Black Youth Educational Under-Achievement Problem:

How Peer Influence, Societal Attitudes, Education Policy, & Family Circumstance Unite to Maintain this Problem in the Ontario Public School System

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Abstract:

This research paper is concerned with the problem of black youth's educational underachievement in Ontario public schools. The general aim of the thesis is to demonstrate that this problem is not one that education policy makers are interested in finding a 'fix' for, even though it has been a mainstay on their debate agenda for three to four decades now. To be sure, black youth's academic under-achievement in Ontario's public school system is an issue usually taken up very seriously by education stakeholders; however, the position taken in this paper is that most often debate tends to be focused on one aspect of the issue: the problem known in academic circles as deviant peer influence (DPI). It is proposed that this focus on DPI functions to prevent much needed light being shed on some underlying factors that may better explain the problem of black youth's educational under-achievement in Ontario public schools. The general position taken in the paper is that the long history of anti-black sentiment, contemporary economic and social marginalization of black people, and discriminatory policies and practices in the Ontario public school system, are all factors that combine to produce the deviant black-youth-identity we talk so much about today. In developing this position, the paper draws on extant scholarship and complementary statistical records; with the particular aim of showing that any serious attempt to 'fix' the black youth's educational under-achievement problem must include direct attention being paid to the above factors. For if such attention is not taken seriously, we cannot rightly say that Ontario's public education officials are keenly interested in fixing the problem of black youth's underachievement within Ontario public school.

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Rationale/Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this qualitative research study is to delve into the many layers of societal distracts that have hindered the educational progress of black youths. The paper seeks to provide reasonable evidence as to what contributed to the gap in literature on the topic surrounding black youth's under-achievement within Ontario schools. By probing into the ideas surrounding the activities and role of school policies and programs such as the equity and inclusive school policy, zero tolerance policy, streaming as well as curriculum design in Ontario public schools; this thesis will offer a starting point through which more scholars analyzing black youth's educational under-achievement and school policies the opportunity to indoctrinate Ontario schools and schools from other Canadian provinces. The research could provide in-depth insights for schools interested in finding out more concerning the high drop-out or failure rate among African Canadian minority students in their school community. This study seeks to explore topic of educational policy in Ontario by raising awareness over whether or not access to education is equitable and inclusive while drawing attention to the potential policy regimes which may be prolonging inequitable access and opportunity for black youths. If inclusion is paramount to ensuring that all students are given equal opportunity concerning education, then why are education policy makers or relevant authorities in favour of African centered schools when taking into consideration the impact of segregation on black people?

Basically as a woman from the minority group and having little children going to school, the above issue resonates with me. My personal experience as indicated somewhere in this research paper seeks to confirm my conviction.

Introduction

One of the foremost societal concerns facing Ontarians today is the so-called 'problem' of black youth's educational under-achievement. Education policy makers, school administrators, public officials, social scientists, social reform advocates, parents of these youths, together spend a great deal of time, energy and money discussing this problem. And there is good reason for the concern, and not simply because Ontario boasts the highest black youth drop-out rate among Canadian provinces. More important is that many of these youths end up with too much time on their hands doing nothing 'productive' with themselves and thereby making themselves targets for the Criminal Justice System (CJS). Thus there is a good reason for broad public and continued discussion on the concern of black youth's educational under-achievement within Ontario public school.

More specifically, too often these discussions begin and end with the same argument, which is that *deviant peer influence* (DPI) as the major cause of black youth's persistent academic under-achievement. According to this argument, black youths who become disenchanted with the public school system and eventually 'drop out' do so primarily because of the influence of their (supposedly) deviant friends. Public education policy makers and school administrators are most famous for posing this argument. While this argument cannot be off-handedly dismissed as invalid, the position taken in this paper is that this notion of *deviant peer influence* may be better appreciated if education stakeholders viewed the phenomenon as a tragic *symptom* of (social, political, as well as economic) forces beyond the control of these black youths, rather than viewing it as the *cause* of their school drop-out (or this or that other negative outcome) In line with the above statement of the problem, the paper is structured into five (5) chapters and develops along the lines of three (3) main interdisciplinary themes: (a) Education- the historical nature of anti-

black sentiment within Ontario schools, (b) Policy- discriminatory public education policies, and (c) Sociology- the social-economic marginalization of the black family.

Chapter (1) is meant to open up the question of why the black youths, among young people generally, find themselves carrying the brunt of social stigma commonly associated with deviant peer influence, or DPI. The focus of discussion here is on what 'peer influence' is generally understood to be insofar as the integral role it plays in the psycho-social development of adolescent youths.

Chapter (2) is devoted to an examination of the subtle social stratification blueprint known as 'race classification', a 17th century European design which sorted the peoples of the world into categories for the express purpose of subordinating, controlling, and exploiting them. The intention here is that, at the end of the paper the readers will have come to appreciate the necessity of this examination.

Chapter (3) presents an overview of the remnant effects of the 'race classification' practice as it is played out in some (Western) Ontario communities—and in particular in the 'common'/public schools—in the immediate aftermath of slavery (the 1840s), when black people fleeing from racial victimization in the U.S. (via the Underground Railroad) landed in these communities.

Chapter (4) is an examination of some of the more controversial Ontario public school policies and this includes discussions on: Ontario public school curriculum design, the Standardized Testing Policy (1996), the practice of Bottom Streaming, and the Zero Tolerance (Disciplinary) Policy.

Chapter (5) is developed in two parts. It begins with a general discussion on the socio-political and economic positioning of the average black family within contemporary Ontario. Here

the principal objective, again, is to highlight the lasting and devastating effect that the European colonial legacy continues to have on black folks. The chapter then attempts to give a more refined discussion on the inability of black parents to raise their young children, in particular their boys. First I discussed the issue of black fathers' absenteeism in the family home and some of the reasons accounting for this; the second part turns to the issue of black single-motherhood and, likewise, some of the more common reasons accounting for this phenomenon. Both of these issues are today deeply embedded in the Ontario's social consciousness, and in fact are often invoked by education policy makers, public officials, social scientists, etc. when debating the black youth's educational under-achievement problem in Ontario. The paper concludes with a brief summary of the previously discussed issues.

Theoretical Framework

This paper takes a Critical Race theoretical approach to the issues examined. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is developed primarily from the work of legal scholars like Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). Critical Race Theory (CRT) which has been within academia since the mid-1970s, was developed as a response to the failure of Critical Legal Studies (CLS) to effectively address the effect of race and racism in the U.S. legal system. (Delgado, 1985). And is a field of inquiry committed to exposing conventions, both historical and contemporary, that function to marginalize and oppress peoples of colour, and in particular those less able to stand up to the various forms of injustice common in our society.

The critical race theory (CRT) movement comprises of a group of advocates and academia engrossed in studying and transforming the connection between race, racism, and power. More specifically, proponents of CRT's main aim are to "identify, through a narrative method, how legal

texts represent a point of view that excludes non-white perspectives" (Young & Arrigo, 1999, p.69), which makes it ideal for the tasks set out in my *Introduction*.

Though CRT has mostly been used from the perspective of legal researches (e.g. Grenshaw, 1995) its inspiration has extended into other disciplines including education. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) while using CRT perspective to analyze educational inequality within the educational arena, suggested that access to high quality curriculum and education has been and continued to be enjoyed by white students.

In other words, CRT seeks to shed light on existing social structures by exposing, as much as possible, the layers and layers of white perspectives embedded in our governing texts, where "texts" must be understood as those discourses of power and control that contemporary Canadian social institutions embody.

Understood in this way, the CRT standpoint(s) aligns well with the intent of this research, which in sum is to discover and understand the forces that work against most of the black youths within our society. These forces are both overt and covert, and can today be found in all of our institutions, the most significant of which for present purposes being the Ontario public school system. CRT upholds that racial prejudices are deeply embedded in these institutions, an embeddedness grounded into the society's consciousness of centuries of white conditioning. CRT strongly suggests that white supremacy-black inferiority complex is sustained over time largely because 'the law', which has been and continues to be written from a white perspective, has a significant a role in the process. CRT focuses unswervingly on the effects of race, racism and power while at the same time addressing the hegemonic structure of white supremacy on the "meritocratic" system (Cook, 1995; Crenshaw, 1995; Dalton, 1995; Matsuda, 1995).

Hence a defining objective of CRT is to examine the various possibilities of/for breaching this strong relationship between law and racialized supremacy, and thereby lay the groundwork for the emancipation of disempowered black folks. It is my hope that in embracing the CRT framework the reader will become more conscious to the true nature of the relationship existing between black students and their classroom environment, as well as some of the many overlaps existing between black students' lives and that of the society as a whole.

Methodology:

With respect to the methodological approaches that will inform and frame my discussion on the above subject matter, this study draws on secondary sources which includes a variety of academic literature such as books, research studies, scholarly articles, provincial legislation, websites, as well as complementary statistical records. From the analysis of these sources, I hope to walk my readers through the various areas that tend to hinder the educational development of most black youths within Toronto; with the specific objective of showing that any thoughtful effort to address black youth's educational under-achievement problem *must include* direct consideration being paid to the aforementioned factors in the section above.

Chapter 1: Peer Influence & the Development of Personal Identity

Peer-group membership, especially during adolescent years, is very significant to the healthy development of personal identity, and also is a significance which is understood, accepted and promoted in virtually all known Western cultures. The more successful the adolescent is in her or his maneuverings in interpersonal relations with peers, the more confident, self-assured, that adolescent grows up to be. Peer group membership, in short, involves the steady building of socialization skills, friendship, support and self-definition, to name a few of our more valued wants and needs. Thus, *being a member* of a particular peer group might be seen as the standard for molding the kind of 'ideal' character that this or that culture/society desires.

As a child grows up and begins to attend school she//he begins to separate themselves from the adults in their immediate lives, because they are now drawing closer to their new-found acquaintances—that is, peers as well as other adults (Brown, 1986). Each of these new acquaintances brings with them wants, needs, norms, goals—in short, values—which blend into and ultimately influence the general experience of that child; some of these values might be similar to their own, and others might be very different (Sheppard, 1985). The concept 'influence' here simply means the processes by which children affect their age mates (Dishion & Dodge, 2005). According to this concept, children "acquire" the characteristics of the peers with whom they associate; and by 'peers' it means children of about the same age or maturity level (although in the research 'peers' is sometimes used to refer to a youth's best or closest friends, and other times to include interaction-based cliques of youth based on reciprocal nominations) (Prinstein & Dodge, 2008).

For the average child venturing into the new world of school, then, peer attachment becomes a source of endearment, compassion and acceptance, which together creates a helpful

setting for accomplishing two main developmental tasks of adolescence: finding answers to who they are (identity formation), and realizing self-dependence (autonomy). As such, it is not surprising that peers play a highly influential role in youth's lives, either in a positive or negative way. Ryan (2000) emphasizes that the choices youth make with regards to inspiration, commitment, and accomplishment in school (and in later life) as well as the gratification gained from these depend, in part, on the context in which the youth make such choices.

Peer influence generally results in a distinct pattern of behaviors which, at bottom, functions to create and mold a certain attitude (or attitudes) in each individual group member. In a study examining adolescent achievement among different ethnicities, Steinberg and colleagues (1992) established that although peers are an essential manipulative effect in terms of students' daily activities at school, there are also apparent variations in relation to the influence different ethnic peer groups have on each other's academic accomplishment. These authors further indicated that peers of African descent attending schools in North America tend to be discouraged by academic attainment to such a degree that high-achieving student are frequently forced to associate with students from other ethnic groups. Fordham and Ogbu (1986), citing ethno-cultural studies focusing on high school students, also found that African-descent peer groups vigorously promote negative attitudes toward school and educational achievement. Therefore, one could envisage a higher degree of deviant peer-group attachment and influence in circumstances where children are to some extent not accepted because of their ethnic and/or cultural background.

Taking Toronto as a context, educational achievement is given top priority within the given society. While**,** the Ontario Provincial Government, irrespective of the existence of vast cultural differences within its jurisdiction, has advocated for a policy that speaks to equity and fairness within its schools. However, evidence shows that academic disengagement of black youths within

the Ontario school system is higher than that of any other group (Clandfield, 2014). On a broader scale, years of academic study have indicated that black students are under-achieving within the Canadian educational system (Brathwaite & James, 1996), not to mention the vast drop-out rate with inexcusable results.

This has become a high level societal problem for all stakeholders concerned. But while for some time now there has been near-unanimous agreement amongst the various education stakeholders (most notably school administrators, politicians, and parents) that this problem is epidemic, there remains a major difficulty or aversion to determining exactly how to fix it, which is evidently so because it is yet to be determined who should take responsibility for this "fix". Among Canada's major cities, Toronto, by virtue of being home to the greatest concentration of black youths, is the prime example of the problem. But then, too, Dei et al., (1997) have pointed out that there could be many factors contributing to black youth's academic disengagement, and further that one must be careful not to oversimplify the issue by privileging one factor over another.

However, despite having just suggested there being a difficulty or aversion to fixing the problem—and notwithstanding the Dei et al., caution—there is evidence in the reviewed literature that many fingers are being pointed towards *deviant peer influence* (or DPI) as principal reason for the high drop-out rate of black youths in Toronto schools. Parents, for example, are notorious for blaming other adolescents (*most* specifically their sons' peers) for negatively influencing son, leading to academic disengagement. But when we observe youth as a group we quickly become aware that pointing to peer influence, as the foundation of disorderly youth attitudes, entails a repeated occurrence of related events. Studies on peer influence reveal three important ingredients. First, peer influence is bi-directional in that it encourages positive as well as risky attitudes; second, peer influence is multidimensional in that it functions in a range of ways that are not equally well-

documented; and third, peer influence is a difficult process which at present is not well understood (Hartup, 2005), partly because there has been more emphasis on the outcomes than on the processes of the influence, but also because there has been too little effort to connect the vast and divergent literature (Brown et al., 2008). It is therefore not acceptable or helpful to state that adolescents as a group sometimes behave badly, since as a group *they influence one another* to do so. Indeed, Allen & Antonishak (2008) emphasizes the point that blaming peer influences for inappropriate or undesired youth conduct may at the end of the day make about as much sense as holding TV transmission towers responsible for troubling and alarming images that become visible on TV.

Nevertheless, despite this caution by Allen & Antonishak (2008) it is quite common to see and hear authorities link a variety of youths' misconduct directly to peer influence. This is particularly true when the youth in question are adolescent and teenaged black youths, most often boys (Dei et al. 2008). Since we as a society rationalize it, there is no doubt that when youths lose interest in or become disengaged from school they inevitably find alternative ways to fill that void. Deviant activity, including petty criminality (and sometimes subsequent 'gang' involvement), is one common way these youths fill that void. But as will be discussed over the course of the remainder of this paper, black youth's academic disengagement, involvement in gang-related and other deviant activity, and subsequent brushes with the law are manifestations not simply of peer influence but in fact may be better explained by more deeply-rooted causes. Caputo & Vallée (2010), for example, indicate that inasmuch as youth's deviance and criminality are today major concerns, we cannot truly understand their causes without an interrogation of the broader social, political and economic factors. Caputo & Vallée (2010) stress that a major result or effect of these broader factors is "social exclusion"; generally, when people feel themselves excluded from

participation in the broader societal affairs they invariably seek out other ways and means—including other people in similar circumstance—to fill that gap. And according to Winant (2004), "*the constancy, domination, and influence of peers are greater during adolescence than at any other time in life"* (Winant 2004, p.4). If this is true, then it becomes very difficult to deny that young black boys of similar age can and most likely do influence each other's "pessimistic" attitudes toward school, as Fordham and Ogbu (1986) pointed out earlier. But rather than 'blaming' these pessimistic attitudes for black boys' academic under-achievement, their subsequent drop-out from school, and their ultimate involvement in criminality, it would be far more instructive and helpful if we examined some other, plausible *origins* of/for these attitudes.

While it is true that peers in some ways influences themselves as they move on from one stage of development to another; the issue relating to peers' influence in relation to black youth's under-development in Ontario schools is a social problem that needs the attention of the school institution, family institution and the society in general.

Chapter 2

The 'Racialized Other': A Brief History of 'Blackness' as Negative Being

Since the subject matter of this thesis revolves around black youths, it would be reasonable to state here that the best place to begin an examination of black male youth's disenchantment with and subsequent under-achievement in school, would be with a brief account of the history of 'race'. To be more precise, how the historical practice of 'race classification' was used to misrepresented non-European peoples most especially the black people. This discussion is very significant to the paper because it helps us understand the major events surrounding the issue of human differentiation or stereotyping. Human perception or judgment, in most cases, rests on our individual or collective observation and experience. Moreover, this perception or judgment in turn influences the interpretation or representation we attach to things (i.e. the meaning(s)

Hence, the concept 'race' in modern times has come to represent an ideology that affects, either positively or negatively, the meaning we attach to most of our observations and experiences; but because the concept is more generally invoked by or attached to negative imagery, discourse(s) on 'race' are highly problematic and subject to ongoing contestation(s) around the world.

The concept "race", according to Stuart Hall (1997) "has become a floating signifier that is continually being subjected to essentialized characteristics or features" (Stuart Hall 1997, p.6). Howard Winant's (1994) contribution to this idea is more direct: "Race has become an enduring, deeply sedimented means of knowing and organizing the social world….subject to continual contestation and reinterpretation" (Howard Winant's 1994, p. xiii). What these two theorists' words suggest is that although we are constantly cajoled (for example, by discourses on anti-racist resistance and policy) into believing that the concept of race lost its hermeneutic significance with the abolition of Trans-Atlantic Slavery, the concept nonetheless continues to influence our

thinking. And indeed, it would be no stretch to say that this influence is today felt in every nook and cranny of the globe. What would be easier to accept, or at least what I would be prepared to believe, is that when we speak of *race* we are not necessarily speaking just about an individual's skin colour.

2. 1: The Old Method of Human Classification

As a product of historical knowledge, the concept of 'race' is relatively new because prior to the sixteenth century the concept did not exist in our language. It is clear from my readings that from the most ancient times through to the Middle Ages *different peoples* existed, and that each of these peoples (would have) recognized that the other is different. From this recognition of 'the other' specific conceptions were created and, quite often, warfare was waged against one another on the basis of these conceptions; but 'the other' was never understood or classified as people belonging to a different *race*. Instead, social classification (or division) in those times were determined on other criteria (for example, kinship, occupation, religion), with the most important or common being between *civilized* and *uncivilized* peoples.

Michael Banton (1987) argued that prior to the sixteenth century a prevailing view was usually arrived at from the accounts of notable 'natural historians' like John Ray (1627-1705), who wrote a book titled *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of the Creation.*" According to Banton, Ray write up indicated that everything in the world was the work of the creator, and was of the opinion that "a black cow and a white cow—or two similar fruits of different taste—belong to the same *species*. Moreover, any clarification of dissimilarities amongst humans had to assume that they were all descended from a single original pair (the doctrine of monogenesis)" (Michael Banton 1987, p.32). The accounts of the natural historians also inform us that a remarkable amount of intercultural and interethnic contacts were made and transactions negotiated between/amongst

the different ancient peoples; furthermore, these contacts were short term as well as long term, and trade (and other) transactions were likewise both short- and long-distance transactions. In other words, Old World societies (i.e. prior to the 16th century) were shaped by understandings of such engagements as alliance making, empire expansion, intermarriage, exchange of cultural knowledge and so on. But none of this would be markedly different from the way we understand these interactions today. What is markedly different between the way the ancients understood and classified human 'identity' and the way we today do is that the ancients never determined their recognition of 'the other' along explicitly *racial* lines (Banton 1987). This new form of recognition we might here call 'racializing', which according to Smedley (1998) is understood/defined as the organization of all people into a restricted number of un-equal categories based on supposed differences in their biophysical personality.

To restate the issue, while it was obvious to the Ancients and into the Middle Ages that there were people with different identities as well as different geographical origins/location, there is no historical record suggesting that peoples were classified along racial lines during those periods. In fact, Samuel Stanhope Smith, cited in Banton (1987), dismisses any suggestion that in those days' attempts would have been made to classify people of different cultures/ethnicities as a 'useless labour', since it would have been so difficult to draw the necessary distinctions (Michael Banton 1987, p.34). Thus, despite the fact that during those eras (i.e. Ancient and Middle Ages) there were divergent interpretations among the different natural historians with regards to the existence of *different human specimens*, the most recognized discourses tended to center on the premise that human existence had the same, or a single, genealogy. Or we could also say that in those times the overarching view about human *being* was based on a static or fixed disposition, in

that the physical/biological differences between or amongst human groups were not given considerable social connotation.

2. 2: The New Method of Human Classification

The practice of classifying/identifying human beings along strictly *racial* lines (what is otherwise known as the 'ideology of race') took shape during the 17th century. The greatest task facing scientific researchers at this time was to establish the 'natural method' of classification for people belonging to different ethno-cultural groups. "The first post-classical publication on the classification of humans into distinct *races* came in 1684, titled *Nouvelle division de la terre par les différents espèces ou races qui l'habitent* (*New division of Earth by the different species or races which inhabit it*) and written by Francois Bernier" (Banton, 1987, p.33). This publication thus served as a template for the racialized division of world peoples; and during the 18th century the differences amongst human groups became the major focus of scientific research. Cultural anthropologists as well as biological anthropologist (bio-scientists) engaged in extensive research in efforts to establish the position that humans around the world did not have the same ancestral lineage (genealogy).

Thus it was that "in 1735 Carolus Linnaeus, inventor of zoological taxonomy, classified/divided human beings (Homo-sapiens) into Europaeus, Asiaticus, Americanus and Afer. Under this classification, Homo Sapiens Europeaus was described as active, acute, and adventurous, whereas Homo Sapiens Afer was crafty, lazy and careless" (Banton, 1987, p.33). The European idea of "race", together with many of the ideas currently linked with the term, arose at the time of the scientific revolution and the era of European imperialism and colonization, which established politico-economic associations between European nations and world peoples of

diverse cultural and religious traditions. As Europeans came into wider contact with people from different parts of the world, they speculated about the physical, social, and cultural differences among the various human groups.

This era in human historical experience could be regarded as the seminal era of the overt display of racial superiority and racial inferiority—or the beginnings of the subordination and discrimination of other peoples (acute racism) (Banton, 1987). Here, people of different groups *outside* of Europe were classified as inferior and relegated to the background, especially people classified as the black (Afer) race. This un-equal classification during the colonial era thus influenced in a biased way the works of most historians, anthropologists, physiologists, as well as others from related disciplines. Indeed, most of the discourses emerging during the colonial period were submerged in this unequal race classification. Most of the research findings of the era were biased in nature in the sense that they tended to valorize and promote colonial superiority. Historical accounts instruct that the scientific classification of physical and genetic (phenotypic) variations were routinely attached to racist concepts about characteristic predispositions of different groups; here the most desirable features were accorded to the White European peoples, while the other races were accorded a variety of increasingly derogatory/detrimental attributes (ibid).

The Atlantic Slave Trade provides the principal example of this unequal race classification. It is often estimated that this Trade, which steadily displaced earlier slave-trade practices around the world, trafficked over six million slaves from Africa through Europe and to the West Indies. Pictorial images from the era, often used to justify the un-equality/subordination, illustrate very well what European historians, anthropologist (cultural and biological) and other scholarly accountants really thought of their African captives. A perfect example can be found on page 235

of the book *Race, Writing, and Difference* by Henry Gates (1986). Here we find the graphic depiction of the black female genitalia which, though not necessarily an accurate representation, nevertheless shows how race classification had been used to relegate 'other' peoples to inferior status.

It will be also helpful to venture further that inasmuch as every conceited effort was made during this era by historians, anthropologists, and the likes to justify their findings. The fact remains that all accounts relating to race categorization, no matter the methodologies and techniques that were applied, were smeared by the racial sentiments as well as the economic greed of the time. In addition, most of the race classification accounts during this era were written by white people who belonged to the 'superior race'. When race surfaced in human history it brought about a fragile but influential change in the worldview on *human difference(s)*, for it forced a *social meaning* on physical distinctions amongst human groups that since served as the foundation for the structuring of overall society. And this new meaning was not isolated to Europe; people of the world, in the view of Smedley (1998), from then on were socialized into a philosophy about the meaning of differences based on a concept of genetic durability that was strange to the Ancient World and the Middle Ages.

Today we live in the 'post-colonial' age, which is witness to a change in the language of race and its discourse. But while acknowledging race and racism as artifacts of the past, cultural anthropologists have avoided these phenomena during the last decades of the twentieth century, when racism has grown more covert and complicated to document in terms of current criteria of political convenience (Harrison, 1998). Indeed, since the mid-20th century the association of 'race' with the ideologies and theories that grew out of the work of 19th-century anthropologists and physiologists has led to the use of the word "race" itself becoming unpleasantly challenging.

Alongside experimental and theoretical problems with race following WWII, evolutionary and social scientists became highly conscious of how ideas about race had been used to validate discrimination, apartheid, slavery, and genocide. The probing of these scientists gained momentum in the 1960s during the U.S. Civil Rights Movement and the uprising of various anti-colonial movements worldwide. (Harrison, 1998)

In this era of globalization, where refined telecommunications, rapid movement of capital, labour and commodities together compresses both time and space, 'racial identities' are being shaped and reshaped with keen passion (Harrison, 1998). As such, anthropologists and biologists no longer see "races" as distinct populations classified by phenotype. In a similar approach, scholars sincerely exploring the history of American attitude/behaviour toward human differences have come to the conclusion that race was a social creation of the eighteenth century which transcribed the external physical differences among the American population into a new form of social repression (Smedley, 1998). Though still used in general contexts, race has often been replaced by other words which are less confusing and breathtaking, such as populations, people(s), ethnic groups, communities, etc. depending on the circumstance. Race is confusing and breathtaking because, according to Fuss (1994), "the concept assimilates much more than human physical appearance, as it involves the adaptable ideology folded into the categorical stance of nation, human and gender that encompasses the masculine or feminine race" (Fuss 1994, p. 35). Thus contemporary social scientists will often replace the concept 'race' with the word 'ethnicity' to refer to self-identifying groups based on beliefs pertaining to historical ancestry and shared culture (Smedley, 1998).

In closing this section of the paper, evidence shows that the discourse related to race has been narrowed down in history to the white and black peoples *despite* the fact that there are people

that belong to other race classifications. In the words of Brenda McMahon, (2003) "Whiteness is a politically constructed category that is parasitic on Blackness" (Brenda McMahon 2003, p.269). Also, McLaren (1995) emphasizes that since "white-ethnic transactions define and sets the limits on all thought about human relations, there can be no prospect for human equality" (McLaren 1995, p.52).

Hence as reflected in the opening sentence since the subject matter involves black youths; the problem of black youth's educational under-achievements in our schools and society today is tied to the above historical analogy of race classification where black race has been and continues to be relegated to the bottom of the pyramid in almost all walks of life.

Chapter 3

Shaping Education Policy in (Western) Ontario in the Aftermath of Slavery

This chapter briefly explores the nature of Ontario education policy through the era of common/public school segregation until present. The intent is to try and trace present-day anti-black discriminatory tendencies/sentiments and practices in Ontario public schools back to the early post-slavery days, when racial segregation was a commonly accepted practice even if not in any way sanctioned by Ontario law. This re-tracing is an important step because it lays a foundation for my later discussion on the evident of discrepancy between *the ideal and the reality* with respect to the equity and inclusiveness strategy contained in the 2013 Policy/ Program Memoranda No. 119 of the Ontario education policy-reform.

3. 1: Public Education in Western Ontario in the Mid-Nineteenth Century

Let me begin by suggesting that racial segregation sentiment in Ontario education is deeply embedded in the concept of white supremacy. The attitudes and practices that arose from the ideas and beliefs in necessary racial segregation, according to Hamilton (2007), have led to the dehumanization of First Peoples and the extreme marginalization of Africans as well as Asians. In other words, these attitudes and practices clearly seem to represent an affirmation of the race classification ideology which dates back to 17th century Europe. As just indicated, this race classification was never an official policy in Ontario; however, as early as 1828 black immigrants were consistently denied entrance into Ontario's common schools (Houston & Prentice, 1988). In view of this act of consistent denial, the then School Superintendent, Robert Murray, proposed to black parents that they should seek the inclusion of a clause in the 1841 School Act to create their own schools. Some years later, in 1849, Ontario transformed its *School Act* to allow separate schools to be established for black children (Sylvia Hamilton, 2007). As it turned out, these

'separate' schools were consistently poorly subsidized and their teachers usually not competent at their jobs. These two central issues caused extensive disagreement between school officials and the black community, disagreement which still exists at the moment in any dialogue pertaining to Ontario's Afro-centric schools (Dei, 1996).

Now, from my research it is apparent that the education of black children is one aspect of Canadian history that has not been well understood. When the education of black children is being debated, the preface of separate schools is frequently presented as a reaction to granting the wish of the black people to be separated from the public school system. Kristin McLaren (2008) maintains that although present work in the area of African-Canadian history tends to emphasize the chauvinistic mentality that permit segregation in education. However, a great deal of research studies still leans towards the theory of segregationist inclinations in the black community, even though there are slight proofs to sustain this theory. Powell (1997), in his contribution, argues that what constantly seems to be missing from these education debates—as well as and from numerous subsequent mediations—is an enhanced perception of the role that 'whiteness' has played in the 'minority' student failure.

Toronto did not get actively involved in segregated schools in those days, but in the south western region of Ontario, most especially Windsor and Chatham, segregated schools remained in place. Historical records reveal that Black families in these south western regions did not request to have black only schools but were nonetheless obliged to opt for such alternative due to the unwelcome reception they were confronted with while trying to have their children attend a local white school (http://www.blackhistorycanada.ca/events.php?theme). The point here, then, is that the intention and expression of negative and derogatory attitudes and practices towards blacks during the era of school segregation in Ontario was not an accidental matter. Rather, it was a

mentality that had been self-inscribed by people who claimed to belong to the superior race, as reflected in the chapter on the historical construction of difference above. Blacks, over the course of this history up until today, have been classified as an inferior race and continue to be misrepresented in negative and derogatory ways.

Throughout the Ontario west, white Canadians expressed suspicions that black children would prove to be a corrupt moral influence upon their own children if they were both permitted to attend the same schools. While defenders of segregationist era attitudes seem to hold the blacks of that time responsible for the intention behind the creation of black separate schools, presented below are some excerpts pointing to the racism and bigotry that were directed towards blacks in the western region of Ontario. Citing these excerpts in full will go a long way in helping to challenge the notion that blacks' requesting of segregated schools was not intentional, but a forced circumstance based entirely on the negative attitudes towards them at the time:

In Chatham, for example, numerous citizens were capable of upholding an affirmation to democratic beliefs in the face of their discriminatory practices as white because black people were presented as ethically mediocre and therefore are not entitled to the identical laws as white people. Giving his view on the motives behind the introduction of the law permitting segregated schools, the then Chief justice Beverly Robinson suggested in 1854 that white parents felt "apprehension that the children of the coloured people, many of whom have but lately escaped from a state of slavery may be, in respect morals and habits, unfortunately worse trained than the white children are in general, and that their children might suffer from the effects of bad example." White express fears that, "African barbarism" might triumph over Anglo-Saxon civilization if black children were allowed to attend the schools with white children" (Kristin McLaren, 2008, p.71).

In 1847 the London Auxiliary Bible Society reported that, in spite of the fact that blacks in London paid the school tax, "If any Coloured child enters a school, the white children are withdrawn, the teachers are painfully obliged to decline, and coloured people… yield to an injustice which they are too weak to redress" (Kristin McLaren, 2008, p.71).

In a related fashion citizens of London expressed their concern in 1861 that blacks were "rude in speech, uncouth in manners and address and untidy in attire". It was feared that they could have a negative influence upon other children, especially on adolescents, if they were to be admitted into the senior classes at London's Central School" (Kristin McLaren, 2008, p.71).

In most municipalities of Ontario West, the majority of white parents, as well as school trustees, remained divergent to unification. Should black children be permitted into the schools, they were by and large required to take a seat in sections different from that of the white kids. Moreover, black children were not allowed into publicly subsidized elementary schools (known then as common schools). To further stress the disdain and hatred that were channeled towards blacks and their prospects of attaining a quality education like every *other* growing child, it was reported that in Amherst-burg parents of white children overtly expressed their dislike about their children being in the same school with black children. They threatened that they would "[rather] cut their children's heads off and throw them into the roadside ditch than send their children [to school] with niggers" (McLaren, 2008, p.71). When the town of Amherst-burg introduced free common schools in 1851, the public school trustees requested the people of the township to "take the responsibility of keeping the coloured children from entering any of the schools" (McLaren, 2008, pp.74-75).

In addition, in 1856 blacks in St. Catharine abandoned their separate school because they felt that it was a drawback, an inconvenience; as well, they wanted to claim what they regarded as

"their lawful right to send our children to whatever public school is established in our ward" (McLaren, 2008, p.71). In that same year, black folks in Camden, Ontario expressed their dissatisfaction with how their taxes were been disbursed, as well as the inaccessibility of the segregated schools, which were felt to be too far away (up to 15 miles) from their homes. Most of the black children in Camden Township were, in effect, deprived access to quality education because the segregated school was too far for them to attend. In towns such as Colchester and Sandwich, trustees divided school districts to avoid contact between the races" (McLaren, 2008, p.71). These efforts to segregate black students were in direct and deliberate opposition to the laws in place, as the School Act of 1843 plainly states:

"It shall not be lawful for such Trustees, or for the Chief, or other, Superintendent of Common Schools, or for any Teacher to exclude from any Common School or from the benefit of education therein, the children of any class or description of persons' resident within the School district to which such common school may belong" (McLaren, 2008, p.71)

While the school Act of 1843 clearly indicates that discrimination of any kind within the school environment is not acceptable, however, the administrators/executors of this policy within the school arena acted in defiance of the ordinances of the act.

The Department of Education got numerous petitions urging them to intercede against segregation, and in reaction then Superintendent of Education, Egerton Ryerson, acknowledged that segregation was "at variance with the letter and spirit of the law, and with the principles and spirit of British Institutions, which deprive no human being of any benefit…. on account of colour of his skin". Nonetheless, Superintendent Ryerson "continued to allow unlawful prejudices in the schools, maintaining that there was nothing he could do to stop it" (McLaren, 2008, p. 72). Then in 1846, in what might have been a direct response to Ryerson's inability to redress the issue, a

group of blacks in Amherberg, in partnership with the missionary Isaac Rice, decided to start their own public school which was open to students of all ethno-cultural backgrounds, with school trustees making quite a lot of demands for equitable allocation of government funding. By 1849 Ontario changed its *School Act* to permit separate schools to be set up for black children (Hamilton, 2007, p.94).

Moreover, in Windsor no public education was accessible to blacks until 1859, even though trustees had agreed on a by-law in 1854 that would allow for the setting up of a "coloured school". The erection of this school was postponed, on the other hand, until 1862 (McLaren, 2008, p.72). The main point here is that in situations where black children were barred from public education, black teachers time and time again had the inventiveness to initiate their own schools. In Sandwich and Windsor, Mary Bibb and Mary Ann Shadd established schools for children who did not have right to public education. While some received a small amount of support from American philanthropists, most black teachers in Ontario West were inadequately paid and their schools drastically under-funded, the consequence being that the majority of them were short-lived (McLaren, 2008).

One might ask here: if the then Superintendent Ryerson could not prevent racial bias in schools within his jurisdiction when taking into consideration the content of the 1843 school Act as stated above, then where lies the justification for the idea that blacks intentionally or voluntarily requested for separate schools given the glaring evidence of whites' negative attitudes towards them? The precarious situation blacks found themselves in within these Western Ontario communities clearly necessitated their call for separate schools. And what this goes to show is that the 'talking point' of those still defending the position that segregation was an option requested by the black people loses all credibility. This blatantly dismisses the racial sentiments that whites

attached to the notion that blacks within these communities requested for black only schools. And it also tends to undermine the very reasoning behind the argument for the present day Afrocentric school experiment.

Ontario was the province that received the greatest number of ex-slave (Black) independence-seekers who were channeled through the Underground Railroad. The primary reason why this province became home to the large number of independence seekers was not only because of its location in relation to the Detroit River, Lake Erie and Lake Ontario, but also due to the fact that it was the English-speaking hub. At the depth of the earliest independence movement of the Americas, the Underground Railroad, the Common Schools Act was approved, providing for the establishment of separate schools. Although racially segregated schools were officially eliminated in Ontario in 1964, residues of the practice could be found in some suburban areas of the province for some time after. For example, in Merlin, near Chatham, the last segregated black school didn't shut its doors until 1965; subsequent to lobbying by concerned blacks to have it eliminated (incidentally, the last segregated school to be closed in Canada was in Nova Scotia, which didn't occur until 1983). http://www.blackhistorycanada.ca/events.php?theme

To conclude here, educator and African Baptist minister Dr. W.P. Oliver put it forthrightly when he said: "Segregated schools are a barrier to good inter-group relations. They are a visible symbol of separation, and a denial of the right 'to belong.' Such schools became the stamp of approval of the mental apartheid that exists in many white minds" (Hamilton, 2007, p.95). If Oliver is correct in this idea that segregated schools represent "a denial of the right to belong", then it becomes easy to see how students who have in one or other way internalized this sense of rejection can lose aspirations for advanced education and thereby (almost by default) forfeit opportunities to a wider range of profession/careers later on in their lives.

3. 2: The Rocky Road toward Education Policy Reform

While both overt and covert segregation in Canada continued into the 1960s, research studies have acknowledged the persistence of negative racial attitudes over time and across generations. At the same time as students were being segregated, general curriculum material either neglected African-descended people or portrayed them in a stereotypical fashion. The segregated structure promotes such deep attitudes within the broader society. In fact, Hopkins (1997) went so far as to suggest that desegregation, even if for the dignified purpose of supporting black males, would put society back several decades in the fight for racial equity. He qualified by saying that this is not because school desegregation has worked so well for African American students, but because re-segregating schools could provide avenue for future mistreatment. Advocates from within black communities were not only disturbed with the quality of education offered their students, but also with the negative depictions of black people in school manuscripts that were accessible to all students in the public educational system (Hamilton 2007). Over the past decades, in fact, school has become viewed as 'trouble' in the sense that the various forums in which school policy is made now appear to be arenas where contending ideological, social, and other interests struggle for recognition and influence (Fleming, 1991).

Through the era of desegregation till now the Ontario governments have embarked on a series of educational policy reforms. The intention behind the efforts is to look at the inconsistencies in public education and implement ways in which to address the issue with regards to equal access to quality education for all (Young et al, 2007). In 1985, for example, the Ontario government issued a policy on race relations, promising that it would work vigorously to get rid of all racial discrimination, as well as those rules and culture which, while not deliberately biased, but have a discriminatory effect: "Racism in any form is not tolerated in Ontario" (Ontario

Provincial Advisory Committee, 1987, p. 38). Here, school boards were encouraged to put into action suitable policies and practices that would address race related subject matters within the Ontario schools, hence granting the opportunity for the development of the first race-relations policy in Canada by the Toronto Board of Education (Harper, 1995).

Recent developments indicate that the Ontario provincial government, through the Ministry of Education, is of the opinion that "Ontario diversity, together with equitable and inclusive education, are essential impetus to creating a cohesive society and a strong economy that will secure Ontario's future prosperity" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p.5). On the same wave length Kathleen Wynne, the then Minister of Education, in her sworn duty of ensuring inclusivity in Toronto schools, indicated that: "Inclusion is not bringing people into what already exist; it is making a new space, a better space for everyone" (Ministry of education, 2009, p.624-625).

While in theory this commitment seems to be the acceptable framework under which the Ontario school policies operates. However, Yon (1999) saw "inclusive education as a way of solidifying the discourse created by society and institutions alike" (Yon 1999, p.624). Also, "The Action Plan", according to Young et al. (2000), suggests that modification to educational policies still does not address in-depth the concern relating to the equal inclusion of minority groups. Subsequently, the practical realization of this reform within the school system as of today is ambiguous and problematic.

Schools process youth through stratified steps leading to expected, viable credentials for possible employment. Most of the steps and some of the end results can be dealt with and/or managed, but one dilemma that has been persistently noticeable is the issue of accomplishment and under-accomplishment among black/minority youths (Dei, 2008). This dilemma stemmed

from the clear messages sent to these students in schools that convey disparity in relation to how the students are being treated and the way student's racial identities are been represented and misrepresented. Dei (2008) states that "the issue of race and the stigmatization of students arising from their differential treatment by race (e.g., labeling and stereotyping, sorting of students, low student expectations by teacher, lack of curricular sophistication, the absence of diversity in staff representation, and the disciplining of black bodies with suspensions and expulsions) cannot be underestimated" (Dei 2008, p.350). Dei further emphasizes that even though we do have compassionate and committed teachers in the system, students' narratives also point to experiences with teachers who tag and stigmatize black students. The extreme demands this tagging place on black youths to confront such discrimination is compounded by the fact that there are not adequate protections and support measures in the schools to help students overcome such discriminatory tribulations. In reaction to demand for action, we see the embanking of procedures designed at generating a secured/protected school atmosphere. The schools' surroundings have repeatedly exposed the enforcement of unfair regulatory control of black youths in schools.

Since the 1960s, school teachers/administrators, researchers, families, as well as people within the broader society have repeatedly acknowledged the obstacles faced by blacks and minority students within the Ontario school system (Board of Education, Toronto, 1988; Brathwaite & James, 1996). In addition, between the 1960s and 1970s blacks and other minority students were being labeled as learning-disabled deficit models, impacted by psychological testing (Coelho, 1988). Brathwaite (1989) argues that the problem of Black Canadian youth's disconnection from school within the GTA is not the problem of the black youths but of the inequality perpetuated by Canadian institutions of education. Hence, the next chapter discusses how discriminatory school curriculum, Standardized Testing, the practice of streaming, and the

disciplinary policy of Zero Tolerance have contributed to the problem of black youth's educational under-achievement in Toronto.

Chapter 4

Discrimination in Educational Policy & Practice Today

Sometimes too, because the school system has low expectations of [B]lack students, you say to yourself, 'why bother?" (Dei, 1997, p.231)

As discussed earlier, Ontario (Canada on a whole) has never had an official segregated public school's policy. Public school segregation was simply agitated for by some folks and eventually became accepted practice in some Western Ontario localities during the mid-19th century. At that time the most important justification held by those white folks who wanted school segregation was that blacks generally were a dirty and immoral people, and these white agitators were concerned that these qualities would rub off onto their own children if they were to "mix" with the black children. Today the vast majority of Canadians would more than likely shun the idea of segregating schools by the colour of their children's skins. This is because schools within Ontario are now promulgating new policies that tend to stress on inclusion rather than exclusionary policy (Young et al, 2007 & Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009) However to suggest this likelihood is not to suggest that all is well in Ontario's public school system. Taking Toronto as an example, 'education' is considered to be a top priority in all walks of life, and for this broad reason all school-aged children are by law expected to attend whatever public schools are accessible in their locality/district. In fact, the Ontario Government has in place policy that speaks to equity and fairness within the province's schools, where the term 'equity and fairness' implies that no children are to be 'treated differently' based simply on such criteria as skin colour, religious orientation, family economic status, and the likes. However, when it comes to blacks or other youths of colour, there is ample evidence to show that these populations have not been fairly represented (Kunjufu, 2011). These populations have been found to be routinely discriminated

against and stigmatized in one way or another within the public school system; practices that some argue are simply a reflection of attitudes held in the broader society. Some of these practices are more troubling than others and we will need to examine them in order to better understand the problem of black youth's educational under-achievement within Ontario public school. The practices would include the following:

4. 1: School Curriculum Design:

The term school curriculum is known as the subject content to be taught in each grade within the school environment. By definition the 'curriculum' simply means the aggregate of various subjects taught in the different levels of schooling; from kindergarten through to university, based on the same age grouping of the children/students. The supposed materials contained in the curriculum design within the school environment are expected to accommodate all students of the same age. But some curriculum materials have been implicated for placing a different light on some students.

According to Young (2006), for example, 'curriculum' is a conception that has historically focused on a white, male, middle-class analysis of "useful information", and which is to suggest that *this information is not necessarily useful to all students in the same way*. Young argues, on one hand, that students who come to school with an awareness of the issues that the curriculum addresses (such as figures, correspondence, natural features, and so on) may feel appreciated and resilient; but, on the other hand, students who come to school with an awareness of issues not appreciated in school (such as taking care of a younger sibling, dealing with a social services worker, understanding gang culture) do not find that sense of equal support.

Now, in Canada curriculum/curricula design/development is a function overseen by the Department or Ministry of Education in each province. Typically, this design/development is

undertaken by groups of selected teachers and subject-area professionals who write the curriculum according to their specific province's standards, and after which it is distributed to the various schools (Young, 2006). However, evaluations of Canadian textbooks/curricula have revealed that many of these textbooks contain biased conclusions that are being presented as if they were the truth.(Pinto, 2012) Thus, to continue following Young (2006), if a history course on conventional Aboriginal ways of life does not reflect on government policies designed that function to get rid of these ways of life, then students do not get the opportunity to realize the exceptionally diverse understandings contained in Aboriginal culture(s). This lack of students' understandings would likewise be true of subject matter concerning policies/practices that tend to discriminate against particular immigrant groups or policies/practices that function to deprive women from numerous essential aspects of life. Similarly, if science and technology are put forward as the ideal avenues for resolving societal conflict, students whose awareness is informed by theological beliefs/perspectives may not be able to make rational decisions concerning the proper roles of science and technology in the shaping of their lives (Young, 2006). To be sure, it is today well accepted that as the society evolves so too do our vision and ways of meaningful interpretation in relation to changes occurring around us; these changes would naturally impact our children's understandings and as such should be reflected in the school curriculum. Students belonging to minority groups, and in particular blacks, often find that they are not equally or fairly represented in this curriculum.

Upon a close look at the Ontario school system curriculum content as related to black history, it becomes evident that the issues surrounding this subject area are not varied or detailed enough to really educate black students. For example, reports indicate that black-focused stories are written and valorize people like Martin Luther King, and the likes, while on the contrary stories

relating to the atrocities committed during the Atlantic Slave Trade era, the colonization of others' land, people and resources are often suppressed and, moreover, that whatever scanty materials are profiled is likely to be de-valorized (Prince, 1998). Proponents of corrective alternatives, on the one hand, have recommended that the best way to address this reality is the creation of Afro-centric schools where much more varied and detailed accounts of black peoples' ancestry would be taught in its entirety. And on the other hand, those against providing race-based schools as a corrective are of the opinion that such schools would only further promote injustice and bring back the memory of Ontario's school segregation days.

This lack of attention to black peoples' ancestral history has been held up as one of the reasons for the high rate of black youth drop-outs in the Ontario public school system. Prince, (1998), further stressed that "The fact that the history of African peoples is not included in the school's curriculum is an example of how cultural hegemony operates in the Canadian school system" (Prince,1998, p.244) As the argument runs, students who are incapable of finding their bearings within the periphery of the school curriculum find it challenging to bond with their educational experiences; indeed, blacks see the limited curriculum content committed to their history as way of "robbing' them of a part of their historical experiences and legitimacy" (Dei, 1997, p.138). Dei (1997) further indicated that "drop-outs felt that the curriculum had not included anything relevant to their experience, whether in the form of black history or in the form of an understanding of black experiences in general. There was a pervasive feeling of being systematically excluded" (Dei (1997, p.138). To support Dei's position, Prince (1998) indicated that "the African experience is one of the links in the chain of historical development that was not…an historical truth. This truth will never surface in ghettoized black history month kits, just

as it will not surface in the kind of curriculum which refers to African in the New World simply as the Slaves" (Prince 1998, p.251)

To illustrate what I think Dei and Prince are pointing to in this sentiment we might take a look at the following excerpt from a U-Tube video dialogue which focuses on an exchange between a classroom teacher and a black student during a black history lesson. In this video, shot by Samuel King (Jan 6, 2015) and titled "What I Wasn't Taught in School", a British-based teacher is leading the students in a discussion on 'black heritage'. The teacher begins the class by getting the students' attention and the following exchange occurred:

Teacher: The lesson is on Black History Month: the key division in the early stages of the Civil Rights Movement and the general impact across the board.

Samuel: But we learn the same stuff every year for Black History Month; every single October we learn the same thing, either apartheid, slavery or the Civil Rights. How many of you guys have actually learned something new these last few years? See! That's what I mean.

Female Student: Sam, this is our history, come on man.

Samuel: Nah, seriously… Do you guys know anything about Ralph Bunche? The first black person to win a Nobel Prize, or that the richest person ever lived was a black man named King Musa 1st of Mali? What about Ella Baker? What about Ella Baker, one of the most influential women of the Civil Rights Movement. This is why I can't take Black History Month seriously, man.

Teacher: But Samuel! The curriculum is designed to help you think about black history critically.

Samuel: Actually Miss, it's designed to teach us what to think, not how to think. For example, when that light switched you taught us that it was Thomas Edison who made it happen.

When, ironically, it was actually a darker man who made that light flick, Lewis Latimer to be precise. Quite nice when you're talking about Mr. Hamilton and his racing car but red light stop. We're always taught that Martin Luther King had a dream, man, but those dreams can't be achieved because our brains are in chains, our minds are enslaved so we won't get our redemption - Morgan Free-man. Will we ever be free man? And leave this state of imprisonment and take that walk of free-damn it, green man from a traffic light invented by the same man who made gas masks to protect our organs. Another free man named Garrett Morgan. But I bet you never knew that? We need to open our minds but how can we be taught to see if the blind lead the blind?

Samuel: The first person to develop significant eye surgery was a black woman named Doctor Patricia E. Bath. Now on that note there's a question I must ask. If this is a great opportunity to learn and be engaged about our past, why are we not actually being taught about our past? Transatlantic slavery is where we're taught black history starts, but is it really? There seems to be a lot you haven't told us, and you shut down and hold back on the bold ones who stand against the way you're trying to mold us. Consistent enemies of progress, you're surprised because I know things you don't expect me to know yet. And when I tell you you're wrong for telling me about me, you call it a riot while I call it a protest.

Samuel: The Broadwater Farm Riot the media exacerbate and make it seem like it's a bunch of delinquent youths on the streets. When, really the first causing trigger was death at the hands of the police. We cease to know information and the truth and that's simply because you withhold information from the youth. Maybe, maybe one day we'll be satisfied with how our knowledge of history equates. Well I'm sure like me you're waiting for the teacher to fill in that space. So do so then… umm, no answer. Maybe I can help and just throw out some names. Mary Sea-Cole, a Crimean war nurse; Mary Prince, a black female author, to be precise she was the first.

Bernie Grant, influential local activist and respected MP. Trevor McDonald, one of the first black ITN journalists to hit the television screen. Jamal Edwards and SBTV and when fuse ODG brought the Azonte dance to the United Kingdom and my foot sway to the left and to the right like the wipers of a car's windscreen. And DJ Abrantee brought Afro-beats to the streets. See, it's funny when we think of our childhood memories. A man who was actually funny, Lenny Henry, many others and the list continues… Marcus Garvey, Haile Selassie, Bob Marley, Ignatius Sancho, Tupac, Fela Kuti, Muhammed Ali, Maya Angelou R.I.P. Kwame Nkrumah, the first Ghanaian president who retained independence from England as well as the Wind-Rush ship which brought Caribbean to Britain. So much to learn in just one month, a tip off the iceberg, a tiny grace; and what was the first Black Roman Emperor's name?

Samuel: Years passed and we're still caught up in the same Civil Rights age. Which isn't bad if you learn something new? But we don't. And we're not being taught enough about our culture so there 're no one else to blame but you, and if not you then who? Question, questions, questions. If you're not teaching us these things then I'm inclined to believe it's you don't know, no? You're the teacher, your job is to teach so you must know, and if you do that must mean you don't want us to know but that's low.

Samuel: If the information is accessible for our knowledge of our culture to grow then why on earth wouldn't you want to let us know? Why are you focused so heavily on the influential but very few men and women who made things happen for us? Why are my people being highlighted for a predominantly negative past? Why do I know the things that you don't, and I'm not the teacher, you are? Why are you focused on our negative past but not on our bright future? Why are you not abreast with the great young things that people are doing in this world? Why are young people trademarks and stereotypes, gang culture and young pregnant girls? Why are the young

people not being given the time of day? And his name was Septimius Severus by the way. I'm sure as a student the code of conduct has been breached. So I will stop here and let you do your job, so teach.

To further support Samuel's position, another U-Tube video titled "Hidden Figures" directed by Theodore Melfi also reflect on some untold factual story of people like; Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan and Mary Jackson- three brilliant black African-American women who were among hundreds who worked to build one of the greatest operations in history: the launch of astronaut John Glenn into orbit. This magnificent accomplishment electrified the world and enthused generations to dream big. But their contributions to science and invention has never been heard or valorized in black history. (Theodore Melfi, 2017)

Katherine Coleman Goble Johnson (born August 26, 1918) is an African-American physicist and mathematician who made contributions to the United States aeronautics and space programs at the early presentation of digital electronic computers at NASA known for accuracy in computerized astronomic navigation. Theodore Melfi (2017)

Dorothy Johnson Vaughan (September 20, 1910 – November 10, 2008) was an African American mathematician and human computer who worked for the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA) and NASA, at Langley Research Center in Hampton, Virginia. In 1949, she became acting supervisor of the West Area Computers, the first African-American woman to supervise a group of staff at the center. Theodore Melfi (2017)

Mary Winston Jackson (April 9, 1921 – February 11, 2005) was an African American mathematician and aerospace engineer at the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA), later known in 1958 as National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). And in 1958, she became NASA's first black female engineer. Theodore Melfi (2017)

There are also other notable black women whose contributions to science have been suppressed or not well recognized in history books. There is Marie Maynard Daly, who in 1947 became the first black woman to receive a doctorate in Chemistry. Her work uncovered the link between cholesterol and clogged arteries changing the way doctors treat heart disease and in the long run the way people eat.

Patricia Bath who in 1988 became the first black woman to receive a medical patent. She developed a laser that changed the treatment of Cataract which are the leading cause of blindness. Her technology allowed her to restore the sight of patents who have been blind for more than 30 years.

Valerie Thomas work at NASA and lead the development of LANDSAT, the first satellite to send images from space.

Shirley Ann Jackson work in the theoretical physics and telecommunications paved the way for the development of all kinds of technology we use today, like caller ID, call waiting and fiber optic cable.

Mae Jamison started her career as a doctor before going on to become the first black female Astronaut. She orbited the earth 126 times during her space flight then left NASA to lead the 100-year Starship Project with hopes to allow human travel beyond our solar system in the next 100 years. Theodore Melfi (2017)

Inquisitively, someone might want to know the relevancy of the U-Tube videos to the purpose of this paper. As mentioned above, these U-Tube videos help to emphasize the problem of inadequate black heritage content in Ontario public school curriculum. The videos reflect on and expose some of the frustrations that Dei points out regarding what black folks within the

school system encounters in their quest for educational qualification. Any students who attempt to challenge what I would here call 'educational correctness' would be tagged and referred to as defiant/s or trouble maker/s, a reality that Samuel's closing sentences make quite clear. Indeed, those students who dare stand in opposition to the school system know that his and/or her days within that environment are immediately numbered.

Most black youth drop-outs, to return to Dei (1997), ascribe flaws in the deep curriculum to a general 'whiteness' of the school organization (Dei 1997, p.144). The inadequate depictions of black youth in the curriculum seem to have a tendency of conveying a sense of lack of inclusiveness in the way most blacks think. Dei further stresses that there is the necessity to reorganize the account of black history and to "tell the truth"; but this, Dei continues, "could only be done by adding on to the existing knowledge base, which will require amongst other things a rethinking of how history and the representation of the 'other' is conceived and presented" (Dei 1997, p.147)

It would be no overstatement to say that black students and parents are in general very skeptical of the Ontario school system. In relation to black uniqueness, at the core of the matter is the well expressed anxiety that there are loopholes in curriculum content. This revolves around the notion that the contributions of blacks are not incorporated with sufficient value which, in other words, would help boost the morale of the black students who learn that their cultures and the accomplishment of their predecessors are cherished. This issue is essential to the ideas of uniqueness and representation. The involvement/classification symbolism proposed by Finn (1989) has ` for both portrayal and uniqueness in terms of a school's capacity to involve students who do not belong to the mainstream culture. It has also been argued within the domain of social reproduction (Bowles and Gintis, 1976) that the school way of life is an indication of the prevailing

culture in society. As such when students find themselves in situations where they are not represented, their expression of identity and biased assessment regarding compliance and confrontation develop into an atmosphere of conflict (Dei, 1997). In the end, students who fail to adopt the mainstream values and fail to comply with the mainstream expectations find themselves being evaluated differently compared to those who, in a word, 'conform' to the system's preferred values and expectations. One way of evaluating students 'differently' is to label them academically deficient.

The academic deficiency assumption designed in educational circles is based on the conception that the difference in educational achievements of the poor as compared with the middle class is provoked by cultural background. (See Cultural deficit model) The cultural deficit model (otherwise referred to as the Deficit Model) argues from the position that cultural traits and/or norms routinely associated with habitually marginalized racial/ethnic groups (more specifically, Blacks and Latinos) prevent members of such groups from integrating and achieving ascending socioeconomic mobility within the culture in which they find themselves (Garcia Coll. et al., 1996)

The Cultural Deficit model upholds that racial/ ethnic minority groups are not as well qualified as their White majority counterpart because their cultural background is dysfunctional and lacking vital features vis-à-vis the dominant White culture. (i.e. "deficit model of difference" (Shibao Guo 2007, p.37).

According to Goof (2001), marginalized people are treated in a way that exacerbates and exploits their vulnerability as racialized or economically deprived subjects. Goof stresses that marginalized people, especially the youth, do not have the power or required resources to resist the negative and derogatory labels/representations accorded them by and within the various social

institutions. We are already quite familiar with some of these labels/representations, which include 'deviant', 'delinquent', 'criminal', and the like. In interpreting Goof, a common symptom of over-exposure to such representations is that the youths come to internalize them, leading to a situation where they feel socially isolated for failing to conform to the norms of these institutions and, by extension, the general society (Goof, 2001)

Thus, the claim that Ontario's policy of 'equity and fairness' in public schools is in fact equitable and fair to minority groups, and most especially black youths, is not sustainable. There is today reliable and verifiable evidence suggesting that school curriculum inadequacies, negative teacher attitudes, discriminatory policy of streaming/standardized testing, as well as the disciplinary policy of zero tolerance, all function to encourage school drop-outs among black youths (Dei, 1997). Black youths see these policies and their teachers' attitudes as unfavorable to them, and as such they lose interest in the education process.

Finally, since the Ontario public school system (and Canadian society, more generally) had drawn a direct correlation between academic aptitude and the securing of employment, these black youth drop-outs begin to encounter difficulties in landing good paying jobs *because* they lack the necessary educational qualifications. Marshall (2012) stressed that Canada's future prosperity depends on the academic success of its young people. In addition, high school incompletion and low participation in postsecondary education have long-term effects, including higher rates of youth unemployment and long-term unemployment.

But while policy makers and school administrators tend to absolve themselves of the responsibility for this and other concerns. The fact of the matter remains that the application and execution of the just-mentioned school policies have been known to have hidden racial sentiments attached to them as indicated in reviewed literatures. The net result for those students who perceive

this, or even merely believe it to be their reality, is that they lose interest in school and in most cases drop out of school.

4. 2: Standardized Testing Policy (1996)

Standardized testing, as the name implies, is Ontario's one-shoe-fits-all method of evaluation for students. A standardized test is one that is given and scored in the same way, no matter where or when it is given, so that scores of all students can be weighed against one another. Generally, the format is multiple choice questions, so that they can be machine scored. Of these, norm-referenced tests are used to assess the performance of one student in relation to the performance of others or to compare individuals to a prescribed acceptable standard. The tests are designed so that the results fit a "bell curve" with most in the middle, and a few at the high and at the low ends.

Standardized testing, according to Diane Meaghan and Francois Casas (2004), "is an integral component of the accountability driven, outcomes-based educational paradigm in which 'gate keeping' based on test results serves to perpetuate and reproduce social inequalities" (Meaghan and Casas 2004, p.35) These authors further argue that although government officials consistently propose, on the one hand, that standardized testing will consequently create a better school and teacher responsibility, on the other hand there is growing authentication that test scores are used mostly for categorization and grading of children, with severe adverse effect on some essentially low-income and marginalized children (Meaghan and Casas 2004) Subsequently, it has turned out to be predominantly challenging when test results are used for students' allocation and advancement, as well as to influence qualification for graduation. And there is credible evidence to indicate that substantial bias in testing has been acknowledged in a huge number of revisions.

For instance, offspring from underprivileged or poor neighbourhoods, students with disabilities, as well as children with language barriers are prone to perform poorly on standardized tests. Bartlett, cited by Bernie Froese-Germain (2004), states that "race and poverty are consistently good predictors of tests score differences, largely due to "racially and class-biased notions of what constitute knowledge, how it should be taught, and how it should be assessed" (Bernie Froese-Germain 2004, p.278). Meanwhile, Meagan & Casas (2004) suggest that Standardized accomplishment evaluation may be detrimental for the growth of teenage children given that the format of evaluation fails to take into consideration that the cognitive aptitude of these children progressively changes in the early years. This has thus necessitated significant calls for enquiries into the findings and substance authenticity of such tests, as well as societal concerns vis-à-vis obstacles for some students by using outcome-based education.

In a related but different environmental context, Couthino (2002) and Mendez (2003) both stressed that African American boys score lower than any other group of youngsters on standardized tests and are also three times as likely as white males to be suspended or enrolled in special education programs for mild to moderate mental retardation. Furthermore, the Schott Foundation study of 2004 emphasizes that although African American males represent only 8.6% of public school enrollments, they however account for about 23% of suspensions and 22% of expulsions.

In addition, Keren Brathwaite, an Educator and former Chair of the Organization of Parents of Black Children (OPBC), expressed concerns on the issue of equity and inclusiveness within the education arena and with particular reference to black youths. According to Brathwaite cited in Connelly report of 2007:

"The question for us today is: Are we making progress in education, particularly in the principles of equity and diversity and anti-racism and anti-class bias which form the cornerstone of our discussion? My analysis is that progress is slow, very slow and does not correlate to the energy, ideas and organizing that happened in our communities, especially in the 1980s and 90s when we formed a unified block of parents and community and I believe it did develop a strong voice about the issues. As a matter of fact, we have experienced some losses, especially in graduation expectations for our students, in curriculum delivery re International Languages and Black Heritage Program, and in offering more integrated curriculum units on our history and cultures, as progressive educators and community were advocating for many years". (Connelly 2007, p.11)

The key concerns in this excerpt— "are we making progress….?", and "…we have experienced some losses"—speak volumes in support of the "inadequacies", deficiencies", "shortfalls", etc. that the many other authors cited thus far in the paper are pointing to. Indeed, education policy in relation to black Canadian youth, though in principle is claiming to be fair and inclusive in nature; but in practice, it has never been fair and thoroughly inclusive. Related concerns which can be argued in some way(s) begin with curriculum design but is now substantively aided by standardized testing. These two factors as indicated in the preceding sections have contributed in one way or the other in suppressing and even eradicating many black youth's interest in their academic pursuits. The problem with Standardized testing also known as Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) for example, is that it does not ensure accountability in the sense that the tests do not give parents genuine reflection of their child's progress. In addition, since standardized testing / (EQAO) entails multiple choice, the tests don't precisely assess student knowledge, critical thinking ability, or many of the other skills and knowledge outlined in the provincial curriculum; The tests don't assess the whole child or the

whole curriculum; the tests provide only one assessment; good program decisions require more assessments which is a problem.

http://www.etfo.ca/issuesineducation/eqaotesting/pages/default.aspx

Despite all the clear evidence, school administrators and policy makers continue to do nothing in way of remedial action, that is, beyond their holding more 'debates' and funding more 'commissions'. This approach on the part of school administrative officers, teachers, policy makers, etc. is consistent with the thinking behind what has become known as the 'deficit theory' (Garcia Coll et al., 1996: Murray and Fairchild, 1989). Based on this theory, school officials offer a biased assessment of the discussed concerns by faulting the socio-economic status of the marginalized youth's families, as well as the youth themselves, for their continued academic underachievement. While at the same time understating their own neglect of the concerns, neglect fostered/promoted in large part by the uninformed stereotypical views they harbor toward black youths within their jurisdictions. That being said, let us now take a look at the policy of Bottom Streaming.

4. 3: Bottom Streaming

Generally, the promise of public education is to provide all students with a high quality learning experience and an equal chance of success. Yet the problem of the achievement gap in our schools between students from different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds reveals that we are still far from delivering on that promise. Dei et al., (1997) indicate that "The saliency and centrality of race in understanding the schooling experiences as well as social and political actions and interpretative practices of African-Canadian youths cannot be underestimated. They further argued that there are distinctions in Canadian youths and their schooling experiences which demonstrate some urgency in dealing with the challenges particularly of [B]lack/African

Canadians" (Dei et al.1997, p.11). Thus, streaming is a recognizable aspect of the educational policy developments that have been identified as another contributory factor that affect most of the black youth's educational achievement within Toronto schools. Since the 1970s and 1980s the practice of streaming students into 'basic', 'general', and 'advanced' levels (Lawton & Leithwood, 1988) have been under criticism. But although Ontario "officially" ended the practice in 1999, streaming nevertheless continues to play an integral role in the underachievement of too many black youths, especially here in Toronto.

In many Toronto schools today, especially the high schools, it is evident that the problem of diversity has generally been addressed through streaming (or, as some would prefer to call it, 'tracking'). In practice, streaming is essentially this: rather than grouping students within a class, the entire courses are set apart by their *supposed* level of difficulty, and on these supposition students are apportioned into courses based entirely on their, again, *supposed* capability and/or inclination to do the work demanded of the (various) courses. Streaming typically generates two broad groups of students: those who are deemed to be to 'academic'-ally inclined, and those deemed to be 'applied/practical' learners (most Canadian provinces have consolidated their high-school courses to fall in line with these two classifications.) Now, there is a fair amount of well-reasoned research by opponents of streaming which argue that the practice keeps lower-class and marginalized minority students away from more challenging programs, ensuing in a "mediocre" education for them. In the view of The Canadian Teachers' Federation (1992), students who are regarded as having less ability, or as being less motivated, are pushed toward tracks and courses considered to be less academically demanding, which invariably result in classes that are less diverse. They further pointed that support for grouped tracking varies between elementary- and high-school teachers, with fewer than half of elementary-school teachers indicating that they think

classes grouped by ability are desirable, compared with two-thirds of high school teachers. And then, in 1994, the Ontario Royal Commission's report on learning concluded that streaming is not favorable to students not assigned to university-streamed (i.e. academic) courses.

Curtis, Livingstone, & Smaller (1992) & Oakes & Wells (1998), in their contributions to the issue, also stress how research on streaming/tracking in secondary schools exposes the negative effects that the practice has on the experience of students who are not placed in the top streams/tracks. Young (2006) indicates that there are reliable research assessments showing that students in tracks called general, basic, or vocational have less actual instructional time, are assigned less challenging tasks, have fewer chances to discuss ideas, and generally have a significantly inferior educational experience. Following through with the information contained in the above existing studies, Pinto (2012) concluded that the streaming approach to achieving 'quality' results in education is highly problematic, since the academic streamed students often have access to more and/or better resources, as well as getting more challenging course work which tends to emphasize a better education for them.

For example, an analysis of more than 124,000 Ontario students, who took Grade 10 math as stipulated in Sachin Maharaj article of 2014, revealed that achievement in applied-level classes was 8 per cent lower compared to academic classes, and for Grade 10 English the gap between the two streams was 9 per cent. So it is no surprise that students in applied level classes are much less likely to meet the provincial standards on math and reading tests, graduate high school, and attend post-secondary education. But perhaps more alarming than the outcome of such tests, is who gets placed in the less academic streams. The article further reveals that schools with more applied classes are in most cases attended by students from families with much lower incomes than those in schools with many students in academic courses. Students who were expelled from school have

linked streaming to a form of detachment that has resulted in a lack of optimism for those placed in the lower or non-academic streams.

Existing studies indicates that 'race' is a significant arbitrating force in schooling, here in particular public schooling. Cheng (1995), for example, points to a 1991 high school survey, conducted by one Toronto Board of Education, which revealed that Black/African-Canadian youths were not achieving as well as other students in terms of 'credit accumulation'. This survey showed that 36% of black students were 'at risk' of dropping-out because of failure to accumulate sufficient credits to graduate within the six-year school term, as compared with 26% for white and 18% for Asian students. The same survey established that 45% of black high-school students were enrolled in the basic and general levels, as compared to 28% of the entire student body placed in those two lower streams. In addition, Brown (1993), "highlighted statistics from the Board of Education's study of high-school students who enrolled in 1987, which showed that by 1991 42% of black students, as compared to 33% of the overall student population, had dropped out of school" (Brown 1993, p.5). Other survey reports also demonstrated the severity of the issues concerning black youth's educational mishaps in Canada. One example, a study commissioned by the Canadian Alliance of Black Educators (CABE), as indicated by Daenzer (1995) also revealed the alarming extent and consequences of black youth's dropping out of school. Likewise, the 1994 report of the Ontario Royal Commission on Learning highlighted the alarming drop-out rate in its discussions about 'a crisis among black youths' with respect to 'education and achievement' (RCOL 1994). And there's more. A survey by Repo (1998) claimed that the placement of black males in the "dummy classes" (Repo 1998, p.83) undermines their future educational opportunities. He further emphasizes that "a large percentage of the higher socio-economic status students were in the academic stream and that a high percentage of the lower socio-economic status

kids were in the general level stream…. black group largely in the G-level stream, the survey also indicates that participation by general level students in intramural and extra-curricular activities was markedly lower than students in the academic program…. Finally, this survey showed that teachers were giving lower marks to the General level students even though they were *already* in lower stream" (Repo 1998, p.127).

While most black youths, as well as high percentages of other marginalized youths, usually fall below grade level as early as elementary school, the gap quickly increases as they get older. Horvat (2006) makes the case that these marginalized youths are more possibly assigned into slow learner groups at unequal rates, and that they are three times as likely as their white counterparts to be placed into classes designed for the mentally retarded, the behaviourally disturbed, and the emotionally impaired. In addition, black youth are half as likely to be placed in classes for gifted and talented students. Furthermore, these marginalized students are repeatedly encouraged by school staff to enroll in courses of study that are less academically rigorous and less challenging, and which tend to leave them trapped in general or vocational tracks much more often than their white counterpart. Clandfield (2014), argues that, the system of teaching, along with learning practices like IQ testing, streaming/tracking provides the mental and emotional reinforcement, within the common sense of the less fortunate, the authenticity and sincerity of their situation of relegation. To reference Stuart Hall (1997), he stressed that "The moment you say that blacks, already the equivalences begin to trip off peoples' mind…. blacks then, sound bodies, good at sports, good at dancing, very expressive, no intelligence, never had a thought in their heads, you know, tendency to barbarous behavior…. all these things are clustered simply in the classification system itself" (Stuart Hall 1997, p.3). Also to borrow an idea from Dodge, the striking contradiction plaguing the fairness and inclusiveness ideals supposedly built into the

aforementioned official school policies is this: "*while these policies are touted as having been designed to increase academic outcomes for all student and thereby help reduce negative behaviors in the troubled ones, too often the opposite effects are produced*" (Dodge, 2006:128).

While the frequency of assessment disparity and management is infused into diverse aspects of social relations and conversation within the school environment; labeling and streaming techniques stand to represent an aspect of those evaluation differences that are implemented through the biased attitudes of teachers as well as guidance counselors (Dei, 1997). Disparity assessment and treatment within the school environment act as an outcome of unambiguous racially prejudiced mind-set. Some black folks have reflected in their observations and experiences within the school system on how humiliating and offensive comments like "you guys aren't very intelligent are you?' (Dei, 1997, p.229) have created a situation where they have been ridiculed and relegated to a state of acute withdrawal and lack of acceptance. This stemmed from the fact that the differential treatment from school teachers, school educators, as well as school administrators in relation to ethno-cultural proximity and background of students within the school system is seen as a causal factor. Toronto school administrations and teachers have been accused by black youths of playing 'favoritism' in their differential treatments of students' in-class engagement and negative behaviors. As indicated in Dei (1997), "black students reported being frustrated by the fact they were admonished for behaviours otherwise accepted from white students….and that some teachers would engage in informal conversations or 'chatting' with white students, but would ignore black students" (Dei 1997, p.229-230). The sense of isolation that these black students feel upon intuiting that they deserve *less* recognition for their (presumably) approvable in-class engagement and *more* admonishment for their (presumably) unacceptable behavior than their white peers tends to stifle their interest in pursuing education. Research reveals

that black youths within our public school system are being discouraged from math and science classes, or being assigned to lower/applied streams, based simply on the assessment of 'professional' school authorities; but here one must wonder: how 'professional' can these authorities be when it is so evident to all the researchers I have thus far cited that assessment is arrived at only after it has already been determined.

One might be made to believe that the intention behind these assessments on the part of the school authority is genuine when considering their vital roles in child's development within any given society. But again, reference to the historical practice of *race classification* discussed at the outset of this paper will clearly confirm a pattern that has been transferred from the 17th century to today -the intelligence of blacks. Blacks through history till now have been classified to have low intelligence by the so called superior race (Stuart Halls, 1997). Therefore, it can and would not be surprising to see black youths within school system been represented and misrepresented in the way they have been. The negative low expectations and misrepresentation of these black youths are seen as a societal generational transfusion that has become a significant feature of the school educational structure within our society today. The discriminatory misrepresentations of blacks' folks within the school system are in most cases exhibited through the attitudes of the school teachers and school guidance counselors under the hidden curriculum. In the view of Giroux 1983, "hidden curriculum encompasses all the ideological stances of the schooling process that "silently" structure and reproduce hegemonic assumptions and practices' (Giroux 1983, p.71). In addition, Dei (1997) sees the hidden curriculum at the same time as a foundation for the cultural supremacy of the mainstream culture that upholds legality to replicate a quiet dialogue that support the pessimistic creation of Otherness. Thus, create a situation of misery, dejection, sadness, unhappiness, depression, hopelessness, powerlessness, lack of self-confident as well as lack of

self-esteem in relation to their long term educational pursuits and achievements. "*Sometimes too, because the school system has low expectations of black students, you say to yourself, 'why bother?"*, (Dei, 1997, p.231). Consequently, these black folks or youths tend to lose continued interest in their educational pursuit and in most cases find consolation with peers of liked situation.

Existing research outcomes indicate that academic track placement, shape variance in friendships choice directly and independently. This revolves around the idea that the association or group you find yourself tends to influence you. The organized accumulation of peers through academic tracking leads to a greater homogeneity of students in the group and increase attachment among those students. However, it appears that low-achieving, low-track students are most exposed to DPI, mostly when they identify with detachment from school and lack attachment to the conventional pathways to success (Dodge, 2006, p.131). This glaring situation helps to strengthen the need for youths to get more acquainted with peers that have similar unfavorable experience from the school system. In essence, student or students will grow more attached to the group and as a result, they are bound to be influenced by the doctrines of the group.

Despite all the evidences that points to the disadvantages of and inequalities resulting from streaming, it continues to appear prominently in educational policy in many jurisdictions, and for several reasons. The education system is structured in such that streamed courses are the only viable option, given class size and teacher preparation. More recently, and particularly in Ontario prior to school reform in the 1990s, de-streaming has not been successful. Study shows that the effect of both peer influence and academic performance are generated on the point in time findings that would undoubtedly explain that an incident that took place over time forms the changing force in the young person's life choices (Gibson, 2004). This sequence of events allows us to speak with

conviction of how alienation, exclusion, invisibility, cultural incongruence, and marginalized resistance inform the educational experiences of black students.

For example, in Jamestown in Etobicoke North on Toronto– a low-income, metro-housing, inner-city community where I live is a place where the bottom streaming of its children is very real and apparent to us all. It is one of the three targeted at-risk neighborhoods known for its high crime rate, shootings, killings, poverty, desperation, as well as gangs. Within the realm of this community, personal experience shows that over 43% of elementary school's children are either placed or recommended for special education/IEP programs – programs where what is expected of students is reduced or "modified" and the prospects of moving on to good programs in high school and good jobs are minimal. Most parents of black youths within this community are worried about their children being placed in Special Education programs that define their children as not bright enough or too disturbed to do well in school. Many have told me about choosing the Academic stream for their children in high school, only to have their children placed in the bottom applied stream without their knowledge or permission. The end results of this bottom streaming are dead-end jobs, no jobs at all, or detention centers.

A particular personal case in point revolve around my child. For the purpose of conceal identity I would not want to name the school or give my child's name as the issue is still ongoing. The bone of contention is that my child's school feels that my child has a behaviour problem and they want me to sign the Individual Education plan (IEP) form that would enable them to send my child into the behavioural class program. But I have refused to sign it on the grounds that it is a false diagnosis on the part of the school because my child does not have a behaviour problem.

Now this is the rest of the story. In 2010 my son was in grade one (1). We had no problem or complaint whatsoever either from the teachers or the students. Things went quite well until the

end of 2013. But in 2014 things begin to change when the school had a new female principal and my son was now in grade four (4). Since then until today we have been swamped with series of serious complaints and suspensions. The whole ordeal started when the school complained that my son doesn't talk in the class and that seems to be a problem for the teacher and the school principal and I was advised by the school to get psychological evaluation for the child. Of which I did. The Psychologist evaluation and result indicated that there was nothing wrong with the boy. Then the school backed up for a while after which the school came up with another allegation that my son does not listen to the teacher in class and he jumps around in class as well as he does not have respect for authority.

Following through with these complaints, we were called to attend series of meetings with the school principal, school psychologist, as well as the school social worker to see how we can resolve the issue. But the series of meetings with the school could not solve the situation since the school principal as well as the school social worker on one hand have already made up their minds to identify and label my child as a child with behavior problem as a result he need to be sent to a behavior class. On the other hand, the school psychologist was not in agreement with the action of the school principal and school social worker because she did not see anything wrong with my child. But to make matters worse, the school administration is stepping beyond their jurisdictional boundaries by involving the Children Aid Services into the case because I refused to sign the IEP form that will give them authorization to conclude process of sending my son to the behavior class.

Following through with the above state of affairs and in order to be in safe and comfortable position, I decided to revisit my child Medical Practitioner for further evaluation. And during this visit, I complained to the medical practitioner who examined my son about the extent to which the school administration has gone. And he told me that this is a common practice especially with

schools that are situated in areas where you have minority or marginalized families living in disadvantaged areas. And that the best advice he would give to me is to change the child's school. He further advised that since the school had already singled him out, they would never give up on him until their recommendations are acted upon. More so, since the school also feels that they are professionals who deals with children in their custody almost every day of their school life, they are never wrong and their recommendation must be adhered to. While it is a fact that schools play important roles in youth's academic development, sometimes their recommendations are biased especially when it comes to children of black historical descent. This has been an obvious fact that has been proven in series of existing/academic studies despite the fact that school administrators, educators, as well as teachers tends to deny this impression about their policy. While my child situation with the school is still an ongoing issue, I am making serious arrangement to take my son to another school within the district.

Since streaming is an educational policy that reinforces the allocation of students into different levels of education based on their apparent academic abilities resulting from test scores. Keren Brathwaite cited in Connelly report of 2007, states that "the streaming that we have always dreaded due to its impact on student communities, is supported by the current industry of standardized testing, which is weeding out more of our students" (Connelly 2007, p. 8). Subsequently, the use of standardized testing becomes a symbolic attachment of streaming.

4. 4: The Zero Tolerance (Disciplinary) Policy

In the late 1990s community concerns about the highly erratic safe-schools and zero-tolerance policies and their impact on black minority students dominated public consciousness (M. J. Brown, 2004; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2003, 2004; Ruck & Wortley, 2002.) These community concerns were necessitated by the fact that zero-tolerance disciplinary policy

functioned to the detriment of most African Canadian males within the school system. That been said, the term zero tolerance "Generally is defined as a school district policy that mandates predetermined consequences or punishment for specific offences, regardless of the circumstances, disciplinary history or age of the student involved" (Findlay, 2008, p.104). The purpose of this mandate was to send the message to offenders that certain types of behavior at school would not be tolerated in any form (i.e., zero tolerance); subsequently, the mandate led to the overuse of expulsion and suspension practices in Ontario schools.

Dei (2008) citing Henay (2005), argues that zero tolerance works with a prejudiced and racialized philosophy of protection, and the strategies in particular help maintain cultural chain of command. These policies he further emphasized put in force severe school punishment and codes of behavior in a one-size-fits-all tactic. They contribute to the acceptance of schools as top-down, dictatorial, and powerful institutions. Rather than teach appropriate behavior that could improve outcomes for students, state and local school districts have extended zero-tolerance practices beyond the federal jurisdiction of weapons control to include fighting, unauthorized use of pagers or laser pointers (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). This stemmed from the fact that the construction of 'fear' of crime by black youths are used as justification to police them in schools (Solomon 2004, p.1).

As far as Black/African Canadian families are concerned, the most contentious issue in education today is the suspension and expulsion of their boys (in particular) due to discriminatory use of the zero-tolerance policy. Studies on the experiences of marginalized ethnic minority students within the Ontario school system, and Toronto in particular, indicate that students find the school system oppressive (Dei et al., 1997). This feeling of being oppressed stems from the fact that many black youths in Toronto schools are being labeled, stigmatized and stereotyped,

often by their own teachers. As Carl James (2004) indicates "These teachers reported that students in the racially, ethnically and linguistically diverse "inner city" schools in which they taught, were often described (or labeled) by educators as at risk, low achievers, learning disabled, drop-outs, disruptive, trouble-makers, problem-students, rebellious, and individuals who are likely to get into illegal activities. Students were also described as coming from "working poor" families who "lived in government housing." Some students were thought to be "growing up in immigrant, blue collar and/or single-parent households on special assistance." (Carl James 2004, p.2)

The basic tension relating to the issues of zero tolerance in schools lies in the differences between the ability to obey the rules and the refusal to accept the repressive nature of this racially motivated school policy. James (2004), further emphasized that students that fall within the above category tend to express their frustration or concern by going against the school code of normalcy "by wearing jewelry, caps and bandanas, decorate their school uniforms with accessories and congregate in defiance of the rules" (Carl James 2004, p.3). The hypocrisy here is that, the teachers, rather than using the policy as the starting point for understanding and addressing the needs, concerns and interests of the affected students; instead drastically use the actions of these racially and ethnically disadvantaged students as a basis for suspensions and/or evictions from schools.

This is what Owen (1976) referred to as *Schooling in Babylon*: "The doctrine depicts Babylon as a whole complex of institutions which conspired to keep the [B]lack man enslaved in the western world and which attempt to over-power and suppress peoples of color throughout the world" (Owen 1976, p.70). Owen further emphasized that *Schooling in Babylon* represents a kind of ethno-cultural integration and acceptance into the historical ways of life of the colonizer to guarantee that the "white-washing" is complete. Schools, in the view of Young et al., (2007), "become central institutions in this culture of oppression that dominates the socio-economic,

political, legal and cultural life of the oppressed" (Young et al. 2007, p. 291). Solomon (2004), in his contribution to the issue, expands on this by stating that:

> "Schools have become the micro-political environment where the struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed is played out…. An environment where a hierarchy of school personnel: principals, vice principals, guidance counselors and teachers with well-defined roles, ensure that top-down rules and regulations are maintained. Increasingly, law enforcement agents such as the police have made their way into schools to reinforce the authority structure. Minority groups perceive such police "Babylon" presence as a continuity of surveillance and containment from the community into the school. Thus the school has become both the agent and agency of oppression, as a site of struggle and contestation between rule-makers and rule-breakers." (Solomon 2004, p.1)

Solomon (2004) further indicates that the educational formation in Canada react to blacks as people that belong to the category recognized as "Others", and their reaction to these black males, in essence, facilitate their presentation and representation as a set to be dreaded, watched, and directed towards limited knowledge acquiring atmosphere (Solomon 2004, p.1).

The questions to be asked then become: what is the school's responsibility to youths and to education? Are schools to act as the police to enforce law and order, or simply to educate young people? If it is to be the latter then educational delivery requires a different mindset, one geared to teaching about discipline and not simply enforcing discipline. It is disturbing when many of the students who are expelled or suspended are students of color (especially black students) who are left to languish during their suspension. It is also interesting to note, at least from the layperson's viewpoint, how school boards are spending precious limited funds on high-priced lawyers to expel students, while parents and communities are simultaneously being told that schools are running budget shortfalls and therefore are unable to address race and in equity concerns. In fact, local communities and black parents have been frustrated by what they see as the discursive manipulations by school boards and administrators. It is asserted that some black students are

being disciplined at times for being nonconformist and resistant to the authoritarian structures of schooling. These complaints cannot simply be dismissed (Roman, 2004; Skiba & Peterson, 1999)

LeCompte and Dworkin 1991, in their Deviance Theory of Dropping Out, argues that by refusing to uphold and obey the established set of school rules and regulations, students place themselves in a situation of being identified as non-conformists by school teachers and administrators within the periphery of the school. Accordingly, this refusal might result to a situation where the students would be deprived the opportunity of being accorded the recognition of well-cultured students. With time, these deprived students who in most cases are black, absorbed such classification within the school organizational structures by redefining themselves in terms of their unusual activities. As they move in the direction of attitudes that work to their advantage, their resistance demeanor attain a measure of legitimacy of its own to some extent greater than the approval of the school authority. However, since the school organization and arrangement do not put up with repeated idleness, weak intellectual competence, and absenteeism, students who fall within these categorizations are sooner or later ejected from the school system. Thus the 'deviance' model is predominantly pertinent for generating awareness of established formations as well as procedures that diminish the school authority's judgment in ejecting students who are considered deviant out of the school system (Dei, 1997, p.19).

Despite the significant increase in the use of suspension and expulsions when disciplining students, there appears to be little evidence that shows expulsion or suspension practices as being capable of improving student behavior. Zero Tolerance policies for school infractions were steadily put into practice within school command and influence across Canada with no empirical evidence to justify that such school disciplinary procedures reduce danger within the school premises (Ayers & Dohrn, 2001). While there are long-standing community complaints that these

policies unfairly target black and minority youths (L. Brown, 2006), there are still people within and outside the system who still consider zero tolerance as a good deterrence to school misbehavior.

Various existing studies have shown that the zero tolerance policy have affected and continue to affect the academic progress of people of color in Toronto schools. For example, Dei (2008) indicated that, "in the 1990s every Secondary Student Survey of the old Toronto Board of Education revealed a disturbing drop-out rate for Black, Portuguese and Aboriginal students" (p.351). Dei (2008), cited R. S. Brown, (1993), as saying that "the graduation rates for black students are provided as 44% and the dropout rate 42%; comparable figures for white students are 59% (graduation rate) and 31% (dropout rate)" (Dei 2008, p.351). He further stressed that while the report might be subject to contestation when taking into consideration the way(s) in which society have evolved, the real facts of the matter is that the inexcusable state of affairs still remains the same in relation to the negative representation and misrepresentation of black youths within Toronto schools. Indicators of high school success such as "geographical area of birth" or "credits accumulated at the end of grade 10" (Dei 2008, p. 351-352), tend to speak to this concern.

A more recent enquiry reveals that "In the 2011-12 school years, student suspension rates according to the TDSB report decreased tremendously for all racial groups compared with the previous census years. Students who defined themselves as East Asian, Southeast Asian, or South Asian had lower suspension rates than other racial groups. On the other hand, students describing themselves as Black, Latin American, Mixed, or Middle Eastern had relatively higher suspension" (TDSB 2013, p.2)

While, critics or those who may not agree with the overall perspective of this paper might contend that, the aforementioned discriminatory school policies are no longer in operational within

the school system following the introduction and reformation of the equity and inclusiveness policy (2013 Policy/ Program Memoranda No.119 of the Ontario education policy-reform). However, the detrimental remnants associated with these discriminatory policies still resonant as of today within Ontario schools. The continued effects of these policies on minority groups especially black youths signifies that there is an obvious discrepancy between *the idea and the reality* with respect to the equity and inclusiveness strategy.

Existing studies have and continued to indicate that when it comes to blacks or other youth of colour, there is sufficient evidence to indicate that these populations have not been objectively characterized. These populations have been found to be consistently discriminated against and stigmatized in one way or another within the public school system, practices that some contend are basically a reflection of attitudes held in the broader society.

More so, a York university report titled "Black students hindered by academic streaming, suspensions" published in the Toronto star on April 24th, 2017 by Andrea Gordon- an education reporter indicates that: "Black children in the GTA may start kindergarten feeling confident and excited to learn, but too many are "gradually worn down" by schools that stream them into applied courses and suspend them at much higher rates than other students. The report found that while academic streaming was supposed to have ended in 1999, black students are twice as likely to be enrolled in applied instead of academic courses compared to their counterparts from other racial backgrounds. And they are more than twice as likely to have been suspended from school at least once during high school (Andrea Gordon, 2017).

The report further emphasized that "Between 2006 and 2011 only 53 per cent of black students were in an academic stream program versus 81 per cent of white students and 80 per cent of other racial groups. Forty-two per cent of black students had been suspended at least once during

high school compared with 18 per cent of white students and 15 per cent of other racial groups. Sixty-nine per cent of black students graduated between 2006 and 2011 versus 87 per cent of other non-white students and 84 per cent of white students. Twenty per cent — twice as many as the other groups — dropped out. Fifty-eight per cent of black kids did not apply to post-secondary school versus 41 per cent in the other two groups. It also cited more recent stats showing almost half the 213 students expelled in the five-year period ending in 2015-16 were black." Black students seem to face an achievement and opportunity gap in GTA schools." (Andrea Gordon, 2017)

While, within the institutional level, policy makers and school administrators tend to excuse themselves of the problem associated with black youth's educational underachievement by trying to lay the blame on either the family or the youths themselves. However, the fact of the matter remains that the application and implementation of the just-mentioned school policies have hidden racial sentiments attached to them that tends to discourage the interest of most of the black youths in their educational pursuit.

That been said, the next chapter will be addressing the question of the black family's circumstance and the role this plays in the problem of black youth's academic underachievement.

Chapter 5

The Family's Role(s) in Black Youth's Academic Under-Achievement

It is well accepted today in virtually all fields of study that families are powerful institutions whose influence over children affects all aspects of their lives, including their educational experiences. And this wide acceptance derives, of course, from the fact that 'the family institution' is the site where children first learn the *socialization process* (Mitchell, 2009). This influence is imparted irrespective of any formal communication between parents and teachers, but is nevertheless known to exert immense pressure on children's educational pursuits as well as the relationships they form while in school. Needless to say, then, this immense influence of the family on children—especially adolescents—can be both positive and negative.

From the beginning of children's lives parents have a range of enormous responsibilities, beginning with ensuring that the children are nutritiously fed, properly clothed, and safely housed. Indeed, as the principal stakeholders in children's overall well-being parents have the life-long responsibility for nurturing their children's minds, beginning with teaching them those things they need to know before they enter school as well as throughout the course of their school life. In other words, parents are expected to provide reliable and timely support to their children all through their years of youthful development. In many if not most cases, this support includes helping the child onto the school bus in the mornings, providing resources such as toys, books; computers, work space, and the like.

Parents ensure the children complete their homework on time, which today often requires tight supervision and control of the time they spend engrossed in front of the TV set or with other social media. Furthermore, as the children begins making decisions on their own they will sometimes seek advice, and parents have the responsibility of being there for that moment; that is,

by lending their ear and voice to strengthening or emphasizing this point made by the child, or as necessary denying or diminishing the importance, value, substance, consequences etc. of that other point. Parents also act as representatives in their children's absence in a host of vital areas too many to detail here. In a nutshell, children learn from parents (the family, more generally) those principles, talents, sense of self and so on, that help to foster and encourage the right character for successful educational achievement.

Keren Brathwaite, in "Keeping Watch over Our Children—the Role of African Canadian Parents on the Education Team" (a chapter published in the book "Making Schools Matter: Good Teachers at Work" by Satu Repo, 1998), speaks to the idea of parents' and communities' active involvement in the children's educational success. In this chapter, Brathwaite stressed the need for black parents to stand up to the plate in support of their children's quest for educational achievement and success. In her words, "For the majority of African Canadian students to achieve success in the schools (and also in the colleges and universities), their parents, families and community will have to provide a strong support system for them" (Satu Repo 1998, p.256). Brathwaite further emphasizes the need for parents and the community to assume their informal roles of 'co-educators' to their children at home before sending them to school, and that the school authorities should recognize this fact if educational success is going to be achieved within the specified community. As she put it, "And most importantly, there must be a full acknowledgement by professional educators that parents are the first educators of their children. This is not an empty cliché. As parents we teach our children in the home and community before they enter formal schooling" (Satu Repo 1998, p.259).

While it is true that parents are obligated to perform the above functions and responsibilities, at least to the extent of what their capacities allow. More so, it is also true that the

discharge of these duties/functions are realized differently depending on particular families' existential circumstances, in particular relation to the internal family structure and specific community/cultural location. Young (2006), for example, points out that such circumstances, in relation to the discharge of parental responsibilities, do not characterize what constitute "good families" or "bad families", nor do they "make a child more intelligent or less intelligent" (Young 2006, p.251). Nevertheless, existing studies reveal that family circumstances are in most cases used within the school environment to classify youth into different levels of academic competence. Reproduction theorists have proposed that educational accomplishment is firmly connected to the scale to which the traditions of the home, work hand in hand with the ways of life within the school periphery. But evidence also indicates that these supposed correlated ways of life are cherished and appreciated differently by the school system insofar as how students relate with their teachers, how students are represented or misrepresented, as well as the nature of the learning environment (Young 2006).

To repeat, then, it is today well accepted in virtually all fields of study that the family setting is where children begin to learn how to interact with the others around them. Families provide stability or instability, security or insecurity, nurture, love, supports and a sense of belonging (Ketterlius & Lamb, 1994). However, there is another side to the family environment that cannot be overlooked. Ketterlius and Lamb (1994), for example, state that "children with behaviour problems will tend to grow into juvenile delinquents and, in due course, into adult offenders" (Ketterlius and Lamb 1994, p.7) because the path towards or away from crime begins early in life (O'Grady, 2007). According to O'Grady (2007), for example, the degree of self-control in a person depends on the eminence of the parenting received, which helps shape the child's mind-set and behaviors during the early years of development and socialization. Parker &

Johns (2002) and Cohen (2008) also argue that proper parental influence is a guiding element to successful child development. Thus while the early training of children, whether directly or indirectly received, is a significant determinant in how children *act* out in the social world, it is also true and important to note that the social world, in turn, *acts* on the children.

For instance, there is a vast amount of academic literature demonstrating that poverty is directly linked to poor academic outcomes of most of the black youths (Levin, 1995). Living in low-income circumstances diminishes parents' ability to afford post-secondary education, which in turn increases the likelihood that youths growing up in such conditions will ever be able to see themselves as capable parents/adults. This negative view toward future 'success' is prevalent in the black family circle, where parents know, or at least firmly believe, that the higher their financial income the better chances their children have to complete their education; and conversely, that the lower the financial position the less likely it becomes that their children will be able to complete their education (Young, 2007).

Statistics from the National Council of Welfare (2000) indicate that during the 1990s the ratio of Canadian children below age 16 living in low-income conditions varied between 15 and 20 percent, depending on the province. Back then these percentages represented more than 1.3 million Canadian children. The National Council of Welfare report further indicated that even through the good economic years of the late 1990s, extreme low income/poverty was a reality for many Canadians, but most especially black (and other minority) families. On the other hand, though, even when black families do have the financial resources and are able to provide their children with the necessary motivation to 'do well in school', the discriminatory nature of school policies tend to negate these families' position and efforts. This negation creates a 'vicious circle' that functions to reproduce and thereby maintain the low-income status of black families; i.e.,

within/amongst these families the connection between poverty and their children's educational under-achievement tends to repeat itself. This impoverished family circumstance, when internalized by the black youths, leads them towards peers in like circumstance (/like interest), and in so doing they find a place of refuge that will encourage a feeling of belongingness, as was outlined earlier in Chapter 1.

Stephane Tremblay (2004), cited by Moll in the book *Passing the Test*, indicates that academic performance is an important apparatus in the measurement of children's wellbeing. But as Tremblay goes on to say that, "The socioeconomic status of students and features of the home environment may have a large impact on academic achievement" (Stephane Tremblay 2004, p.156). It is believed that economic conditions have prevented many black men from actively participating in child and family maintenance, as these men find themselves entrapped in these low socio-economic conditions, it is the black women who are left with the rearing of the children for many years and it's these women who watches the children go from strength to strength or fall into the hands of school and societal regression.

Against the above background, this thesis will like to take a more detailed look at the issue of the black family's existential circumstances in the Ontario context. Here, the focus will be on the negative impacts that certain circumstances can have, and often do have, on black youth's possibilities for academic success, including absence of fathers in the family home, and the growing prevalence of single motherhood.

Chapter 5:1

5.1.1: Absence of Father in the Black Home

Father-absence is not a new phenomenon to African/Black homes and communities; it is a predisposition that has progressively increased in ratio over the last 400 years (Cabrera & Tamis-Lemonda, 2003). Historical records tell us that (what is commonly considered to be) the *normal or ideal family life* did not exist for blacks who were brought to the West Indies and the New World (North America) as slaves. On or before 1868, the expected traditional male role of been a father and a husband by the African Blacks were affected and taken over by the slave masters or supposed slave owners since the marriages between slaves were not officially given the necessary recognition and acceptance (Taylor, 2006). This invariably affected the traditional, family setting of most African Black males within the very context they found themselves. Instead of being able to sustain a reliable family and be a dedicated father and husband, the black males were be used as male prostitutes as well as object of economic production and reproduction. Trasha Jacquette Black (2008), citing Taylor (2006), indicates that:

"Male slaves were often required by slave owners to act as "bucks" and impregnate numerous female slaves in an attempt to generate greater numbers of laborers and increased wealth. Slave owners would frequently "rent" their men to neighboring owners to produce additional slave children. These male "bucks" were not recognized as fathers and were discouraged from presenting themselves in the fatherly role because sole rights of all slave children officially dwell with the owner of the child's mother" (p.14).

While the above circumstances tend to depict and present the white colonial slave masters as the guardian of black women and their children, they also helped to create an atmosphere where

the capacity of black male (*supposedly fathers)* to provide for and defend their families were limited and thus rendering them powerless and inactive (Davis, 2002). As society evolved and the abolition of slavery became increasingly seen as inevitable, blacks were given the opportunity to legally get married and be recognized as part of 'the family institution'; however, high rates of father-absence continued to exist among black families living in North America (Wallenstein, 2005), and the primary reason for this continuance is the fact that there remained a lot of restrictions and barriers (from slavery) that continued to set economic and social limitations on black families.

Today the occurrence of father-absence in the African/Black families and communities is disturbing, and the impact of this on the children is distressing in many ways. Duncan (1997) indicates that father-absence in a number of cases adversely affects children's educational achievement, as validated by lower test scores, reduced academic grade development, and increased challenging school behavior. In addition, Balcom (1998) spots personality, psychosocial growth, and emotional suffering of children as features recognizably associated with missing fathers. Furthermore, behaviours in children relating to, emotional problems as well as all forms of harmful, risk-taking behaviors like greater risk for suicide, crime, early sexual activity, and illegal drug and alcohol use are also recognizable characteristics associated in most cases to father's absences in their children's lives (Harper & McLanahan, 2004).

Judging from experience and observation, I would infer here that not all children without a father or living with a single parent do badly in their educational pursuit, but for black families it is a concern in many cases. U.S. and Canadian statistics routinely indicate that there is in general an insufficiency of male role models for the youths. More than half of black children, one third of Hispanic children, and 20 percent of white children reside in single-parent households that have

no father to model themselves after (Bradshaw, 1995). However, with that been said, father-absence is said to affect boys and girls differently. Boys, according to some reports, are more negatively affected by father absence than their female counterparts (Mitchell, 2001; Walley, 2001). Father-absence harmfully impacts boys' self- confidence, as well as their capacity to realize self-reliance in dealings later in life. Most of the teenage boys who grow up without male authority also have a tendency to over-identifying with their missing fathers. These factors create an unstable arrangement, because each of these boys may grow up to become a man who is unprepared to provide as a father to his own children, thus maintaining a sequence of father deficiency (Wark, 2000).

Basically, most Black/African descent parents living in North America are in a state of despair educationally, financially and judicially, all of which contribute to the high incidence of absenteeism. Father-absence is more common among underprivileged populations who contend with numerous socioeconomic complexities, including the issues of teen motherhood, low education, and racial inequality (Harper & McLanahan, 2004). In conjunction with the issue of father-absence with regards to most of the black youth's educational underachievement in Toronto, correlations are drawn between black fathers and lack of education/low employment income, black fathers and domestic abuse, as well as black fathers and incarceration.

5.1.2: Low Education-Low Employment Income and Black Fathers' Absence

Generally, acquiring education represents the key to a better future in terms of job prospects and quality of life. Black fathers' lack of education which, in other words, results in low employment income, has been linked to their absence in their children's lives. Black people, but more specifically black men, have a long history of being relegated to the bottom of the economic

class structure. This persistently low economic status stems from the fact that the intelligence of blacks generally has always been and continues to be questioned. The Black 'race', as we will recall from an earlier section of this paper, had been classified to have low intelligence and to be lazy. According to Stuart Hall (1997),

"What racism, as a philosophy, contends is that there is a natural connection between the way people look, the differences of color, hair, and the bone, and what they think and do. With how intelligent they are, with whether they are good athletes or not, good dancer or not, good worker, civilized or not. Racists believe that these characteristics are not a result of our environment, but of our biological genes. Blacks for instance are born not as intelligent as white" (p.1)

This mentality continues to resonate in and around our community. Judging from demographic composition as well as class-structure categorization within our society, verifiable facts indicate that blacks occupy the lower rungs of the economic ladder. This revolves around the justification that most of the black folks lack the adequate educational skills to secure good paying jobs that would help elevate their situation and that of their family. While this impression could be true based on statistics on high rates of school drop-outs among blacks, it nevertheless forces us to raise questions as to the extent to which institutionalized racism and systemic discriminatory school policies and practices influence those statistics. As earlier indicated in the discussion on educational policy, issues related to inadequate school curriculum content, discriminatory school tracking/streaming and disciplinary policies, have all contributed in one way or the other to discouraging innumerable black youths from taking keen interest in their academic pursuits.

The historical development of these policies and practices (even the mere perception of them) have engendered a situation where most of these black folks (who now are parents) felt

forced to drop out of school, with the result being that they are today stuck in low-paying jobs that ultimately severely reduce their ability to adequately cater to their families' needs.

Furstenberg (1995) argued that fathers who face financial difficulties usually encounter many obstacles to becoming active in their children's lives and well-being. Saracho & Spodek (2008), in direct support of Furstenberg, indicates that "due to the extensively accepted correlation of education and income, fathers of most of the black youths in Toronto who lack academic success are more likely to lack opportunities for productive employment on one hand. On the other hand, fathers with greater resources and higher financial, educational, and skill levels are more expected to assume the role of active father" (Saracho & Spodek 2008, p.3). In addition, Toronto District School Board (TDSB) (2013) report indicates that "students whose parents had higher education levels (university or above) had lower suspension rates than students whose parents had lower education levels (secondary school or lower) in both Census years" (TDSB 2013, p.3) The report further stipulated that "the higher the students' family income and the lower were their suspension rates" (TDSB 2013, p.4)

Furthermore, with regards to socio-economic status, the report indicated that "In Grades 7-8 and Grades 9-12, students whose parents held professional and senior management positions had the lowest suspension rates than other student groups. On the other hand, students whose parents held unskilled clerical and trades, or non-remunerative positions, had higher suspension rates in both Censuses." (TDSB 2013, p.4)

Consequently, while black parents in our society falls within the lower economic category due to the lack of adequate educational skill to obtain well-paid jobs; there is always the possibility of black fathers not being able to provide adequately for their family, a reality which many authorities agree can, and often does, lead to conflict within the home.

Subsequently, practical reality within our society have and continued to reveal that the inability of most of the black fathers to provide adequately both financially or otherwise for their family, tends to represent one of the root causes of domestic violence in and around the structure of family institution. And in most cases thus lead to separation, divorce, as well as incarceration as the case may be.

5.1.3: Domestic Violence and Disenfranchised Black Fathers

Domestic violence or abuse is another contributory factor that has been linked to black fathers missing in their children's lives. This violence often stems from the fact that a lot of black fathers are not able to adequately provide for their family on account of their deficient educational status. This ultimately prevents them from getting well-paid jobs in order to better support their families. In a situation where the income coming into the home is insufficient to meet the family's daily needs and responsibilities there is always the possibility that disagreements, unhappiness and conflict would arise between husband and wife as well as, eventually, the children. Bradshaw (1995) indicated that in Canada (and the United States), the unemployment rate among 'minority' males is higher than the national average, which tends to discourage most women from getting married since from the outset concern is raised about the inability of the prospective husband to sustain themselves and subsequent family.

This predicament of the women is underpinned by systemic racial bias and other forms of prejudice which all intersect with other factors (e.g. social location or poverty) and combine to marginalize, exploit and eliminate specific groups (e.g. Black, Aboriginal, Hispanic, etc.) (Parker & Reckdenwald, 2008). Heise (2002) drives this point home in emphasizing that "men living in poverty are expected to generate anxiety, frustration and a sense of insecurity for having failed to

live up to their culturally anticipated role of breadwinners. This precarious situation in which many black father finds himself, if not controlled, could escalate into physical violence/abuse directed toward their female partners/spouses" (Heise 2002, p.99). Heise also stresses that "one of the most common forms of violence against women is that performed by a husband or an intimate male partner and [that] men who assault their wives are more likely to be emotionally dependent, insecure and low in self-esteem, and are more likely to find it difficult to control their impulses" (Heise 2002, p.89). The likely—and indeed quite common—consequence of the man's inability to control said impulses is mandatory police intervention and the judicial proceedings. This might include unwanted restriction orders placed on the men and, which in worse cases, can lead to the possibility of permanent separation/divorce being forced on the parties involved.

In related development, research evidence reveals that friendly and lovely relations with the mothers of their children are extremely connected to higher levels of non-residential father's involvement in their children's lives. This includes, among other things, the setting up of sound supervision arrangements as well as having free visitation access on one hand (Laasko & Adams, 2006) Then on the other hand, distance among the father's dwelling and children's residence, restricted access to visitation as well as the failure to relate to and identify with their children is absolutely associated with level of absence (Coley, 2006, Adams 2006). Fathers who have restricted supervisory control in their children's lives and encounter conflicts with the mothers because of this (along with any legal restrictions in place) are more likely to become and/or remain absent in their children's lives. And while there is much evidence showing all this to be true of fathers/men generally, the excessive scrutiny historically given to black men tends to magnify perceptions that black fathers are most prone to this kind of aggression, violence, and abuse. The

net result for these black fathers who vent their pent-up aggression on the mothers of their children is that they get arrested, charged, and sentenced to some time in jail.

5.1.4: Incarceration and Black Fathers

The connection between father-absence and imprisonment (or other form of 'confinement') is perhaps the most devastating correlation/statistic, since it represents the ultimate departure from their children's lives. Research studies (not to mention popular culture forums like movies and television) indicate that black men have a much higher rate of prison confinement and internment than their white counterparts (Wester & McLanahan, 2000). But besides the reams of literature on the subject, simple observation will confirm that black parents are inexplicably negatively affected by the Canadian judicial system. Fathers who have had punitive acquaintance(s) with the courts, either through child-support mandate or criminal indictment, have higher rates of indolence and/or absence in their children's life (Anderson & Kohler, 2005; Jones, 2006). Thus, the combined factors of higher imprisonment rates and lower schooling accomplishment add up to a situation where affected black families are less able to sustain themselves, financially as well as in terms of supervisory management over the children. These factors also contribute to the possibility of the today's black boys becoming absentee fathers themselves in future (Bradshaw, 2002). Wester & McLanahan (2000), in their contribution to the subject, suggest that the rise in incarceration thus involves a massive culture (or norms) that considerably affect young, poorly educated, minority males.

For example, statistics cited by Black (2008) from the U.S. Department of Justice (2001), reveals that "30% of African-American males between the ages of 20 and 29 are under correctional supervision and that 30% of African-American boys will spend time in jail during their lifetimes.

In 2002, there were 791,600 African-American men in federal, state, and local prisons and only 603,032 enrolled in higher education in the United States (U.S. Department of Justice, 2003). According to this same Justice Department report, the year 1980 logged only 143,000 black men in prison, a significantly lower occurrence. Today, African-American men make up 41 % of the inmates in federal, state, and local prison systems, but comprise only 4 % of all students in American institutions of higher education" (p.2). Though these reports are addressing the plight of black males within the judicial and educational systems in the United States, the figures are relevant to this paper because Canada and the United States operate almost identical systems when it comes to judicial as well as educational matters. It is evident that blacks within the context of these two countries face almost the same types of discriminatory practices within the realms of the courts and the schools. Consequently, in situations where fathers are missing in their children's lives for reasons relating to economics, domestic abuse, as well as judicial incarcerations, children are now left in the sole custody of the mothers.

Chapter 5.2

5.2.1: Single Motherhood & the Black Woman

Although there is recent evidence that the socio-economic status of women in our society has improved in certain areas, historically women, but single mothers in particular, have encountered various forms of exploitation and oppression. Systemic discrimination faced by black women, again especially single mothers, is an area that is worth giving particular attention when the issue of black youth's educational achievement and under-achievement is being considered.

Generally speaking, single-parent households are usually headed by the female parent whose educational attainment is low and takes home an income that is below a male worker (McLanahan, 1985). This educational attainment research, which focuses on adults, further indicates that those who grow up in one-parent families' complete fewer years of schooling than those who spend most of their lives in two-parent households. This finding is consistent across several studies on educational attainment and is related to other indicators of adult well-being, including occupational attainment and marital stability. Research has also shown that there was an increase of 11.2% for lone parent household from 2001 to 2006 (Ministry of Education, 2009).

Acquiring post-secondary education represents the key to a better future in terms of job prospects and quality of life, yet single mothers face a combination of unforeseen circumstances in their struggles to obtain education. These circumstances, or barriers, involve systemic issues resulting from patriarchal ideologies, racism, classism and sexism, as well as discriminatory practices which construct these single mothers as 'other.' Low income levels also impact single mothers' ability to acquire a post-secondary education. In addition, the lack of support services and resources available to this marginalized group present further obstacles as they attempt to educate themselves.

5.2.2: Impact of Patriarchy on Single Mothers

Patriarchy, by simple definition, means 'rule of the father', which suggests that fathers (or men) automatically has authority/control over the women and children in the family. Indeed, taken to the extreme patriarchy is in fact understood as meaning that both mother and child were rightfully the 'property' of the father. This family arrangement/structure was the dominant design in western societies for many centuries. Up until the 18th century, social norms and laws did not allow women to have custody of their children during a divorce and male privilege was accepted throughout society, often to the detriment of children (Laakso, 2001). During the 19th century the rate(s) of poverty in western societies increased dramatically, and as a result fathers began finding it difficult to provide for their families (Zhan, 2004). Children, who had previously been considered 'beneficial' to the family (they were an essential part of the family's farm-labour force), were now seen as "an expensive family burden" due to the onset of industrialization (Laakso, 2001). Up until this development fathers had *de facto* control over children, but now mothers were increasingly viewed as the ideal parent to care for the children because it was believed that mothers act with the children's best interests in mind. Since men did not excel in caregiver roles they lost exclusive rights of custody over their children and they were also obligated to provide child support despite the lack of custody (Laakso & Adams, 2006).

As western societies continued to evolve so too did the social standing/position of men change, particularly his role as head of the household; women, meanwhile, began to assume or take on more of the family responsibilities. However, patriarchal ideology and practices remained entrenched, meaning that despite the ascending status of women/mothers male thinking continued to dominate social-cultural life. The result of this continuance of male-think dominance is that

women have been rendered vulnerable to a variety of discourses that reinforce male privilege and female subjection. One method employed in these discourses is to discriminate against women by attaching to them stereotypical labels that stigmatize and devalue them (Haleman, 2006).

Single mothers in particular experience this stigmatization on a daily basis, and which hits them from various sources in society (Fulford & Ford-Gilboe, 2004). For example, Adair et al., describes a situation where a single mother and her child entered a bus and the mother faced unnecessary public humiliation; as she was trying to get out her money the driver of the bus shouted, "Don't bother.... the welfare office is only a few steps away, sit down and get out of the way" (p.2). Single mothers encounter this type of discrimination from various members of society, including family caseworkers, family members, store clerks, medical professionals, and many others (Haleman, 2006; Fulford & Ford-Gilboe, 2004). Fulford & Ford-Gilboe, (2004) emphasized that, humiliation can also come from family members. These authors give the example of the aunt of a pregnant single woman who phoned her and stated that the woman was not ready for a child since she was single and that she was not entitled to have a baby shower. For this woman the pregnancy of a single woman represents "a tragedy, not a celebration." (Fulford & Ford-Gilboe, 2004) Moreover, social workers carefully scan the attire of women and determine that single mothers need to be controlled and disciplined (Fulford & Ford-Gilboe, 2004). What these examples clearly suggest is the idea that the labeling and stereotyping faced by single mothers (and women more generally) originated in patriarchal ideologies, which is up to today still solidly entrenched in the minds of social actors.

Patriarchal ideologies marginalize single mothers on the basis of multiple factors, including race, gender and class. Adair et al., (2008) references the social prejudice that views black single mothers as "lazy uneducated and living in the ghetto with five (5) children [and] selling her food

stamps to buy alcohol" (p.136). The discrimination against single mothers (of any race) originates in the over-all discrimination against women in general; indeed, traditionally, women have been viewed as helpers who are innocent, fragile and soft (Abbott, 1995, p.263). Consequently, women have been reduced to the status of "objects" and patriarchal norms and ideology enforces these socially constructed ideas, ensuring that women, and especially single mothers, are disempowered within society (Adair et al, 2008). Mitchell (2003) argues that "gender biases become even more stronger for mothers living in poverty" (p.113) and Dahlberg (2003) reinforces this position, stating that "sexism and classism intersects in every realm of popular rhetoric; popular rhetoric expresses the view that poor single women *prefer to be* single mothers" (p.79). The notion that "lazy poor women" stay home waiting for handouts to purchase color televisions in order to watch the Oprah Winfrey Show clearly illustrates how the factors of gender (women) and class (poor) combine to stigmatize single mothers. Of course, *race* must be added to the equation, since black single mothers face an especially high degree of marginalization and oppression within a patriarchal society that grants the highest status to wealthy, white, married males (Mitchell, 2003).

Globalization functions to exacerbate the barriers and forms of oppression faced by single mothers (and women) throughout the world. Mitchell (2003) argues that some of the oppression single mothers encounter stems from within their own cultures and societies. In North America, single mothers do not fit into the dominant family model that comprises a mother, father and children. However, Haleman (2006) further indicates that globalization is creating a form of "global feminization" that discriminates against single mothers in countries around the world. Economic changes caused by globalization have led to a reduction in their employment security and an increase in the amount of work that they need to perform on the job. Increasing numbers of women have jobs but most of these jobs feature low pay and harsh working conditions.

Social stratification connected to globalization has helped to enforce economic inferiority on women. Men continue to have power and control, and they attempt to exclude women from making decisions and obtaining employment positions that confer power (Segal and Brzuzy, 1995, p.144). This exclusion negatively impacts women's economic stability everywhere in the world, leaving women subjected to male domination and regulations that render women universally vulnerable (Wetzel, 1995, p.177). While globalization seems to have the potential to unite women, most women have unfortunately become united in their poverty and marginalization.

5.2.3: Impact of Income and Education on Single Mothers

Most women and single mothers understand that in order to escape welfare and poverty they need to acquire higher education (Austin, 2003). Yet they encounter problems with the education system and low incomes. As single mothers enter into the educational environment they often experience a feeling of isolation. Their responsibilities outside of their schoolwork become overwhelming, and this can undermine their ability to devote the necessary time and effort to education (Duquaine-Watson, 2007). Moreover, the education authorities do not consider the unique needs of single parents when planning the school curriculum. Single parents in almost all situations live in poverty and this also undermines education, especially for mothers (Romo & Segura 2010). Adair points out that mothers face strong pressure to prioritize their families' rather than their own education, stating that "[a] good mother has to work for her family; she does not hide out in school" (Adair, 2008, p.10).

Therefore, while education can provide a way for single mothers to escape poverty and social alienation, it can be very difficult to overcome the obstacles that stand in the way of obtaining a post-secondary education. "Family income can influence various development outcomes like, academic result and life transition, for example living in low-income situation may

reduce the ability to afford post-secondary education and increase the likelihood of living in low-income circumstance as an adult" (Statistics Canada,2014). Most single mothers need support from financial institutions or organizations to pursue post-secondary education. However, the needs of single mothers attending school while raising their children has been largely ignored. Tuition costs at most colleges and universities are very high, so single-parent mothers are forced to take out student loans which require repayment later. Moreover, some single-parent mothers enroll in colleges rather than universities because college tuition fees are lower, but so are the wages that can be earned after graduation (Duquaine-Watson, 2007). Childcare also impact single mothers financially. Given the demand for childcare spaces and the high costs associated with this, single mothers are forced to frantically search for the best alternative caregiver service for their children.

Citizens in general often face economic challenges, but single mothers are especially vulnerable to the problems caused by low incomes. Financial issues affect single mothers in many ways, including lack of public support for children, irregular and inadequate child support from fathers, and the low wages that single mothers typically earn (McLanahan and Garfinkel, 1993, p.15). Furthermore, various levels of government have done little to support single mothers and to invest in single mothers as a form of human capital. Haleman (2006) draws particular attention to one of the more difficult challenges single mothers face, this being the common accusation that they are not doing enough to get better jobs so that they could lift themselves out of poverty. And at the same time, they have also been denied the supports they need to obtain education and better jobs, which makes it difficult for single mothers to improve their standard of living. This catch 22 position, as Haleman (2006) further stressed, "can cause single mothers to experience various illnesses including depression and anxiety" (Haleman 2006, p.775).

In addition, Spector and Klodawsky (1993) indicate that "single mothers are the heads of 85% of the households headed by women and that these single mothers tend to spend disproportionate amounts of their incomes on housing" (Klodawsky 1993, p.240). However, the low income of typical single mothers within our society affects their ability to provide quality housing for themselves and their children. As a result, single mothers and their financial problems living with children face financial hardships in so many areas of their lives (Spector and Klodawsky, 1993).

Attaining higher education has been identified as a motivational force to gaining higher income and increased employment prospects, which when combined is presented as the best way to escape poverty. However, within our society, as Jager (2011) stresses, single mothers continue to face discrimination in the work environment due solely to their gender, and this even after they have obtained a post-secondary education. Zhan (2004) argues that employers' impression of single mothers is that they lack certain unique qualities that can qualify them for certain occupations despite their educational achievements. Zhan further argues that these mothers are usually young and poor, and for this reason they are not granted the respect and opportunity they deserve. Single mothers who complete post-secondary education and obtain jobs still lag behind men in terms of wages. As Ferri (1993) sharply explains it, single mothers are simply considered unreliable. Thus, the low incomes of most single mothers negatively impact their ability to obtain post-secondary education in a variety of ways. As a result, it limits their ability to provide adequately for their children due to the fact that they do not have access to adequate support services within the community in which they find themselves.

5.2.4: Lack of Support Services for Single Mothers

Employment support for single mothers within the Canadian society is also lacking. And while this is generally true for most women because of gender discrimination. When compared to men they earn significantly less. The lack of support is particularly acute for black single mothers. Jager (2011) indicates that single mothers of colour often hold jobs that carry lower status than those held by white single mothers. This lack of employment support for single mothers denies them upward mobility opportunities which have a negative impact on their quality of life. And even when single mothers are determined to take positive steps they have trouble obtaining jobs with good pay and benefits (Adair, 2003). This reality, in other words, makes it difficult for women to maintain the single parent household and thereby places further stress on them, often causing detrimental effects on their health.

Financial challenges are further heightened for those single mothers who are having trouble obtaining financial assistance from the fathers of their children. If fathers of their children refuse to uphold their financial/support commitments, single mothers are supposed to seek redress through the courts which are supposed to help effect those commitments. A court may grant an order to garnish the wage of the father, but the money has to first go through the system before it gets to the mother. A single mother struggling to obtain financial support from the father of her children may turn to child support services, but this can cause further trauma for her because of the legal and bureaucratic proceedings involved. As Laasko (2001) indicates, the system is hopeless and incompetent and thus causes further grief to single mothers.

The absence of structured support systems to help single mothers find decent employment functions to perpetuate their social exclusion. There is also a lack of welfare support for single mothers. Welfare reform policy stipulates that in order for single mothers to receive benefits they

must seek part-time employment and attend school full-time (Haleman, 2006). However, educational programs were limited to two years (i.e. the system prevents them from enrolling in the 3-4 year programs that could/would better prepare them for escaping poverty.) As a result, if single mothers were to handle the stress of work, education and family responsibilities she would obtain an education that would qualify her for only lesser paid jobs (Haleman, 2004). Haleman (2006) further points out that the cumulative demands (such as discussed above) placed on single mothers make it difficult for them to cope, especially when the children are young and require the help of the mother for almost everything. Also, Romo (2010) emphasizes that caseworkers sometimes mislead single mothers by giving them inconsistent information on education and by strongly discouraging them from enrolling in four (4) year programs, despite the fact that such programs represent their best opportunity to escape poverty. Welfare support should be structured to assist single mothers but instead it functions to preserve their economic hardships and thereby ensuring they remain uneducated and in poverty (Adair et al., 2007).

To conclude, all the barriers and difficulties just discussed affect the capacity of single mothers to discharge their duties and responsibilities in proportion to their children's needs and overall wellbeing, among the important consideration in almost all cases being their educational needs. Indeed, the school system, the courts, government agencies, as well as the society at large, all share in creating and sustaining the hardships encountered by these single-mothers. All of these institutions share responsibility for holding single mothers down and incapable of sufficiently providing for their children's wellbeing, among the most important of which being their educational success. Increases in such families' negative state of affairs (such as economic pressures and divorce) have prompted more and more teenagers to depend on peers for emotional support.

Realistically, though the roles and responsibilities of parents within the family institution are indispensable with regards to their children's development; however, parents' performances and accomplishments of their parental obligations and duties are at times affected in a favorable or unfavorable way by their socio-economic position within and outside their family surroundings. It is believed that economic conditions have prevented many black men from enthusiastically partaking in their children and family upkeep, as these men find themselves entrapped in these low socio-economic circumstances. These low socio-economic conditions as indicated in the sections above has a causal connection to domestic violence; which invariably leads to father absenteeism, father incarceration, as well as single motherhood.

Living in low-income settings thus reduces black parents' capability to meet up with the expense of their children's post-secondary education, which in turn increases the possibility that youths growing up in such environments will ever be able to see themselves as capable parents/adults. This adverse opinion towards the road to impending 'success' is predominant in the black family circle, where parents know, or at least confidently believe, that the higher their financial income the better chances their children have to complete their education; and on the contrary, that the lower the financial position the less likely it becomes that their children will be able to complete their education (Young, 2007).

While, educational success as suggested by Reproduction theorists is strongly related to the scale to which the cultures within the home, works hand in hand with the ways of life within the school environment. Nonetheless evidence also indicates that these supposed simultaneous ways of life are valued and treasured differently by the school system in relation to how students relate with their teachers, how students are characterized or mischaracterized, as well as the nature of the learning environment (Young 2006).

On the whole, the above impoverished family circumstance coupled with the negative representation and misrepresentation of black youths within the Ontario educational system, when internalized by the black youths, leads them towards opting out of school.

Possible Effects:

While the roles and duties of parents within the family unit are very essential in their children's development, parents' executions of their responsibilities are sometimes affected in a positive or negative way by their structural compositions, which include the internal structure, socio-economic status as well as their cultural location. These structural compositions of the family in some cases have been identified to be of casual influences on criminal activities among children and youths, especially black youths.

Mitchell (2009), for example, suggests that family violence or abuse is a factor that influences youth criminality. A 2001 study, referenced by Mitchell, (2009) indicates that one-quarter of all vicious offences reported to police services involved cases of family sadism. Youths in these cases, in other words, become a creation of their bad family circumstances because their siblings, fathers and/or mothers were incarcerated or had regular interactions with the criminal justice system (Czudner, 1999; Parker & Johns 2002). Coming from a background that promotes violent or criminal activity therefore increases the possibility of youths being influenced towards similar behaviour.

Criminal behaviour— 'deviance', more generally—can be inspired by other family dynamics as well, including the single-parent household. Single-parent households are important sites for study when considering, for example, youth's tendencies toward delinquency and/or defiance. Dornbusch et al., (1985) argue that single-parent households, particularly those run by single mothers, often exhibit recognizably dysfunctional characteristics such as can lead to youth's

development of antisocial behaviour. Most families headed by single mothers fall within the category of 'underprivileged population' due to poverty. It was noted that 85% of all single parents were women living in poverty; many of these women have experienced divorce and due to the larger social problems they are faced with they tend to have a liberal style of parenting (Dornbusch et al., 1985; Nelson, 2006). Poverty thus becomes a motivational or energizing influence on youth's eagerness and passion, especially male children, towards deviance and subsequent criminal activities. Most male children within single-mother households are inclined to making important choices without parental consent or involvement, and these choices, if gone unnoticed or left unmonitored, sometimes result in detrimental consequences for the youth as well as their families. Indeed, there is a substantial volume of literature attesting that youth in single-family structures have more issues with addictions (i.e. drugs, alcohol, tobacco), not to mention with rule-breaking behaviour, emotional distress, and so on. Jablonska and Lindberg (2007) are in agreement with this when they argue that children and youths in single parent homes are more vulnerable to delinquent behavior than those in households consisting of mother and father.

The community and surrounding environment of the family home is another indicator of the kind of influences youths receive. According to Desmond and Kubrin (2009), social location and social exclusion or oppression tend to encourage and motivate deviant/criminal behavior; in fact, these authors stress that youths who reside in criminally prone areas (due to poverty or lack of access to suitable living conditions) are exposed to criminal activities on a daily basis (Desmond & Kubrin, 2009). Community/surrounding environment has been widely acknowledged to be a leading influence on those youths who decide to engage in certain activities, and quite often criminal activities.

What these remarks are meant to suggest is that a micro-analytic approach to the 'problem' of black youth's disengagement from schooling cannot properly attend to the surrounding macro-structural political, cultural, and economic forces that have marginalized the families of minority children who attend our schools. Razack (2001) put the matter most clearly by saying that "it is evident that racism and discrimination are embedded in our structure, institutions and within the social fabric of society. People from racial minority groups are faced with different forms of racism and discrimination within the society" (Razack 2001, p.224). What all of the experts cited to this point are saying is that social actors' home surroundings are an essential cursor for both academic and employment-related upward mobility. Children of lower-class parents (who themselves are more likely to have minimum levels of education and thus insecure financial status) living in impoverished communities are therefore likely to remain at an inferior status in comparison to children of middle- and upper-income parents.

Recommendations:

In conjunction with the above stated affecting factors with regards to black youth's educational underachievement within Ontario schools, it is in the further opinion of this paper to suggest the following:

1. That education policy makers, administrators, educators as well all other relevant stakeholders should use every resources within their disposal or jurisdictions to eradicate all forms of discriminatory policies and ordinances in and around the school environment. The Ontario *Human Rights Code* (the *Code*) states that "it is a public policy in Ontario to recognize the inherent dignity and worth of every person and to provide for equal rights and opportunities without discrimination. The *Code* aims to create a climate of understanding

and mutual respect, so that each person feels that they belong in the community and can contribute to it" (www.ohrc.on.ca). Subsequently, the Ontario Ministry of Education have modified its policy in relation to the above by promulgating new policies that tend to stress on inclusion rather than exclusionary policy. While this is a step towards a right direction, however, the policy of equity and inclusion should be properly and constantly monitored in and around the school premises in order to realize and actualize its purpose.

2. That school curriculum should be totally modified and updated to reflect an accurate account of the historical experiences and contributions of black people in North American history. History books and literatures should include all relevant historical records and experiences of black people rather than an accounts of prominent selected few. The use of the history of Martin Luther King, Rosa Park and some selected few as a reference point during black history months within Ontario schools is not an enough or complete representation of the experiences and contributions of the blacks in human history. More positive contributions of black people to human history should be emphasized and valorized in school curriculum rather than negative representations and mischaracterization. More so, atrocities that were committed to the black people should also be emphasized and re-emphasized so that black youths within the Ontario schools should be able to know the root of their history.

3. That school teachers should be more knowledgeable, trained as well adequately equipped on subject relating to blacks and their historical/cultural heritage. By so doing, teachers would be in a better position to speak with total conviction and clarity on issues of blacks and their heritage within the classrooms and its surroundings.

4. School Educators and parents of black youths should work together as co-educators rather than pointing fingers at one another with regards to problems and concerns of black youth's underachievement with the Ontario schools.

Conclusion;

This thesis was primarily concerned with showing that *deviant peer influence* (DPI)—which has been made largely responsible for black youth's educational under-achievement in Ontario public schools—is not as straightforward a phenomenon to understand as it is often made to seem. In fact, as the discussions above tried to argue, while DPI cannot be dismissed as a cause of these youth's academic under-achievement, and in many instances may indeed lead to their dropping out of school entirely, there are many other structural issues that are not given sufficient consideration, if at all.

To briefly summarize these issues, we might begin by saying that for some decades now the Ontario public education system has been using an 'anti-racism' approach to education policy formation and teaching practice(s). However, it is apparent that much of anti-racism education theorizing today is approached from the idea that educational institutions, in and of themselves, possess the capacity to alter relations of power within schools and wider society. The three guiding assumptions in this approach seem to be that with 'the right education': (1) social actors will be enabled to negotiate the mantra of 'equal opportunities for all', (2) social actors are thereby empowered because their 'individual freedom' to act as they please has been released, and (3) by virtue of these conditions social actors come to believe themselves capable of engaging in/promoting a 'critical democracy' that would guarantee (their) social justice (Ellsworth, 1989, p.300). Interestingly inventive that is, it is implicit in the theory of anti-racism education that educational institutions can be changed independently of other institutions; that schools can be

fundamentally altered without making structural changes elsewhere in the system, such as in economic and political realms of social existence (Anyon, 1995).

However, when discussing potential changes in the educational system it is important to remember that our public schools do not exist in a vacuum; our schools are embedded within the larger society and as such are influenced by such considerations as the geographical location of particular schools, the socio-economic status of the families whose children attend these schools, and the present political climate in which the schools exist—all of these are relevant considerations when talking seriously about how to create a better learning environment for our youth. Moreover, all of these considerations are themselves conditioned by historical precedence, which is perhaps the factor/element most obviously missing in our considerations about system-wide educational reform. And when we (i.e., policy makers, educators, and other societal stakeholders) fail to take these factors into serious consideration, one of the most devastating consequences is that 'minority' students become alienated from the school system in large part through no fault of their own. This consequence is as true for minority students living in rural communities (whose schools may not have access to anti-racist discourse(s) and resources), as it is for those students living in the inner-cities (whose ideals do not agree with those of the anti-racist thinking/approaches), but in either case in particular as concerns our black youths.

We saw in Chapter 1, for example, that while membership in a particular peer group is generally understood as important for shaping young people's character, when this understanding is applied to black youths the connotation is very often a negative one. As we learnt from one of the examples cited, peer groups of black youths were said to hold or promote negative feelings and attitudes toward school, and in another example that these negative feelings and attitudes is stronger among black youths than any other group within the Ontario school system. However, it

was also pointed out in Chapter 1 that peer influence "encourages positive as well as risky attitudes", and moreover that because we still have limited knowledge as to exactly how/why the youth respond in different ways to said encouragement. It is both hasty and unfair to emphasize one direction (risky/negative) over the other (safe/positive). However, it appears that in the case of black youths the risky/negative side is often overemphasized and the safe/positive side either deemphasized or not recognized at all by the school officials. The overemphasizing on the risky/negative side of youth's behavior has led to the kinds of policies and practices, discussed in Chapter 4, at play within the Ontario public school system.

But before getting to these policies and practices it was necessary to foreground them with a brief history of the societal attitudes held by European white peoples towards African black peoples. In Chapter 2 the focus was on the issue of 'race classification', which was a 17th century European design that sorted/ranked the different people of the world (as they were then *understood* or, perhaps more correctly, *misunderstood*) into their supposedly 'natural' categories. The chapter does not give any conclusive scientific evidence as to exactly *how* these different peoples' (namely, Europaeus, Asiaticus, Americanus and Afer) ranking was determined, since doing so was felt to be unnecessary for this paper. What was felt important emphasize is that Europaeus/Whites was understood as naturally belonging at the top of the ranking and Afer/Blacks at the bottom and, moreover, that this ranking is still used today in determining people's social stations and opportunities. Chapter 3 picked up on this theme with respect to the arrival of blacks in Western Ontario in the 1840s. These early black Canadians had fled from the Unites States in the hopes of escaping slavery and the unspeakable terror associated with that institution, only to find that they had jumped from the frying pan into the fire, as the saying goes. More specifically, Chapter 3 was concerned to show that the 'disenchantment' allegedly afflicting many of the black youths

attending Ontario public school today *cannot* be properly assessed or understood in isolation from the history of white negativity towards black people.

Chapter 4 highlighted the issues of Curriculum Design, Standardized Testing, Bottom-Streaming, and Zero-Tolerance the policy. All of these are policies and practices common in Ontario's public school system, and all are said or believed to help promote the ideals of fairness, equity, and safety in our public schools. But as the literature reviewed for the chapter showed, these policies and practices in one way or other unfairly target and discriminate against our black youths, never-mind the official mantra of "best intentions" promoted by education officials. Curriculum Design experts, for example, were accused of preferring to present only negative imagery in the text books, while downplaying of excluding positive imagery, leaving all students with a one-sided view of black peoples. The Standardized Testing policy/practice has been said to be explicitly biased in favor of those students whose early knowledge of the social world was built upon white (/superior) standards and ideals. If this bias does in fact exist, as the many authors reviewed seemed to believe, then the argument can be safely made that those students (the so-called 'minorities' and in particular the black youths) who find themselves in the lower 'applied' or 'non-academic' programs are there not because of their [in] ability to handle required academic work, but rather they are there because they were 'streamed' there by design. And finally, those students who (for whatever reasons) resist the above policies/practices and land themselves in trouble because of this resistance end up face to face with the Zero Tolerance policy. This latter policy was instituted in the pretext to *make our public schools safer*, words which suggest the 'good intentions' of the policy; however, as the discussion on this policy showed, black youths is by far the largest single group to come face to face with the consequences of this policy, which at the extreme includes suspensions and expulsions from school.

Chapter 5 serves two separate but closely related functions. First, it is meant to give a present-day perspective on the lasting dysfunctional effects of the 'race classification' design discussed in Chapter 2. Second, the chapter was meant to help bring the Chapter 1 discussion on *deviant peer influence* (DPI) 'home', by which I mean that families of the black youth who fall within the academic underachievement category as a result of this (whether factual or merely perceived) influence would need to accept some responsibility for their children's situation, as Keren Braithwaite forcefully argued. Taken together, these two perspectives are meant to give some 'balance' to the paper, which is also to say that it is neither constructive nor advisable to lay all the blame for our black children's lack of success on 'the system'; besides, a main objective of this paper, as stated in the beginning, was to try and see how we as a society could begin moving beyond the blame-game, which evidently must happen before we could hope to find real solutions for the black youth academic underachievement problem.

The Chapter then narrows down its focus by discussing, in turn, the concerns of father-absence and single-motherhood which are increasingly plaguing black homes. Both of these concerns, as they are witnessed today in our society, can be traced back to the purposeful destruction of black families that took place during the Atlantic Slave Trade, as well as to the 'race classification' design discussed in Chapter 2. Neither of these historical episodes can be easily dismissed, as has been argued through the paper. However, and more importantly, what the discussions in Chapter 5 were meant to do is: (a), highlight some of the more common and obvious structural/systemic barriers that function to leave many black men feeling inadequate in their role as fathers and which, eventually, essentially force them out of the family home, on the one hand, and (b), on the other hand, highlight some similarly difficult barriers that black mothers have to contend with in the absence of their children's fathers.

While fingers are being pointed from one area to another (from school educators, families, peers as well as the society at large), with regards to who is to be blamed for black youths not doing well in Toronto high schools. However, it is clear that everything from educational policies, family strain, and peer influence to ethnicity plays significant role in black youth's underachievement in Toronto public schools. In the situation where black youths are marginalized and discriminated within the school system, parent's failure to fulfill their parental obligations, and the society they live in, they are bound to resort to peers for support and guidance and as a result, they are bound to be influenced by the peer group for a sense of belonging. The effects of peers' influence among black youths within most literatures are in most cases gear towards the negative misrepresentation of which crime and gangs is most obvious. Therefore, one would predict higher deviant peer-clique involvement and peer influence in contexts where children are partially rejected because of their racial and/or cultural background (Prinstein & Dodge, 2008, p.75) When youth's needs, security, dependency or trust are violated they exhibit anger, become untrustworthy, fearless, gravitate to negativity and retaliation as a coping mechanisms (Mitchell, 2009 & Czudner, 1999). Going beyond the blame game would require the possibility of encouraging parents, schools and the community to be actively involved in the educational outcome of their children.

Note:

For clarity, the general focus of this study was directed most especially to the problems of most black's youths within Ontario schools with respect to their poor educational wellbeing. This includes among other things (Peer influence, Discriminatory educational policies, the nature of the family circumstances of most of the black youths). However, this study recognizes a number of limitations which will be rectified in-depth within subsequent publications. This includes the

inclusion of black feminist scholarship, the issue of hierarchy of oppression, the impact of ideologies and class inequalities.

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