

# **SCHOOL DESEGREGATION AND THE PIPELINE OF PRIVILEGE**

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## **Abstract**

The struggle to end racial segregation in America's public schools has been long and arduous. It was ostensibly won in the 1954 *Brown v. Tulsa Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling. But racist resistance has been intense. Years later, extensive school segregation remains for Black children. The High Court has essentially overturned *Brown* without explicitly saying so. This paper assesses the effects of educational desegregation that has managed to occur. Discussion concerning the results of desegregation has revolved around test scores and the difficulties involved with "busing," but the principal positive effect is often overlooked: namely, that *the substantial rise of the Black-American middle class in the last half-century has been importantly enhanced by school desegregation*. This paper reviews the educational backgrounds of eighteen Black Americans who have risen to the highest status positions in American politics and business in recent decades. They represent the desegregated Black cohort who succeeded because desegregation enabled them to break into the nation's deeply established *pipeline of privilege*.

**Keywords:** School Desegregation, Pipeline of Privilege, Racial Segregation, Black American Middle Class, *Brown v. Board of Education*

## **BRIEF HISTORY OF THE RACIAL DESEGREGATION OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

White supremacists over the past six decades have managed to roll back the historic 1954 U.S. Supreme Court *Brown* ruling outlawing racially segregated schools. Black American children in the nation's public schools are today virtually as segregated as they were prior to *Brown*.<sup>1</sup>

In 1955, the High Court undercut its historic desegregation ruling with a vague "all deliberate speed" order. The White South, quite deliberate but rarely speedy, viewed this order as a sign of weakness. This second decision had the unfortunate, if unintended, consequence of heightening opposition to the original decision. Resistance groups called White Citizens' Councils—basically middle-class Ku Klux Klans—sprang up throughout the South.

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Consequently, scant progress was made for a decade. In response to this delay, three strong Federal Court rulings emerged. In 1968, *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County, Virginia* struck down a so-called “freedom of choice” attempt to avoid desegregation. In 1971, the *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* decision established that desegregation required affirmative action—including the “busing” of students throughout Charlotte’s metropolitan area. In 1973, *Keyes v. School District No. 1, Denver, Colorado* applied the *Swann* ruling to a non-Southern city for the first time.

In reaction to this progress, strong resistance to school integration developed—led by President Richard Nixon, who sternly opposed the “busing” needed to achieve it. This opposition gathered strength as it seized on the claim of massive “White flight” from cities to avoid desegregation. Bolstered by the publicized assertions of sociologist James Coleman, conservative judges began to use it as an excuse to roll back desegregation orders (Orfield and Eaton, 1996).

The “White flight” argument ignored two key points. First, the Coleman analysis was seriously flawed. While White families did move to the suburbs and private schools more during the first year of integration, it was basically a “hastening up” effect. That is, large urban districts that started school desegregation did not lose significantly more White students over the critical 1967–1976 period than did districts that remained racially segregated. Phrased differently, desegregating districts were already losing White families before the process and after a few years would have lost just as many White families without any desegregation whatsoever (Farley et al., 1980).

Second, the “White flight” phenomenon was especially acute in huge cities such as Detroit, MI where the High Court flatly rejected metropolitan plans for school desegregation in *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974; Pettigrew 2004). But in smaller cities, such as Richmond, VA,<sup>2</sup> Lexington, KY, and Wilmington, DE, metropolitan plans were far more feasible.

Court-ordered school desegregation plans were generally effective in reducing racial segregation. But as soon as continued court oversight was removed, their desegregation began to fade (Reardon et al., 2012). Adding to the problem is that right-wing judges, even on the U.S. Supreme Court, have been openly dismissive of relevant social science evidence when it does not support their personal beliefs (Pettigrew 2021).

Thus, it was not surprising when, in 2007, the U.S. Supreme Court reversed the historic *Brown* decision without directly saying so. A five-judge majority, all Republicans, held narrowly-tailored desegregation plans of two school districts—Seattle, WA and Jefferson County, KY—to be in violation of the Equal Protection clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment (Tropp et al., 2007). They ruled this because a few White children had been denied access to the schools of their choice in order to further racial desegregation and because prior state *de jure* segregation was not directly involved.

This sweeping ruling prohibited assigning students to public schools solely for the purpose of achieving racial desegregation and declined to recognize racial balancing as a compelling state interest. These decisions directly affected hundreds of other desegregated school districts. Earlier, four lower Federal courts had consistently upheld the Seattle and Jefferson County plans to be constitutional; but these rulings were abruptly overturned.

Ironically, just a few years before in 2004, the nation had celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of *Brown* as a great step forward in American democracy. Accordingly, the Seattle and Jefferson County cases that essentially ended *Brown* can be seen as great steps backward for American democracy. They made *race* alone an unacceptable constraint for limiting school choice, while no such restrictions have ever been explicitly applied to such other categories as gender, religion, social class, and disabilities (Minow 2010).

These two decisions, together with Detroit's *Milliken* anti-metropolitan decision, marked the twenty-first century's partial return to the nineteenth century's infamous *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896).

## RECURRING PROBLEMS WITH SCHOOL DESEGREGATION

Black Americans endured two types of burden for their desegregation efforts. First, hundreds of qualified Black educators were vindictively fired, especially in the deep South. White supremacists vainly hoped that this would deter Black efforts. Second, desegregation typically involved Black students giving up their own schools to attend as minorities in predominantly White institutions. As a Black Virginian succinctly phrased it: "It felt like being a visitor, but in many ways an unwanted visitor in somebody else's house" (Schneider 2021, p. 27).

Two books look closely at the later effects of *Brown* (Pettigrew 2011). Martha Minow's book, *In Brown's Wake: Legacies of America's Educational Landmark* (2010), concentrates on the worldwide significance of this landmark decision. A Harvard law professor who clerked for Associate Justice Thurgood Marshall, she shows how the *Brown* decision has shaped cases involving immigrants, gender, religion, other minorities, and the disabled. Indeed, the decision has even influenced foreign litigation from the Republic of South Africa to the Czech Republic. It seems that *Brown* has had a greater effect for other groups than it has had for Black Americans for whom it was intended.

The second book, *Both Sides Now: The Study of Desegregation's Graduates* by Amy Wells and colleagues (2009), surveys the ensuing lives of 268 Black and White graduates in 1980 of six racially desegregated high schools located throughout the nation. 1980 was chosen as desegregation's high point prior to the reactionary Reagan era. The results reinforced several important earlier findings—namely, that color-blind strategies in these schools did not work well (Schofield 1997) and competition from private schools led to the use of public-school resources being heavily spent to keep White parents content (Clotfelter 2004).

Nevertheless, these products of interracial schools, both Blacks and Whites, had more positive attitudes toward each other than products of segregated schools. Yet, they have not been able to exercise their beliefs in later life. Both the Black and White respondents reported how difficult it had been for them to stay in touch with their other-race friends and to live in interracial neighborhoods. They had changed, but American society had not changed enough to accommodate their altered racial views.

## DID SCHOOL DESEGREGATION EXPAND BLACK OPPORTUNITIES?

Unfortunately, much of the discussion concerning educational desegregation's effects has focused on test scores. But achievement test scores are poor predictors of college or occupational success, particularly for African Americans (Fleming 1990; Jencks et al., 1972; Marston 1971; McClelland 1973).

More to the point, did school desegregation expand opportunities for Black students? Early studies reported promising results (Pettigrew 2004). Relevant research, mostly longitudinal surveys, tracked the initial products of mixed racial schools. Not all these studies used probability national samples nor removed potential threats to validity. Yet the consistency of the results from this research using different and broad samples forms an often-replicated syndrome of positive and interrelated effects. With social class

controlled, Black children from desegregated schools, when compared with Black children from segregated schools, were found to be more likely later: (1) *to attend and finish majority-White colleges*; (2) *to work with White co-workers*; (3) *to live in interracial neighborhoods*; (4) *to have somewhat higher incomes*; and (5) *to have more White friends and contacts and more positive attitudes toward Whites*. Similarly, White products of desegregation were found in these early studies to have more positive attitudes toward Blacks than comparable Whites from segregated schools.

A larger, more rigorous study that looked at the long-run impacts of interracial schools was needed. In 2011, the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) supplied the crucial research (Johnson 2011). It analyzed many types of data on more than 4000 children born between 1950 and 1975. With its varied data and advanced statistics, the NBER research found that previous studies had actually underestimated the positive effects of interracial education for Black children.

While court-ordered school desegregation did not influence White educational outcomes, it significantly improved such important Black outcomes as graduation rates, later annual earnings, and adult health. For Black men, interracial education as a child even sharply reduced (14.7%) the probability of being in jail by age thirty. But there was some indication that desegregation not accompanied by an increase in school resources slightly reduced these positive effects.

Rucker C. Johnson (2012) followed up this research with an innovative check on the outcomes of interracial education for the children of the desegregated Black students—aptly named “The Grandchildren of *Brown*.” With cohorts born since 1980, he uncovered results—enhanced math and reading test scores plus greater likelihood of high school graduation and college attendance—that revealed that the positive effects of educational desegregation had significantly extended into this next generation. These grandchildren of *Brown* were also more likely to choose more selective colleges that had greater student diversity. Johnson further demonstrated that part of these effects can be traced to school quality. Thus, desegregated parental education proved to be a causal determinant of generational mobility. This ground-breaking research reveals how educational opportunities have important cumulative and lasting effects.

## THE PROCESSES BEHIND DESEGREGATION'S BENEFITS

This pattern of positive lifetime effects of desegregation does not primarily reflect test score gains. Far more important are a range of processes at all three major levels of analysis.

### Micro-level Process: Desegregation erodes avoidance learning

After long facing discriminatory treatment, some Black Americans learn to avoid Whites (Pettigrew 1964). But this understandable reaction closes off better opportunities that exist beyond the ghetto. It also keeps one from knowing when the situation has changed. Finally, avoidance heightens the stereotype threat phenomenon (Steele 1997). This threat arises when one is performing a task for which a negative stereotype exists for your group.

### Meso-Level Process: Desegregation involves interracial contact

Intergroup contact is one of social psychology's most firmly established theories (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2011). A meta-analysis found that out of 515 studies focusing

on Intergroup Contact Theory, 93% of them show that intergroup contact reduces prejudice of many types (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006, 2011).

### **Macro-Level Process: Desegregation makes it possible for Black Americans to break into America's pipeline of privilege**

Information about colleges and jobs flows largely through all-White networks. Desegregated Blacks can gain access to advantages and opportunities available through these White social networks. This does not require close personal friendships (Granovetter 1973). Weak interpersonal ties are the most informative, because close friends are likely to possess the same information. There is also a contagion process. In largely White, upper-status high schools, the question is not whether you are going to college but to which colleges you are applying.

Thus, school desegregation enables African Americans to break through the monopoly that White Americans have long had on informational flows and institutional access (Braddock and Dawkins, 1984). These processes mirror the harsh fact that life chances in the United States importantly flow through White-dominated institutions. Jomills Braddock (1980) focused on this phenomenon and named it *perpetuation theory*. He showed that Black students in interracial high schools were significantly more likely to attend interracial colleges than those in segregated schools. Later studies supported perpetuation theory; they found that school segregation even shaped later housing choices (Goldsmith 2016; Stearns 2010).

The present article extends perpetuation theory by maintaining that interracial education can lead to Black Americans gaining the ability and status to pry open the domain of special privilege. Products of interracial schools are viewed more positively by White gatekeepers, and this in turn allows further advancement up the ladder. In short, the pipeline of privilege enjoyed by many prosperous White Americans is cumulative. Entry at an early stage greatly enhances the probability of advancing to the next stage.

Popular parlance speaks loosely of “White privilege.” But the pipeline of privilege emphasized in this paper is more complex. It involves the interaction of race, social class, and gender; its beneficiaries have traditionally been not only White but also wealthy and male. It would be a great surprise to the White residents of Kenover, WV, one of the very poorest towns in the nation, to learn that they were “privileged.” Lower-status Whites are generally not able to enter this pipeline. So, when they perceive that a growing number of African Americans are gaining this access, it ignites two types of threat. Black progress not only invokes envy and resentment, but also evidence against deeply held racist theories of White superiority. Have they ever been labelled “gifted” or headed a major corporation? This leads some White Americans to turn to extreme right-wing politics as seen in the 2016 American presidential election and the violent 2021 insurrection attempt. Indeed, racial prejudice as well as a sense of relative deprivation proved to be major correlates of the Trump vote in 2016 (Pettigrew 2021).<sup>3</sup>

In support of these contentions, I review the educational experiences of those Black Americans who, in recent years, have risen to elite positions not open to Blacks in the past—leaders in politics and business.

## **BLACK AMERICANS IN THE “PIPELINE OF PRIVILEGE”**

### **Political Figures**

The first three cases are obvious—Barack and Michelle Obama and Vice-President Kamala Harris. All three had desegregated educations that placed them firmly and early in the pipeline of cumulative privilege.

### **Barack Obama**

Growing up in a middle-class White home, Obama was accustomed to interaction with Whites. According to his insightful memoir, *Dreams from My Father* (Obama 1995), his breakthrough to the pipeline came when he obtained a scholarship to attend Honolulu's elite private college preparatory school, Punahou. Having had his first four years of education in Indonesia, Obama entered the fifth grade and remained in the posh school until his graduation in 1979. There were only a few other Black students at Punahou, and he reports being uncomfortable except on the basketball court where he made some close White friends.

On another scholarship, Obama came to the mainland to attend Occidental College, a small, mostly White private college in the heart of Los Angeles. Here he became active in the movement for the divestment of the school's investments in South Africa and learned he could effectively influence others with his oratory (Obama 1995). His next step up the privilege ladder was a transfer to Columbia University after two years at Occidental. He majored in political science at Columbia, then spent four years in Chicago as a community organizer before being accepted to Harvard Law School. He excelled and became the first African American editor-in-chief of the *Harvard Law Review*. Each step—from Hawaii to Los Angeles to New York and finally to Cambridge—marked his advancement along the pipeline of privilege.

### **Michelle Robinson Obama**

Growing up in Chicago, Michelle Obama was selected by her public school as gifted and placed in advanced classes. Next, she was enrolled in a citywide interracial magnet school for gifted children. The Whitney Young Magnet School boasted Black students in a slight majority. Her achievements in this special situation won her a scholarship to Princeton University. Here she, too, felt uncomfortable (Obama 2018), and worried that the university had only accepted her because her older brother was a Princeton basketball star (and later a basketball coach at Oregon State and Brown Universities). Attendance at Princeton cleared the way for her acceptance in 1985 to Harvard Law School. So, Michelle's desegregated pipeline consisted of gifted interracial high school to Princeton to Harvard Law.

### **Kamala Harris**

The vice-president is a one-person testimony to America's diversity: a Tamil Hindu-Indian mother, a Christian-Jamaican father, and a Jewish-American husband. Harris and Barack Obama, according to the Pew Research Center (Tamir 2021), are among the rapidly growing 3.7 million multiracial members of the Black American population.

All members of Harris' immediate family became distinguished in their fields—her late mother an oncology researcher with a UC-Berkeley doctorate; her father a UC-Berkeley doctorate in economics and a retired Stanford University professor; and her sister a lawyer and former head of the Lincoln Law School in San Jose, California.

When in Berkeley's public schools, Harris was bused to the interracial Thousand Oakes Elementary School in 1970 for her kindergarten class—a fact she emphasized in the 2020 presidential debates. Her primary and secondary education took place completely in interracial schools. Then she entered predominantly Black Howard University in 1982 and returned to California to study law at the University of California's interracial Hastings College of the Law (1986–1989). Her rise to be the first woman and first non-White vice-president of the nation was preceded by her being elected as

district attorney of San Francisco (2004–2011), attorney general of California (2011–2017), and junior Senator for California (2017–2021).

### **Cory Booker**

Senator Booker of New Jersey is one of just three Black American Senators in the 117th Congress (2021–2023). He was practically born into the nation's pipeline of privilege. Both of his parents were executives at IBM, and he grew up in the small, overwhelmingly White, upper-status borough of Harrington Park, NJ. He attended the mostly-White Northern Valley Regional High School which was awarded the U.S. Department of Education's Blue Ribbon for excellence (1994–1996). He played football for the school and was named to *USA Today's* all-USA high school team.

Booker attended Stanford University where he obtained a BA in political science and a MA in sociology. He also starred as a tight end in football and was elected senior class president. He then secured a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford, where he earned a degree in U.S. history. Finally, Booker received his Yale Law School degree in 1997. His first two runs to be Newark's mayor were unsuccessful, but he persisted and won in 2006. This persistence capped by success argues for Booker running again for the presidency. After serving seven successful years as mayor, he became the junior Senator from New Jersey in 2013. Booker's whole remarkable career path, from elementary school to the Senate, has occurred snugly within America's pipeline of privilege.

### **Timothy Scott**

Senator Scott of South Carolina grew up in a one-parent household in North Charleston. Scott's path, too, reveals the pipeline theory of privilege although from a completely different part of the White world. He went to a Black high school, and then briefly attended mostly White Presbyterian College on a football scholarship before switching to Charleston Southern University. This overwhelmingly White institution is a strict Southern Baptist college that advertises itself as "the best Christian college in South Carolina." It was here that Scott entered the White world of religious fundamentalism.

This important right-wing segment of the state's politics has supported him in his steady climb up the political ladder—from Charlestown County Council (1995–2009) to South Carolina's General Assembly (2009–2010), and to the U.S. House of Representatives (2010–2011). In 2013, he was appointed to the U.S. Senate by then-Governor Nikki Haley. Scott won the post in a special election in 2014 and again in 2016. This notable career was undoubtedly aided by the Republican Party insight that the growing Black vote in South Carolina required a response.

### **Raphael Warnock**

The eleventh of twelve children of two Pentecostal ministers, Senator Warnock of Georgia grew up in poverty in public housing in Savannah. He took early courses at Savannah State University before entering Morehouse University in Atlanta, GA where he earned a degree with honors in psychology. Only after attending these two predominantly Black schools did he later go on to obtain three graduate degrees from New York City's predominantly White Union Theological Seminary.

Warnock may well be one of the few current leading Blacks who did not come up through the pipeline of privilege. He rose through Black church ranks and in 2005 became the youngest person ever to become senior pastor of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. His election to the U.S. Senate in 2020 was

made possible by a historically huge Black voter turnout. Perry Bacon, Jr., a well-known Black columnist and himself a graduate of Yale, lists Warnock as a prime example of a rising Black American who did *not* come through the pipeline of privilege (Bacon 2021). Growing Black voting strength in Georgia, famously organized by Stacey Adams, and not his White connections, won Warnock his U.S. Senate seat.

### **Chief Executive Officers**

Consider, too, the early educational opportunities afforded the rare eleven African Americans who in recent years have headed major American companies.

#### ***Ursula Burns***

Raised with siblings in a New York City housing project by a single mother who was an immigrant from Panama, Ursula Burns became the first Black woman to head a company (Xerox) in the Fortune 500 (2009–2016). Her entry into the privilege pipeline started with enrollment at the all-girls, then highly diverse Cathedral High School in Manhattan. She next obtained a BS degree in mechanical engineering from Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute (now part of New York University). Then she earned a MS in mechanical engineering from Columbia. This background led to a summer internship at Xerox that began her four-decade career with the company. Burns (2021) describes this extraordinary journey that overcame both sexism and racism in her pointed memoir, *Where You Are Is Not Who You Are*.

#### ***Rosalind “Roz” Brewer***

Like Michelle Obama, Roz Brewer attended an interracial public magnet school for the gifted—Cass Technical High School—when growing up in Detroit. She and her four siblings were the first of their family to attend college. Brewer graduated from predominantly Black Spelman College in Atlanta. From there, she entered into the pipeline of privilege by graduating from the University of Chicago’s Booth School of Business and then Stanford Law School.

Her business career has been extensive and has included leadership positions at Kimberley-Clark, Starbuck’s, and Sam’s Club. In 2021, Brewer became the CEO of the Walgreens Boots Alliance, Inc., and the only Black woman then head of a Fortune 500 company.

#### ***Kenneth Chenault***

The son of a dentist and a dental hygienist, Chenault grew up on Long Island and attended the highly diverse Alternative Waldorf School. There he was elected senior class president and captained sports teams. This promising and diverse start enabled Chenault to flow into the privilege pipeline—first as a history major at Bowdoin College and then on to Harvard Law School. He later served with success as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the American Express Company from 2001 to 2018.

#### ***Thasunda Brown Duckett***

Born in Rochester, NY, Duckett moved with her parents to Texas and attended San Houston High School in Arlington. This school is diverse with a majority of Hispanic students, but it receives low ratings in improving student test scores. Duckett started her climb into the privilege pipeline when she enrolled in the University of Houston.

A timely college scholarship from the Federal National Mortgage Association (known as “Fanny Mae”) made it possible for her to continue her education. This allowed her to proceed and obtain a degree in finance and marketing and later to receive an MBA at Baylor University’s School of Business.

Duckett’s business career took root at J. P. Morgan Chase Bank. From work on mortgages, she rose to become the head of Chase auto finance and then CEO of Chase Consumer Banking. In 2021, she became the CEO of the Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association of America (TIAA) and joined Rosalind Brewer as the second Black female CEO of a Fortune 500 company.

### ***Kenneth Frazier***

A Philadelphia native and son of a janitor and former sharecropper, Frazier was the CEO of Merck Pharmaceuticals from 2011 to 2021. Though growing up in a poor neighborhood of North Philadelphia, he managed to attend the city’s Masterman Laboratory and Demonstration School. This institution prides itself as a highly diverse international and multicultural school. He then attended Philadelphia’s Northeast High School, another highly diverse school. These institutions, together with his strong grades, got him into Pennsylvania State University. Now fully within the privilege pipeline, Frazier was accepted to Harvard Law School.

### ***Roger Ferguson***

In 2008, Ferguson became the CEO of the Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association (TIAA). He grew up in a middle-class family and won a scholarship to attend Washington’s private desegregated Sidwell Friends School. That put him, too, in the privilege stream. He then won a scholarship for a year of study at Pembroke College at Cambridge University. Next, he entered Harvard University where he obtained three degrees—a BA, a PhD in economics, and a law degree.

### ***Robert Louis Johnson***

Johnson is a co-founder of Black Entertainment Television (BET) who became the nation’s first Black-American billionaire in 2001. He was born in Hickory, MS as the ninth of ten children. His mother was a school teacher and his father a farmer. But the family soon moved to Freeport, IL. As an honor student at his high school, he gained entry to the University of Illinois where he received a BA in social studies. His full entry into the privilege pipeline came when he earned his masters in public affairs from Princeton’s Woodrow Wilson School in 1972.

After graduation from Princeton, Johnson was inducted into the television world with a job at the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. BET became the first Black-controlled company to be listed on the New York Stock Exchange in 1991.

### ***Robert Frederick Smith***

Born to two school teachers who each had attained doctorates, Smith—at more than \$8 billion net worth—is probably the richest Black American. He grew up in a middle-class Denver neighborhood. While still a high school student, with great persistence, Smith obtained a Bell Labs internship designed for college students. He developed a reliability test for semiconductors.

After this auspicious start, he attained a BS degree in chemical engineering from Cornell and an MBA in finance and marketing from Columbia. Smith was by now firmly entrenched in the privilege pipeline.

He worked at Goodyear, Air Products, and Kraft Foods as a chemical engineer before turning to technology investment banking at Goldman Sachs. Then he founded Vista Equity Partners, which has become a major player in Silicone Valley financing. Smith is best known as a leading philanthropist, especially for racial causes. He received widespread publicity in 2019 for paying off the entire student debt of Morehouse College's graduating class. This positive publicity was somewhat clouded by a later brush with the Internal Revenue Service over unpaid federal taxes.

### ***Jide Zeitland***

Boasting the most diverse background of this group of CEOs, Zeitland was briefly the CEO of Tapesty, Inc., a purveyor of luxury accessories. Born in Lagos, Nigeria, he was adopted at the age of five by the Zeitlands—an American world-traveling journalistic family. He attended the same school in Nigeria with the Zeitland's daughter. As he grew up, he lived for extended periods in Pakistan and the Philippines with his adoptive parents. After studying at New England private schools, he majored in economics and English at Amherst College and, once on the privilege track, he got his MBA at Harvard Business School.

### ***René F. Jones***

CEO of the M&T Bank, headquartered in Buffalo, NY, Jones is the son of a Black American father and a Belgian mother who met in the midst of World War II. He grew up in Ayer, MA near Fort Devens where he attended interracial schools and earned his BA from Boston College and his MBA from the University of Rochester. Like Barack Obama, Jones not only experienced interracial schooling all his life, but also grew up in an interracial family—the third multiracial member of our group of eighteen eminent Black Americans.

### ***Marvin Ellison***

The former CEO of J.C. Penny department stores, Ellison is now the CEO of Lowe's Home Improvement stores. He only half fits the recurrent theme of gaining access to the pipeline of privilege early in life. He was born one of seven children on an impoverished farm outside of the hamlet of Brownsville near Memphis in the southwestern delta of Tennessee. His early education was racially segregated. But he later enrolled in Memphis University, a largely White school with a substantial Black American presence. This marked his entry into the privilege track, and once in it, Ellison made the most of his opportunities. After obtaining his marketing degree from Memphis University, he ventured on to earn his MBA from Emory University in Atlanta.

Note how fourteen of these eighteen talented people, including both Obamas, got their final push into elite circles via the Ivy League—six of them at Harvard University. This is not a coincidence. Harvard was one of the first major White universities to seek out highly talented Black Americans—as it had done long before with W. E. B. DuBois (BA 1890, MA 1891, PhD 1895). But in doing so, Harvard College officials have tended to seek talent from predominantly White institutions where they had trusted contacts and were accustomed to looking for White talent, such as Chenault's Waldorf School

and Ferguson's Sidwell Friends School.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, Harvard Law School routinely looks for promising talent at other Ivy League Schools, such as the Obamas' Columbia and Princeton Universities. That is how the access network operates from stage to stage. And in the past, these "natural" pipelines typically operated to exclude Black Americans intentionally or unintentionally. Indeed, much racial discrimination in American society is unintentional and unnoticed by Whites (Greenwald and Pettigrew, 2014).

While these examples illustrate the point, the reader can check the backgrounds of many other prominent Black Americans and will commonly find that this process of gaining entry into the world of privilege is a critical part of their careers. Consider a further example:

### **Lester Holt**

Lester Holt, from whom millions of Americans get their nightly news from the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), is a California native of mixed Jamaican background. Holt's formative years at Cordova High School and Sacramento State University were spent in predominately White institutions.

## **SUMMING UP**

The pipeline of privilege does not operate in all areas of American life. The exceptions tend to be in areas, such as sports, where the dominant presence of Blacks and sheer talent makes success less dependent on special access to the privilege pipeline. LeBron James comes to mind. Sought after for his athletic skills, *he* chose to attend predominantly White St. Vincent–St. Mary High School in Akron, OH.

Social class is also involved, of course, but note that most of our examples grew up either in poverty or in modest middle-class homes. This made invaluable the many timely scholarships these eminent people received at crucial times in their educational careers. It is also interesting that four of these successful people (Obama, Harris, Johnson, and Smith) had parents who were teachers.

The eighteen cases reviewed in this paper were obviously not picked at random. They represent the very top echelon of Black participation in government and business: all three Black Americans at the presidential and vice-presidential level; all three Black members of the U.S. Senate; all eleven Black CEOs of major companies; and a foremost television newscaster. Arguably, these are eighteen of the most influential and powerful Black leaders in America today. Only one—Senator War-nock—seems not to have benefited importantly from early entry into the White-dominated pipeline of privilege.

Too much focus has been given to the micro-effects of school desegregation (e.g., changes in test scores and racial attitudes), while ignoring the later-life constructive meso- and macro-societal effects of the process. The extensive 2011 NBER study previously described found that desegregated schools led not only to improved test scores but also to higher annual earnings and better health as adults (Johnson 2011). And Johnson's (2012) follow-up research found these positive outcomes of desegregated schools even extended to the next generation of Black pupils. This present paper extends these positive outcomes of desegregated education still further to include the possibility of talented Black Americans cracking into the nation's pipeline of privilege.

We can hope for two interrelated future trends: many more Black Americans able to join in the nation's pipeline of privilege and the pipeline itself becoming less necessary

for Black success. As the Black American middle-class expands, we will witness more examples like Senator Warnock rising to prominence without having benefitted from the largely-White structures of access to privilege.

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## NOTES

1. This is true although desegregation involving Latino American children has markedly increased (Meckler and Rabinowitz, 2019). This point is often obscured by pro-segregation writers who claim massive interracial schooling is now the national norm.
2. I served as an expert witness in the metropolitan desegregation case in Richmond—my hometown.
3. This same phenomenon involving immigrants can be found operating in the pro-Brexit vote in the United Kingdom and in right-wing voting throughout Europe (Pettigrew 2021).
4. I remember this well, because I taught at Harvard from 1955 to 1980. As a University of Virginia graduate, I too, like other Whites, was a beneficiary of the access network.

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