States.

Methodology

I began fieldwork in Riverton in the summer of 1988 and continued through the summer 1991. During this time, I was also conducting a parallel and overlapping evaluation study of school reform in Riverton on behalf of a community collaborative and a national foundation that sponsored the reform. (See Methodological Appendix for a discussion of the evaluation study and implications of my dual role.) Although my fieldwork during the first 2 years gave me insight into restructuring at its inception, I collected the bulk of the data for this book during the 1990–1991 school year. As part of the evaluation study,

I was assisted, in all 3 years, by two local researchers who each spent about 2 days a week in the schools and occasionally attended district meetings. Because I was interested in school culture, social relations, and teachers' meanings—public and explicit, tacit and unrecognized—I used ethnographic methods (Erickson, 1986). Local researchers and I attended team and schoolwide faculty meetings, school board meetings, school steering committee meetings, various school functions and assemblies. We observed classes and informal interactions between teachers and students and among teachers and administrators, and simply spent time in the schools. We collected meeting agendas and minutes, descriptions of staff development activities and curricula, school and district policy statements, guidelines for restructuring, school schedules, and classroom handouts. Throughout the year, I conducted semistructured interviews (Spradley, 1979) and talked informally with teachers, nonteaching staff, students, school and district administrators, the teachers' union president, a few parents, community leaders, and social service workers. I interviewed the superintendent, restructuring director, and principals repeatedly during the year. All these people generously shared their insights, perceptions, and frustrations as well as documents related to restructuring. I also talked with several educational and community activists, African Americans and Whites, about restructuring and the politics and history of education in Riverton.[5]

I took notes during and after observations and interviews, and these were subsequently written up as field notes. Some student interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. Local researchers' field notes, oral and written reports, and notes from our monthly meetings are also part of the data. I iteratively coded the data by topic (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). Starting with a broad theoretical framework, I used a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to generate descriptive and analytical themes from these codes. These themes became the backbone of my analysis.

In order to observe the relationship of organizational reforms and ideological processes in some depth over time, I focused more intensively on two teams of five teachers at each of the schools. (See Methodological Appendix for a discussion of how I selected these teams.) Together, the four focus teams included all three grade levels and had somewhat different student and teacher compositions. Thus, they offered a range within which to study dialogue and change. I also concentrated on other contexts that offered new opportunities for teacher collaboration, exchange of ideas, and participation in classroom and school-level decision-making, for example, school steering committees and teacher-initiated collaborative projects.

All of these contexts provided an opportunity to explore the relationship of restructuring to educators' responses to African American students. Race and class were intertwined in these contexts. At Gates, it was difficult to disentangle race and class in teachers' perceptions about African American students and their practices with them because most were low-income. In retrospect, at Franklin, it was possible to sort out race and class because the vast majority of students, African American and White, were working-class, but I did not frame the study to disentangle race and class, and my data are insufficient to elaborate this issue. This, frankly, is a limitation.

The Study from My Point of View

The researcher is the principle medium of ethnographic research, and research decisions and interpretations are filtered through her subjectivity. As with any methodology, the ideological dispositions, identity, and perspectives of the researcher influence what she sees and how she sees it (Peshkin, 1985). The key is to triangulate data and to be conscious of ideological, cultural, and personal assumptions and how they influence selectivity in observations, as well as one's interpretations. In addition, the researcher needs to be conscious of how her participation influences events, discourse, stated beliefs, behaviors, and other factors and to take advantage of this participation to gain additional insights (Metz, 1983).

I began this project with a strong point of view. I believed that the negative educational experiences of children of color are rooted in their oppression in society and that daily life in schools can reproduce, disrupt, or transform dominant relations of power. I believed that academic failure and student alienation must be analyzed through an examination of educational policy and practice. My goal throughout was to understand how schools can be changed to support the efforts of marginalized students and communities to transform their lives.

This point of view motivated my research questions, as well as my scrutiny of educators' practices and beliefs, school district policies, and the change process itself. It led me to probe educators' definitions of school success and to investigate the social context of educational reform. And it led me to examine the place of White and African American students, staff, and parents within the schools in this study. It also led me to look for ways in which reforms might create opportunities to support the empowerment of African American students. This stance also shaped the writing of this book. Thus, the book advocates for moving the condition of students of color and other marginalized groups to the center of discussions about school restructuring. I am also conscious

that the power of advocacy within academic scholarship is premised on the honest and systematic gathering, presentation, and analysis of data, as well as openness to unexpected interpretations. Throughout, I tried to be reflective about my own perspectives, to look for countervailing evidence, and to triangulate data.

Over the course of 3 years, five people worked on the two-person local research teams. The data they gathered complimented my study of Franklin and Gates. Although there were different individuals in these teams over 3 years, each team was composed of an African American female and a white male. The teams included a former principal, a teacher, a journalist, an education researcher, and a cultural worker—all long-time residents of Riverton. Two had children who attended public schools. Several had been active in school and community affairs, and they introduced me to people with a history of involvement in educational issues and desegregation in Riverton. In addition to being colleagues, these local researchers were significant and diverse sources of information about the school district and community. Their intimate knowledge of the schools, the city, and the state supplied a context within which to situate, triangulate, and interpret my observations and interviews. Our dialogue was a significant means of checking and elaborating my perceptions and of interpreting data. My conversations with Rivertonians from a wide range of social locations, experiences, and connections with education and the community also informed my interpretations.

A White Northerner in a Southern Setting

Interpretations of racial dynamics are inevitably filtered through one's own racially specific experiences and consciousness. For Whites, there is the danger of normalizing Whiteness—assuming that one's experiences reflect the norm and seeing those who are different as *other*. As a White female, my consciousness is obviously not shaped by the historical experience of racial oppression or by the solidarity that has evolved out of a common struggle against racial oppression. These are significant limitations in a context in which issues of racism are central.

These limitations were perhaps somewhat mitigated by my previous years of teaching in a predominantly African American school that stressed African American cultural-centeredness, an awareness of racism and racial dynamics, and my history of social activism in which persons of color were the majority and racism was a central concern. It also helped to compare my own perceptions with other members of an interracial research team in which we made racial issues a consistent topic.

Being White can be a barrier to winning the trust of people of color in the research setting, but, because I frankly initiated discussions about race and racism, African Americans and Whites concerned about these issues became quite open with me about their views. Some considered me a potential ally because I was associated with a project, or at least a foundation, that some educators saw as an advocate of African American students. As a result, the majority of my closest informants were African American teachers who consistently shared their opinions and concerns with me. Still, my interpretations of African American perspectives are clearly those of the outsider.

Frank questions about racial disparities had the opposite effect with some White educators. Their discomfort at broaching the topic of race was an indication of the sensitivity of racial issues. On the other hand, I was occasionally the recipient of unsolicited confidences from some White teachers and counselors who initially assumed I would be sympathetic to their complaints against African American teachers and students because I was White. These confidences broke through the veneer of color blindness that pervaded much of the public discourse in both schools. As a whole, the variety of reactions I encountered from African American and White teachers indicated the existence of multiple racial perspectives behind a public facade of racelessness. Ultimately, my interpretations of meanings about race will be measured against my informants' own voices—White and African American—in this book.

A second issue was regional differences. I can hardly overstate the cultural dissonance I experienced as a Northerner conducting research in a Southern school district. It became apparent early on when I found my words and behavior frequently being misunderstood and discovered that I was all too often confused by the behavior of others. Although I became more familiar with life in the two schools and in the city over time, I continued to feel very much an outsider. This cultural distance from many of the people I was observing and talking with has to be acknowledged in my interpretations. Nevertheless, I strove to understand events and ideas from the viewpoint of the Riverton teachers and administrators themselves and in the context of their history. Checking interpretations and perceptions with local researchers helped me develop a feel for the encoded meanings of what I was seeing and hearing. Although I was an outsider, I saw the Riverton schools and community in a way that perhaps natives of the area did not see it.

Regionalism had an effect similar to race, in that some teachers and administrators mistrusted me because I was a Northerner. They

were quick to point out that non-Southerners could not understand the unique history and culture of the South and that educational solutions devised elsewhere were inappropriate for them. Conversely, some African American and White teachers perceived that my Northern origins distanced me from traditional Southern race relations and the particular history and culture of Riverton. Consequently, they considered me a potentially sympathetic outsider. In our conversations, they were quite openly critical of the racial dynamics in their schools and shared their perspectives on Riverton's history of school desegregation.

Plan of the Book

In the following chapters, I discuss and compare restructuring at Gates and Franklin. I analyze the implications of the reforms for teachers' beliefs about and practices with African American students, the effects on school policies, and the ways in which reforms were mediated by ideological, cultural, and structural factors. I pay special attention to the role of several exemplary teachers of African American students and the implications of their participation for the direction of restructuring. In chapter 2, I situate my research questions in explanations for the school performance and educational experiences of students of color, assumptions about school restructuring and teacher-centered educational change, and the role of cultural change in transforming schools. In chapter 3, I describe the historical and social context of the study, the city of Riverton, the Riverton School District, the two junior high schools, and the restructuring process there. Chapter 4 launches the case studies with a typology of teachers' ideologies regarding African American students and the configuration of these ideologies in each of the schools.

The next four chapters describe and analyze the process of restructuring in the two schools. In chapters 5 and 6, I describe and analyze how teachers interpreted restructuring at Gates Junior High School and the implications for African American students there. In chapter 5, I focus specifically on two ninth-grade teams and the actions and dialogue of these teachers as they began using new opportunities for collaboration and collective decision-making. Chapter 6 examines restructuring schoolwide at Gates. It discusses the principal's perspective and the influence of the school's culture and of ideological and political forces beyond the school on the direction of restructuring there. Chapters 7 and 8 develop a comparative analysis at Franklin Junior High School. In chapter 7, I describe and analyze the activities

of a seventh- and an eighth-grade focus team and compare them with the focus teams at Gates. In chapter 8, I discuss the ways in which school culture, competing ideologies, and the school's and principal's position within a hierarchy of power in the district influenced how restructuring unfolded, drawing comparisons with Gates. In chapter 9, I describe three exemplary teachers and their roles in the restructuring process. I examine the implications of their role for the nature of dialogue and change at both schools. In the concluding chapter, I return to the assumptions underlying restructuring and examine them in relation to the process of change at Franklin and Gates. The chapter also discusses the relationship between restructuring and ideological, political, and structural factors in schools and the broader social context. It examines the relationship of educational change, social change, and power and the role of exemplary teachers and advocates of marginalized students in promoting transformative change.

It is my hope that this book will contribute to understanding the relationship of school restructuring to students' experiences in school. My analysis highlights the importance of ideology and relations of power in educational change. Although my conclusions are constructed from what I have learned from the efforts of a group of educators in a specific context, I expect that the ideological and political processes I uncover reflect wider patterns. My aim in writing this book is to spur dialogue about the fundamental premises of educational change, its focus and direction in relation to social justice. I hope the insights gleaned from this project will be of value to teachers, administrators, and others who conceive and implement educational reforms, to parents and community members concerned with educational equality and justice, to those who make educational and social policies, and to those who study educational change. In writing this book I have tried to follow bell hooks's (1989) reminder that to speak in a language accessible to all of us is a political choice about whom we are speaking to, whom we want to hear us, and whom we want to motivate with our words.