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Changing Faces

Suburban School Response to Demographic Change

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As minority populations continue to grow, suburban school systems will bear a larger responsibility for educating students of color. Rapid demographic change may mean that students of color could walk into suburban schools ill prepared to address their academic and social needs. The focus of this study was to examine how and why several suburban high schools responded to demographic change in the ways they did. This multisite case study considered the policy and procedural changes that took place as growing numbers of African American students entered these schools. Interviews, documents, and archival data provided information on the programs, policies, and practices that schools modified and/or adopted in response to their growing African American population. This study suggests that racial meanings and interpretations affected issues of faculty efficacy and agency, school identity, and power and politics, which ultimately shaped school actions, beliefs, and decisions in response to demographic change.

Keywords: *demographic change; racial belief systems; school organizational behavior*

Over the past 20 years, the nation's suburbs have become increasingly diverse. In 2000, minorities made up 27% of the suburban population, up from 19% in 1990 (Frey, 2001). Areas such as Los Angeles, Chicago, Washington, D.C., Houston, and New York have the highest minority suburban population, about 43% of the total suburban population (Frey, 2001). Consequently, as minority populations continue to grow, suburban school systems will bear a larger responsibility for educating students of color—an expectation long associated with large, urban school districts across the country. Just as significant is the fact that minority families are typically limited to just a few suburban communities, so that neighborhoods and schools quickly become majority minority as White families move out (Orfield, 2001). Such rapid racial change within a suburban context may

mean that students of color could walk into schools that are not ready, willing, or able to address their academic and social needs (Haberman, 1994; King, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994b).

This article describes a study that examined how several suburban high schools responded to the complex phenomenon of demographic change. For the purposes of this study, school response considered the policy and procedural changes that took place as growing numbers of African American students entered these schools. Specifically, I examined the beliefs, actions, and decision making that occurred relative to demographic change. In addition to exploring what schools did, I examined why schools responded to demographic change in the ways they did. Interviews, documents, and archival data revealed the specific programs, policies, and practices that schools discussed, adapted, adopted, and/or modified in response to its changing population. The data also illuminated the various factors that influenced decisions on programs, policies, practices, and school organizational behavior. This article focuses on these factors within each school and across all schools that shaped school response to demographic change.

In this study, Kelly, Johnson, and Parker High Schools (all pseudonyms) each rendered a response to demographic change unique to its organizational and community context. Yet cross-case analysis revealed several themes, intersected and influenced by race, that help explain why these suburban schools responded in the ways they did. Findings from this study suggest that school response to demographic change may be explained by several factors. First, faculty belief systems influenced faculty collective efficacy and agency and subsequent school behavior and response to demographic change. Second, efforts to construct or maintain a certain identity shaped the manner in which schools responded to their racially changing school population. School and community history, particularly racial history, helped to construct school identity and image, as well as some notion of what school identity and image should be. Finally, power and politics provided the mechanism through which certain school members influenced school decisions and behaviors in response to changing demographics.

Although these factors prove to be significant, race exists as the underlying factor in this study of school response to demographic change. For this reason, this article begins with a discussion of the salience of race in the study of education. Critical race theory is important to this discussion as it centralizes the race issue in school response. In addition, I briefly examine the literature on belief systems and interactionism, which provides additional perspectives on the dynamics between racial conceptions and the actions and behaviors associated with them. Next, several theories used post hoc are introduced to interpret the findings and to illustrate the key

explanatory factors that emerged from them. After a brief description of the methods and site selection, profiles of three suburban high schools and their approach and response to demographic change are presented, as well as a thematic overview of the findings that help explain why schools responded as they did. In the discussion that follows, I compare response patterns to highlight similarities and contrasts in these schools' approach and response. Finally, this article concludes with some observations and implications for policy, practice, and research.

The Salience of Race

Current suburban demographic change takes place within the context of the turbulent racial history and the ongoing, complex nature of race relations in this country. The schools in this study represent unique examples of how race played out within a changing local and national racial landscape. In the not-so-distant past, Kelly, Johnson, and Parker High Schools had been all-White: within these contexts, some would argue that race did not matter in these all-White schools and communities. Yet implicitly and explicitly, these places and spaces were designated for White students. As soon as African American students began to enter these schools and classrooms, racial beliefs and assumptions were tested in the social interactions between teachers and students. These interactions required teachers, administrators, and schools to confront the beliefs, assumptions, and stereotypes they heard and learned about African American students. In addition, school faculty positioned themselves physically, mentally, and professionally to deal with their new African American students. The complicated dynamics of race relations in schools and classrooms are inevitable and continue to shape the experience of American education. In an effort to capture the significance of race from a macro-level perspective, I use critical race theory, a perspective that places race in all social situations and actions. In addition, and because of their emergent significance in this study, an overview of the literature on belief systems and interactionism and their relationship to race describes their significance to meanings and actions on behalf of African American students.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory emerged in the 1970s as a scholarship and intellectual agenda focused on examining race, racism, and law during the

post–civil rights period (Delgado, 1995). The basic premise of critical race theory situates race as an element of social structure, which is a normal part of American society (Bell, 1992; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Omi & Winant, 1994). This premise poses several challenges. One challenge is to position race at the center of analysis of American society and its institutions (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Parker, 1998). The strategy then is to not only uncover the legal history of racial subordination, racial ideology, and the racism experience but also to unmask how White Americans and institutions assume normative standards of whiteness while ignoring or subjugating other groups (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Parker, 1998). Another challenge of critical race theory is to dispel the myth of neutrality, color blindness, and meritocracy (Tate, 1997). Tate (1997) offers these myths as "camouflages" of the self-interest of the powerful and privileged in society (p. 235).

Examining the issues of race and education certainly is nothing new to academic scholarship. However, adopting critical race theory in the study of education means that racism in its many forms has to be exposed and that radical solutions must be proposed to deal with it (Ladson-Billings, 1998). To do so, one has to consider both the ideological and structural dimensions of racism (Gilroy, 1991; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997). Hence, from the critical race perspective, the examination of the schools must take into account more macro-level aspects of the educational system and society that are based on the laws, policies, values, and culture of the society. Ideological constructs such as traditional values, standards, established property interests, cultural artifacts, and status quo interests all have structural consequences that give birth to the social structures of institutions (Larson & Ovando, 2001; Omi & Winant, 1994). Critical race theorists would argue that these ideological beliefs are transmitted to and through the educational system.

For education scholars employing a critical race perspective, the main objective is not to determine whether racism exists in schools but to determine the manner in which the racial meanings and identities provide the basis for action, that is, educational decision making for students of color (Parker, 1998; Tate, 1997). For this study, several tenets of critical race theory are offered as a lens through which the beliefs, actions, and behaviors of schools and school personnel can be analyzed in an effort to centralize and problematize the race issue. Taken together, these tenets of critical race theory illustrate the ways in which race may be conceptualized and enacted in school response to demographic change.

Basic Tenets of Critical Race Theory

First, critical race theory challenges the notion of "traditional" values and standards, with the idea that they normalize Whites and White behavior and subjugate ways of being and knowing of people of color (Nebeker, 1998; Parker, 1998). Based on White middle-class ideologies, the values and standards define, reward, and/or criticize actions, behaviors, events, and dispositions of individuals, organizations, or other entities. According to the theory, the construction and interpretation of public policy, including school policy, flows along the lines of traditional values and standards. As arbiters of these traditional values and standards, schools as institutions claim rights of disposition; that is, rewarding or punishing students based on their conformity to school norms via school policies and practices (Ladson-Billing & Tate, 1995).

Along with the idea of traditional values and standards, critical race theory aims to uncover the ways in which property interests rationalize the marginalization of students of color. Property interests represent certain rights to information, actions, or beliefs. For example, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1998) describe curriculum as a property interest because the essence of its content, both what it contains and what it omits, implies something about the values of the school or certain representative groups. Furthermore, they characterize reputation and status as a property right; for schools, this interest serves to rationalize policies and procedures that presumably protect the schools' reputation or identity. Last, the right to maintain status quo also indicates established property interests that may be evident in a school's resistance or reluctance to change or modify programs, policies, and practices in response to its changing demographics. The concern in diverse or racially changing schools rests in the ways in which these property interests justify the allocation of resources including knowledge, power, human, financial, and so on, as well as who gets to allocate those resources, and how they may or may not benefit or reflect the interests of students of color (Scheurich & Imber, 1991).

A third tenet of critical race theory seeks to uncover and dispel the notion of color blindness (Tate, 1997). The color-blind ideology perpetuates the notion that schools are race-neutral spaces where information simply gets transmitted from one person to the next. Furthermore, as Lewis (2001) suggests, "It stigmatizes attempts to raise questions about redressing racial inequality in daily life through accusations such as 'playing the race card' or 'identity politics,' which imply that someone is trying to bring race in where it does not belong" (p. 800). Invoking a color-blind ideology,

school faculty may proclaim all students as the same, regardless of race or class, as well as certify their own actions, behaviors, and decisions as race neutral and consistent across all students. Yet school faculty may still act and talk in ways that exemplify a racialized reality (Lewis, 2001). Critical race theory contends that a color-blind ideology ignores the salience of race. In doing so, schools may negate the histories and perspectives of people of color in general and downplay unique modes of knowing and being that result in the failure to address a diversity of instructional, academic, and social needs (Yosso, 2002).

Critical race theory centralizes race within and across the organizational and institutional contexts that shaped these schools and their response to demographic change. The words, actions, and behaviors of schools and school personnel, as well as the patterns of meaning and behavior across schools, reveal the ways in which racial meanings played out in these schools undergoing demographic shifts. Although this article minimizes explicit reference to the illustrations and interpretations of this theory, it does give attention and focus to the actions, words, and behaviors of schools and school personnel and the implications of them within the racialized context of school and community demographic change.

Belief Systems and School Response

Well before the emergence of critical race theory and its application to the field of education, scholars studying race and education gave considerable attention to the beliefs, attitudes, and expectations of school personnel and the impact they could have on schools and schooling for students of color. One reason belief systems are so important is that teachers make judgments about students based on these beliefs, which in turn, dictate how teachers behave and what they do (Clark & Peterson, 2000). In their model of teacher thought and action, Clark and Peterson (2000) identify three categories of thought processes: teacher planning, teacher interactive thoughts and decisions, and teacher theories and beliefs. They argue that thoughts and beliefs affect planning and interactive thoughts and decisions, and vice versa. Furthermore, thought processes have a reciprocal relationship with teacher actions. This seems to support the notion that belief systems may be critical in this analysis of school response to demographic change.

A myriad of desegregation studies focused on and supported the importance of belief systems in education and schooling. Some indicated that faculty and staff attitudes toward desegregation influenced their approach to it (Nespor, 1986; Orfield, 1975; Peretti, 1976; Washington, 1978;

Wells, Crain, & Uchitelle, 1994). Positive attitudes toward integration influenced teachers' selection of practices that promoted integration, whereas negative attitudes promoted the use of resegregation practices (Epstein, 1985; Peretti, 1976). When teachers accepted the changes that came with desegregation, they were more likely to embrace racial and ethnic diversity and focus on the individual needs of students (Washington, 1978; Wells et al., 1994).

Furthermore, studies indicate that perceptions often shape teachers' interactions and expectations of African American students. For example, Cornbleth (1980) found that teachers rated White students as more efficient, organized, industrious, and pleasant, and Black students as more outgoing and outspoken. Similarly, Eyler, Cook, and Ward (1983) found that educators viewed African Americans as less promising and more troublesome. Gay (1974) found that White students received more open contacts whereas Black students received more discipline contacts.

Moreover, attitudes and beliefs mediate expectations, which have been shown to strongly influence what teachers do and how they relate in the classroom (Chunn, 1989; Gay, 1975; Good, 1987). Expectations can be based on many different characteristics including race, socioeconomic status (SES), sex, information obtained from other teachers, and track placement (Chunn, 1989; Good, 1987). The expectation of the teacher is one of the most significant factors in the academic success of students, considering the long-term interaction between teachers and students (Good, 1987). Some studies on teacher expectations suggest that race may be the most significant factor influencing teacher belief systems and subsequently their actions, behaviors, and decisions (Cornbleth & Korth, 1980; Dusek, 1983).

Interactionism and School Response

Despite substantial evidence on the relationship between belief systems, race, and faculty actions and behavior, some scholars question the actual influence of faculty belief systems on their decision making and on subsequent school response. An alternative theoretical perspective suggests that it is the interactions between individuals that actually guide actions and behaviors. Indeed, many respondents in the current study posited that their interactions with African American students and families, rather than their beliefs about them, guided individual and school actions and response to demographic change. This perspective might be explained by symbolic interactionism, an area of social science that contends that actions and meanings made of those actions in a social situation influence subsequent

actions and decision making (Becker & McCall, 1990; Charon, 1979). The next section offers a brief overview of symbolic interactionism, the role that race might play in interactionism, and its relationship to belief systems.

A couple of basic tenets define symbolic interactionism. The first is that actors act as they do because of others in the situation (Becker & McCall, 1990; Charon, 1979). Furthermore, actors do not merely react to the actions of others but instead to the meaning they attach to those actions. The second tenet of symbolic interactionism is that the actions are symbolic because they relay a message to others in the situation about how others should react and respond (Charon, 1979). Both tenets make important the notions of perspective and interpretation to symbolic interactionism. In other words, it is one's perspective that defines how one sees a particular situation; the interpretation of the interaction directs the action of actors (Becker & McCall, 1990; Charon, 1979). Symbolic interactionists hold that although perspectives can be shaped by the "reference groups" of actors (i.e., race, SES, gender), factors such as attitudes, beliefs, and personalities do not hold up in trying to explain actions because the influence of these factors will be altered or tempered by the actors "who are defining and redefining themselves and each other as the interaction continues" (Charon, 1979, p. 132).

However, Denzin (2001) takes this notion of symbolic interactionism in a somewhat different direction when considering racial subjects. He contends that individuals know race through representations and by the actions of the racial group and that "these representations are anchored in real historical formations, formations bounded and defined by the color line" (p. 244). Furthermore, he states that "systems of prejudice flow along these lines and they are acted on and fitted to the racial identities of interacting individuals" (Denzin, 2001, p. 244). In other words, interactions between people of different racial groups inevitably include preconceived notions about the other racial group. For the purposes of this study, these somewhat contrasting views about symbolic interactionism imply that to try to distinguish between school actions and responses based on belief systems and those based on interactions may not be necessary and may in fact be futile.

A better proposition considers that the actions, behaviors, and decision making by school faculty may result from some complex engagement between belief systems and social interactions. It appears that both belief systems and interactionism contribute important elements to this study because faculty respondents vehemently claimed that the actions of African American students and families influenced and shaped teachers' actions, reactions, and school response to demographic change. Also important to this study, this idea of symbolic interactionism can be applied to organizations such as

schools so that the actions of organizations can be better understood (Blumer, 1969). As addressed in the next section, both belief systems and interactionism generally influenced faculty collective efficacy and agency that shaped school response to demographic change.

Agency and School Response

The aforementioned discussion suggests that beliefs about, and interactions with, African American students may influence what teachers and schools do in response to demographic change. As previously suggested, such beliefs, perceptions, and interactions may manifest in and pose problems for faculty collective efficacy and agency. Collective efficacy is the *perceived* ability and capacity of a group of people to affect a situation or condition (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk, 2000). Collective efficacy becomes a part of collective agency, that is, the group's power and ability to affect their own condition or act on their own behalf (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk, 2004). In effect, the concept of agency can be thought of in terms that operationalize agency. So in addition to efficacy, Giddens (1993) describes responsibility for outcomes as another part of agency. Also, the will and capacity to make something happen seem significant to the operation of agency. Thus, the operational definition of agency used for this study includes having efficacy, responsibility, and will and capacity to affect situations and conditions within which one exists.

The nexus between beliefs, interactions, agency, and school response to demographic change becomes apparent when examining the expected role of school faculty in these racially changing situations. The basic assumption is that professional educators assess the situations in their schools and exercise agency in an effort to create an environment conducive to teaching and learning for its "new" and existing students. It is apparent that a number of factors contribute to the exercise of agency; one critical factor seems to be the expectation that others exercise agency on their own behalf. Thus, it seems feasible, for example, that if faculty believe that African American students and parents have the primary responsibility to exercise agency on their own behalf (and through interactions, faculty determine that African American students do not exercise their own agency), then this ultimately affects the responsibility, will, and the capacity of faculty and schools to respond to their changing demographics in productive ways. In addition, the degree to which schools and school faculty claim color blindness (i.e., race does not matter) may contribute to a sense of denial of the significance of race and influence the amount and exercise of faculty agency (via

actions, behaviors, and decision making) on behalf of their growing African American population. Though limited, the current study begins to explore these ideas in an effort to understand better the relationship between faculty efficacy and agency and school response to demographic change.

School Identity, Power, and Politics in School Response

School Identity

Kelly, Johnson, and Parker High Schools each responded to race and demographic change in ways unique to its organizational culture. Implicit in the concept of organizational culture is that the unique values, history, and assumptions create an organizational character or identity that distinguishes it from similar organizations. A cognitive construct, organizational identity serves to classify and order the social environment based on how members perceive the values, expectations, and operations of the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). An important dimension of organizational identity is image, that is, members' perceptions of how others view the places in which they work (Elsbach, 1994; Giola & Thomas, 1996). Vital to understanding the importance of identity and image is that persons develop social identities from their association with organizations, and thereby perceive the fate of the organization as their own. Several studies on organizational behavior and response illuminate the ways in which organizational identity and image guide actions and behavior of members (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Giola & Thomas, 1996). The general idea is that organizational identity not only shapes the ways in which issues and events are defined but also shapes subsequent behavior as members act to maintain or modify organizational (and personal) identities and images. Moreover, individuals most likely act in ways that project favorably on themselves and/or their organizations.

As evident in the work of Metz (1978) and Duke (1995), history may provide a framework for interpretation of race, school identity, and demographic change. For example, Duke (1995) described an organizational history that laid the foundation for the "culture of academic excellence" at Thomas Jefferson High School (p. ix). At the same time, this history provided a context for the interpretation, meaning, and ultimately, the behaviors that the faculty exhibited in response to desegregation. In this way, Duke demonstrated why faculty felt justified when they claimed "business as usual" (p. 99) in response to the increasing African American population.

As a sense-making tool, history evokes retrospection that enables people and organizations to look back at what they have been or done to define who and what they are in the present. This retrospective attention to the past creates meaning and helps shape personal and organizational identity (Weick, 1994). Combined, these ideas help explain how the unique histories of these schools and communities may shape school identity, which in turn, influence faculty's interpretation and perception of race and demographic change and their response to it.

Power and Politics

Mirroring the larger society, school demographic trends affect the political milieu in and around schools because of changing demands, expectations, interests, identities, and power dynamics (Ward, 1993). Indeed, these political struggles stretch across individuals and groups within the organization as well as outside the organization. Viewed from a political perspective, school response to demographic change may indeed reflect the interests and values of some individual or groups of individuals who are able to wield their power and influence over school decisions. According to Bacharach and Mundell (1993), a political analysis of schools can be viewed in two ways: a macroperspective, which considers the political dynamics between individuals or interest groups in the school environment at large, and a microperspective, which considers how "logics of action are negotiated among interest groups within organizations" (p. 432). The latter, described as *micropolitics,* illuminates a dimension of political behavior that, because of its very nature, may be missed and its importance possibly minimized. Several definitions of micropolitics exist, though I will simply outline several of its basic principles.

First, political acts and conflicts are "implicit and subterranean" (Ball, 1987, p. 20) as individuals or groups use their formal and informal power and/or influence to further their own political agendas and interests. Second, these agendas do not necessarily align with the goals of the organization; rather, they include the struggle about values, cultural understandings, turf, resources, decision making, or other symbols (Blase, 1991). Another feature of micropolitics includes the constant negotiation and renegotiation of these values, symbols, and the like that takes place in response to the changing environment. Last, it is important to note that micropolitical activity takes place outside the formal structure of the organization.

Blase (1991) points out that all political activity takes place within the sociopolitical and cultural contexts of the school environment. As schools

undergoing demographic change take on new identities, particularly new racial identities, the power and political struggles about how schools would be defined, for what purpose, and in whose interests become more complex and even contentious. Indeed, history and identity shape the key assumptions about school organizations and about the implicit assumptions of power associated with racial and socioeconomic groups. It seems reasonable that these assumptions would fuel the power and political dynamics that likely emerge in racially changing schools and communities.

The focus of this study was on the actions, behaviors, and decision making of school faculty in addressing the racial changes in their school population. Critical race theory helped situate and problematize race in society and education. Specifically, critical race theory offers a lens to examine the ways in which race might play out in racially changing schools. The overview of the literature on belief systems and interactionism suggests a reciprocal relationship between the two, each influenced by race, with significant implications for faculty agency and, subsequently, school response to demographic change. As elements of school culture, school identity, and power and politics, each shape the school response for Kelly, Johnson, and Parker High Schools in unique and important ways. In the next section, I provide an overview of the methods and site selection, followed by brief profiles of each high school.

Method

This research was a descriptive, explanatory multisite case study examining the phenomenon of demographic change in schools. The study described the events, happenings, and decisions made over time and parallel to the racial changes taking place within the schools and communities. At the same time, this study provided explanations, often competing ones, for the events, happenings, and the accompanying belief systems in an effort to gain greater understanding of the phenomenon of school demographic change and suggest "how such explanations might apply to other situations" (Yin, 1994, p. 5).

In making important the reasons why schools responded to demographic change in the manner they did, this study revealed some of the organizational and institutional elements of schools, including the salience of race, that played a role in decision making for school personnel and the schools as a whole.

Two detailed research questions guided this case analysis:

1. What changes in school procedures, policies, and practice reflect a response to student demographic change?
2. What factors related to the school organization, institutional influences, and race were associated with these changes and how did they shape school response to demographic change?

Site Selection

Because of my familiarity with the specific geographic area, I put together an initial list of suburban communities that had undergone demographic change. To determine whether any marked change had in fact taken place, data from the 1990 and 2000 census data were examined to identify those communities that had experienced at least a 20% increase in their African American population during this time period. Next, data from the high schools in these communities indicated whether they had undergone similar demographic change. In addition to African American student enrollment, other indicators used included the percentage of low-income students, and past and current academic performance on state assessment. From the initial review of data, it was evident that Kelly, Johnson, and Parker High Schools had experienced an increase of at least 24% in their African American student population (see Table 1). Moreover, all were moderate-income level schools, with 50% or less free and reduced lunch as indicated by school data. (Neither "poor" schools nor "wealthy" schools were considered so that SES, although significant, would not be minimized as a compounding variable.) Finally, these schools were situated in the same general vicinity on the outskirts of a large metropolitan city.

Data Collection

To address these research questions, school faculty and staff (at least eight from each school and specifically those who worked in the schools prior to or since 1990[1]) participated in face-to-face interviews in 2003. Key informants included the current principals of each school, as well as two of the three current superintendents. All but one of these key informants worked in their respective school at least 13 years, with one principal spending the previous 10 years in the district. Approximately 30% of informants were African American, 30% were administrators, and 60% were women. The 90-minute initial interviews were recorded in written form and via audiotape. Follow-up interviews with some respondents were conducted to obtain additional information, to check information from other respondents or documents, or to clarify previously obtained information.

Table 1
Proportion of African Americans at Kelly, Johnson, and Parker High Schools and in Their Communities, 1990 and 2000

	Kelly	Johnson	Parker
Community			
1990	20	19	60
2000	50	55	84
School			
1990	8	32	75
2000	50	75	95

Note: These approximate values represent percentages of the total population.

School documents reviewed for this study chronicled the period from the late 1980s through 2000 and included each school's report card (listing demographic and academic information), school board meeting minutes, attendance and discipline reports, student and teacher handbooks, school improvement plans, and other school or program reports. Local newspaper articles obtained from public library archives provided valuable historical and recent information about the communities and other school and community events and happenings.

Data Analysis

Within-site analysis addressed how schools responded to demographic change, as well as the norms, beliefs, assumptions, agents, or elements that influenced those responses. From several reviews of interview transcripts and document analyses, the actions, changes, and modifications in programs, policies, and practices within schools were noted and subsequently grouped into one of the predetermined categories: curriculum and instruction, professional development, discipline, school restructuring, staffing, student support services, student placement, and other. From the data, patterns and key events emerged through the repetition and consistency of specific themes and ideas. These key themes and some key events represented certain elements of school culture, institutional influences, race, or other aspects unique to each school.

The cross-site analysis involved comparing and contrasting the broader aspects of the data analyzed in the within-site analysis. From comparison of key components across all schools and contrasts on within-school variables,

patterns emerged reflecting the broader themes that appeared significant in their impact on school beliefs, behavior, and decision making. Once preliminary themes emerged, I reread the within-site cases and coded evidence and examples that illustrated the themes. These themes were compared to the literature to determine whether the data reflected certain theoretical beliefs and ideas. From the observation of patterns reflecting similarities in dominant themes, I developed some propositions that described the salience of each of the key themes, or factors, which are discussed in a later section.

School Response

This section includes the profiles of Kelly, Johnson, and Parker High Schools. Each profile reveals some historical and other background information about the communities and schools, as well as the conditions or situations that precipitated demographic change. In this brief overview, I give some insight into the beliefs, values, and assumptions of these schools along with their approach and response to their changing demographics. After the profiles, the key factors explaining school response to demographic change are outlined, and more detailed discussion and additional evidence from the cases are provided.

Kelly High School

In 1990, demographic change was a relatively new phenomenon at the Kelly High School. African Americans represented 8% of the population, but community changes signaled significant future growth in this population. For many decades, Kelly High School had been a valued institution in the White, working-class community of Mission Village. Many of the previous White students from this town did not plan to go to college; instead, local factories provided immediate post–high school employment for those who desired it. When a downturn in the economy forced these industries to close, many White residents moved out. The beginning of the 1990s marked a critical period for Kelly High School, suddenly faced with the challenge of changing demographics amidst a declining local economy and more state accountability in a community that was resistant and resentful of change.

In response to changing demographics, many school officials and teachers espoused a “kids are kids” philosophy. Although this may have been perceived as a productive and proper approach, this philosophical stance

proved to be the excuse given for maintaining status quo in the school. Several examples illustrate this point. In 1990, a faculty multicultural committee quickly dismantled after it was deemed unnecessary by some teachers and union representatives. Similarly, parents and some school board members called for an increase in minority teachers, but the minority hiring initiative never took hold, again, because at least one administrator in charge of human resources deemed it unnecessary. By 1992, the district began to offer training opportunities for culturally relevant teaching strategies. Some teachers took advantage of these offerings, but such training was not considered mandatory. Generally, teachers and school administrators felt that the school should not focus on differences between students; as the assistant superintendent put it, "We are a community first." These early discussions about the impending demographic change failed to generate any substantive modifications in curriculum, instruction, professional development, or minority hiring for the better part of a decade at Kelly.

However, the "kids are kids" philosophy did not apply to school discipline. Kelly High officials tightened and strictly enforced residency policies and instituted a new policy allowing students to be arrested on campus. Discipline was considered to be the job of teachers, which justified the administration's decision not to hire security guards or install security cameras. However, the "tough, by-the-book" approach to discipline led to a large increase in the number of discipline referrals and the disproportionate suspension and expulsion of African American students. To handle these increases, school administrators hired new support services personnel, specifically a new dean and an assistant principal of discipline. In addition, new counselors and an attendance officer dealt with the other social problems that these "new" students "brought" to Kelly High.

According to respondents, Kelly's history and culture as a White, working-class school largely controlled by a "good ole boy network" created barriers to organizational learning and change in response to its rapidly changing population. The "network" that included school board members, school administrators, teachers' union officials, teachers, and community members received much of the blame for the lack of attention to the racial changes. More important, others perceived them as proactive agents who thwarted attempts to address demographic change. Also, because demographic change was a district-wide phenomenon, much of the decision making occurred at the district level, which limited the possibilities for a school-level approach to demographic change at Kelly.

Johnson High School

Different from Kelly, Johnson High School's African American student population had seen considerable growth since the mid-1980s. In the 1970s, small numbers of African Americans lived in the middle-class communities surrounding Johnson. By 1990, the African American population reached 32%, and the community as a whole became part of the school's transition from a majority White to an ethnically and racially diverse school. Like Kelly, demographic change was a district-wide issue as the two other high schools experienced a similar influx of African American students. Community-wide demographic change made dealing with school demographic change a district-wide and community-wide concern and effort.

Evidence suggests that Johnson High School's approach to demographic change exemplified a philosophical and practical dilemma. On the one hand, school officials took a proactive stance in addressing its changing demographics. The district enacted a minority hiring initiative that resulted in the growth of minority faculty from 11% to 21% during the 1990s. Also, in the early 1990s, the district approved the school's first Black History club and program. The other important district initiative came in the form of the faculty multicultural committee whose task was to determine the professional development needs of the racially changing district. This committee designed summer professional development opportunities addressing curriculum, instruction, and social issues pertinent to African American students, with a special focus on African American males. They hired multicultural consultants, developed parent workshops, and solicited participation from community groups. These efforts fostered a climate of inclusiveness at Johnson and throughout the community.

At the same time, the district felt compelled to address concerns brought forth by their White constituents. In the early 1990s, Johnson school officials and teachers, in an effort to guard their image as a "nice, quiet suburban school," resisted certain security measures such as guards and cameras because of the possible impact on public perception. Also, in response to community concerns, the district sought ways to bring racial balance to its three high schools but the redistricting initiative failed. Yet in 1994, increased gang violence in and around the school caused officials to change from an open to a closed campus, offer gang and drug workshops for parents, hire new security guards, install cameras, and implement attendance and tardy policies that effectively dropped students from class and from school. The new, strict discipline policies led to a record 4,800 discipline referrals for its 1,000 students.

In response to the increased numbers of discipline referrals, Johnson High exercised its independence from the district by becoming the only district school to restructure its school day. In 1996, the school implemented a block schedule, which was thought to provide better opportunities to engage the "more sociable" African American students. The school saw an immediate drop in discipline referrals and suspensions; later, school administrators acknowledged that there was also an accompanying drop in student academic performance. Around the same time, the school board and district administrators canceled the all-school Black History assembly, after several years of White student and parent protest.

Parker High School

African Americans began entering the halls of Parker High several years after the school's opening in the late 1960s. They were unwelcome, and this led to several years of race riots inside and outside the school. Though they numbered only 100 out of 1,800 students, some faculty saw African American students as the cause of all of the school's problems. Adding to the community and school tension, housing agencies and local realtors allegedly exercised racial steering that brought large numbers of African Americans to the community. Despite this early history, by the 1980s, Parker considered itself a "college-prep" school, offering a comprehensive curriculum, including honors and advanced placement courses, and many extracurricular clubs and activities. However, this same period marked a rapid decline in White enrollment and in overall enrollment at Parker.

By 1990, the school had become 75% African American. As the only majority African American school in the district, Parker gained the image of "ghetto" school. Throughout the 1990s, image and identity problems and academic problems took its toll on teachers, administrators, and students. A number of teachers "quietly" sought and gained permission for a transfer out of Parker to the other majority White schools in the district.

Prior to the 1990s, Parker discussed and/or implemented a variety of approaches and strategies in response to its growing African American population. One particular strategy, minority hiring initiatives, resulted in a 20% minority faculty and a majority African American school administrative team. Yet as the African American population grew, issues of diversity received less attention because the school was no longer seen as "diverse." By the mid-1990s, the school engaged in little discussion about culturally sensitive curriculum or instruction, and very little discussion about how to

meet the needs of African American students. Parker was seen as a Black school in a White district with many of the same problems as urban or inner-city schools. By the middle of the decade, discipline became the main focus of teachers and the main task of school administrators.

This focus on discipline prompted a significant conflict between teachers and the school administration. A "control and punish" attitude prevailed among teachers that made minor infractions punishable and referable to the dean. (Teachers strongly held that "it was not [their] job" to contact parents.) By contrast, the African American administration not only considered teachers as the gatekeepers of order and decorum in the classroom and hallways but also claimed that the sometimes hostile demeanor of teachers toward African American students may have provoked some student misbehavior. The conflict between teachers and administrators led to an increased number of referrals for minor infractions, all of which were sent to school administrators. Amid this internal turmoil, Parker's academic achievement and public image continued to decline.

Explaining School Response to Demographic Change

Several key themes illustrate the complexity and multifaceted nature of demographic change and school response. First, collective efficacy and agency affected faculty actions and behaviors toward and on behalf of African American students. Also, grounded in historical, racial, and geographical representations, notions of identity provided meaning and shaped faculty interpretations of issues associated with demographic change. Finally, power and politics became the mechanism through which the struggle about identity and other issues manifested within the school and the school community. None of these factors was mutually exclusive, and all seem to be a function of each other; more important, all explanatory factors operate as a function of the meanings associated with race. The next section begins with an overview of faculty beliefs about African American students and the meanings they associated with those beliefs. I provide examples of how the beliefs-interactions dynamic influenced decisions and actions on behalf of their growing African American student population. Following this discussion is an examination of the ways in which beliefs and interactions influenced the efficacy and agency and subsequent decision making of school personnel. Finally, I discuss the unique nature and influence of identity, and of power and politics on school response, and the

impact of racial meanings on each of them. Beyond this explanation of factors, some concluding observations on the salience of racial interpretation to school response to demographic change will be presented.

Beliefs, Interactions, and School Response to Demographic Change

Almost all of the respondents in this study perceived African American students as louder and more social, less motivated, less prepared for school, lacking in support at home, and more confrontational than White students. Moreover, respondents believed that African American parents probably did not have good school experiences, and thereby failed to communicate positive images of school and teachers to their children. Generally, faculty felt that African American students could not perform at the same academic levels as previous or current White students.

Consistent with these perceptions, a majority of interviewees said that they *experienced* African American students to be louder and more social, less motivated, less prepared for school, and the like. Similarly, respondents used terms such as "out of control," "from broken families," and "academically deficient" to characterize their African American students. Another popular notion about African American students characterized them as having "bad habits that they brought from the city." Incidentally, these "bad habits," which included truancy, tardiness, and absenteeism, increased with the growing African American population. Many respondents attributed these "habits" to the lack of parental and family support for education. Some respondents expressed a sense of fear and "uneasiness" with their African American population, particularly the males, in part based on their perception of the relationship between student attire and gang affiliation. Also, African American students' language and seemingly aggressive demeanor made some respondents and their colleagues "uncomfortable."

The consistency of these perceptions across almost all respondents, both African American and White, may be indicative of a broader societal framework that associates and generalizes these characterizations with African American students. Yet most respondents in this study would disagree with this interpretation. Though they admitted a certain set of beliefs, teachers and administrators minimized the influence of these beliefs in their own actions and behaviors and in that of the school response. School personnel claimed that the school response to demographic change represented a response to the characteristics and behaviors of African American students and their families.

Beliefs, Interactionism, and School Discipline

As one principal stated, "If we don't take control, we'll lose control." Similarly in all schools, this call to order emanated from the belief that schools needed to have order before striving for academic achievement. Coupled with the increase in truancy, tardiness, and "typical teenage misbehavior," such as insubordination and disrespect for authority, beliefs about African American students signaled a greater need to socialize the more sociable African American student. Each school in this study either incorporated stricter discipline, attendance, tardy, and dress code policies as an early response to changing demographics or enacted stronger enforcement of the policies already in place. School officials across all schools acknowledged that these policies often led to higher numbers of suspensions, which meant more students missed class and/or missed school more often.

Another approach to discipline enacted at Johnson High School prompted school restructuring from a regular to a block schedule, with the goal of reducing student socializing in hallways. Although school officials attributed suspension reductions to the new schedule, they later determined that the block schedule adversely affected student achievement. For this reason, the school returned to a regular schedule in 2000. Johnson administration also eventually eliminated strict attendance and tardy policies that frequently placed students out of school or class.

Other evidence shows that school faculty's negative assumptions and beliefs likely affected their interactions with African American students. For example, Johnson High's assistant principal claimed that he often reminded teachers that "every kid who sags his pants is not a thug," in contrast to this commonly held notion. Respondents spoke of themselves or their colleagues as "uncomfortable" and even "fearful" of African American students. Some teachers felt the need to maintain physical distance from African American students or to show "toughness" by not smiling at students as a way to keep them "at bay." It is reasonable to suspect that these stereotypical images played a significant role in the overreferral of African American students for discipline. As an extreme illustration, a Parker High teacher called for assault charges against an African American male who inadvertently bumped him while running to class. These examples show that in the relationship between beliefs and interactions, one may in fact affect the quality of the other.

Beliefs, Interactionism, and Academic Goals

During the 1990s, all state schools faced new accountability measures that led them to refocus academic goals. School officials across Kelly,

Johnson, and Parker acknowledged that changing demographics complicated their efforts in dealing with the new accountability measures because they generally believed African American students to be unprepared to work up to the level of expectations of suburban schools. (Most school officials believed that their new African American students came from city schools that failed to adequately prepare students. However, they had no evidence to support this notion. One administrator at Johnson acknowledged that many African American students came from other suburban schools.)

Findings from this study did not reveal any significant changes in the way that these students were taught. However, findings suggest that schools and individual faculty members changed *what* they taught to students. Teachers' perceptions of students' abilities, and of their own willingness and ability, led many of them to "dumb down" the curriculum and provide less challenging material. Also, respondents stated that teachers lowered their expectation of what constituted excellent or good work. At Johnson, the faculty became divided on whether to assign homework because only about 50% of students bothered to complete it. In addition, when greater teacher accountability mandates held Johnson teachers responsible for passing grades, many of them simply lowered their standards for excellence. Other respondents claimed that they and their colleagues changed their grading scale and/or the types of assignments without any wholescale changes in their approach to classroom instruction. Some faculty suggested that because African American students were not "hard workers," the teachers did not have to work hard. One respondent at Parker claimed that many colleagues questioned why they needed to force unwilling students to do work.

Strongly suggested in this study was the association between faculty beliefs and interactions with African American students, faculty collective efficacy, and their actual agency. The following discussion offers illustrations of how and why faculty efficacy and agency, shaped by beliefs and interactions, affected school response at Kelly, Johnson, and Parker High Schools.

Efficacy, Agency, and School Response

Several factors may have influenced faculty collective efficacy and agency across schools, albeit to different degrees. Respondents across all schools generally felt that African American students brought "issues" to school that created disorder and stifled their own academic achievement and success. Attributions such as lack of motivation and effort supported faculty perceptions that this was "just the way they [African American

students] are." Respondents believed that African American students and their parents could have and should have exercised agency in supporting their own (or their children's) education.

However, schools varied in how they viewed themselves in light of these perceptions. Consistent with the previously mentioned portrayals, some Kelly and Parker faculty deemed African American students as "unchanging." In addition, they expected further decline in school test scores and achievement to accompany continued demographic change. So although Kelly faculty generally espoused a "kids are kids" philosophy, in actuality, some of them felt powerless to make productive responses for their African American students. Consequently, teachers at Kelly relied on the "status quo" rather than find ways to adapt to their changing populations. Similarly, tension between Parker teachers and administrators contributed to the "powerlessness" felt by teachers who also denied responsibility for the eventual outcomes of the schools. Respondents suggested that low collective efficacy among faculty led to reactive, rather than proactive, responses, or in some cases, no response at all. At Parker, some teachers stopped disciplining and/or teaching students.

By contrast, Johnson faculty generally felt they could and should exercise their own agency and design actions or implement strategies that would positively influence African American students and the school as a whole. A cadre of teachers and administrators believed that teacher training, school restructuring, certain instructional practices, and other programs and policies could and would make a difference in the experiences of students and teachers. Even though they believed that African American students displayed certain traits that negatively influenced their schooling, Johnson respondents felt responsible and efficacious to some degree in dealing with the changes taking place within the schools, which led them to proactive responses.

Aside from the idea of responsibility, evidence shows that these schools exhibited considerable will in their response to changing demographics, though they varied in their will, capacity, and effort to respond in a manner productive for African American students. It seems that of the three schools, Kelly High lacked the willingness to make changes in general, but specifically ones that dealt with its changing demographics and its African American student population. Along with the lack of will and capacity there was also the lack of will to develop their capacity. Structural barriers (i.e., teachers' contract prohibiting after-school meetings) and ideological barriers (i.e., "kids are kids" and "we don't see color") prohibited capacity building and left Kelly High without any substantive response to demographic

change during the 1990s as their African American population grew from 8% to 50%.

By contrast, Johnson High School willingly and proactively addressed the changing demographics and attempted to do so in a number of ways. They primarily focused on building the capacity of the faculty. At the same time, school administrators and the community structured a social environment they believed to be conducive to teaching and learning for African American students. It was not clear whether all of their particular strategies benefited African American students. In fact, the controversial cancellation of the Black History program may have had negative effects on African American students and families. This decision notwithstanding, Johnson school officials attempted to respond to demographic change using a multifaceted approach that aimed to develop the capacity of their students (through instructional strategies, school restructuring, and social services), of their teachers (through professional development and participative decision making), and of the community (through committees and parent workshops).

School Identity and School Response

The Role of History in Shaping School Identity and School Response

Described as "insular" and "tightly knit," the community surrounding Kelly did not welcome "outsiders," particularly people of color. Some respondents acknowledged that this historical precedent might explain the resistance to change and difference evident in the school and community. For example, the oft-stated "it has always been this way," steeped in the long history and tradition of the school, provided a historical basis for teachers' inflexibility regarding discipline. Teachers felt justified using "by-the-book" discipline policies and practices, even though they disproportionately affected African American students. Resistance to change also became evident in a public dispute about a "racist" symbol on the school emblem. Some school board members affirmed that demographic change should not cause the school to "give up their traditions." Consistent with this idea, the data indicated few changes in curriculum, instruction, professional development, or minority hiring for the entire decade of the 1990s.

Different from Kelly, Johnson High and its surrounding communities claimed a historical identity that supported diversity. In fact, a town advertisement from the 1970s for one of its feeder communities proclaimed it as "the epitome of harmonious diversity." By the 1980s, many middle-class African Americans lived in Johnson's surrounding communities. As the

1990s approached, diversity became one of the district's most pressing topics. School board meeting minutes revealed that the issue of diversity was a frequent agenda item, brought forth by concerned parents, students, administrators, and community members. The broader community's acceptance of diversity provided the context for Johnson's proactive approach to the academic and social needs of its growing African American population and its faculty. By the 1990s, Johnson High instituted a minority hiring initiative, a district-wide school racial balance initiative, and multicultural training for faculty.

According to respondents and archived newspaper articles, Parker High's history dating back to the 1970s included violent confrontations between Black and White students, and between students and teachers. This tumultuous history put an embarrassing mark on Parker's identity, which school officials worked to transform via diversity and multicultural training, professional development, and minority hiring initiatives. Yet respondents claimed that by the 1980s and the early 1990s, Parker High took on the identity of a "college prep" school. However, as more African Americans entered the school, historical allegations of racial steering by realtors resurfaced and fueled the belief that African Americans never belonged in the community. This sentiment, coupled with declining achievement and increased disorder, led some teachers to resent teaching African American students. Furthermore, Parker's identity as the "ghetto" school prompted some teachers to transfer out of Parker to more White schools or districts.

Identity and the Color (and City Limit) Line

Virtually all respondents across these schools acknowledged that demographic change redefined their schools or at least gave them an uncertain identity. When "students from the city" began to inhabit these communities in large numbers, school identity became ambiguous and paradoxical. On the one hand, these schools were still located in the suburbs, with all of the idealized "goodness" associated with it. On the other hand, their White suburban schools became more Black and more "urban," which likely signaled a decline in the school's social status and faculty's professional status. In fact, their legitimacy as educational institutions became at-risk because the school's image in the local community played into the faculty's view of the school's identity. Respondents from both Kelly and Parker noted the negative "ghetto school" remarks they received from their in-district colleagues from mostly White schools. Contemplating this situation, one Parker respondent

questioned why *all* the African American students had to attend their school rather than be distributed across all district schools.

The increase in African American students elicited concern about school identity and so too did the possibility of sudden White and middle-class flight. Although some White and middle-class African American students left to attend private or parochial schools, other efforts to leave the schools and districts came by way of de-annexation lawsuits. Through these lawsuits, community members attempted either to force change in the residential boundaries so that their children could attend other public schools or to seek permission to create schools of their own. Respondents claimed that parents argued for an opportunity to send their children to the same high schools attended by former elementary school classmates. (According to school administrators, many of these same parents eventually withdrew their children, sending them to private high schools with other children who did not attend elementary school with their children.)

Though school personnel generally saw demographic change as a threat to their identity, they perceived de-annexation to be just as threatening to school identity. This perceived threat prompted Kelly, Johnson, and Parker administrators to fight vigorously against these lawsuits, spending hundreds of thousands of dollars and many years in the courts. According to board meeting minutes and newspaper articles, administrators argued that these schools were "still good" schools in spite of demographic change, alleging racism on the part of lawsuit parents. After years of litigation, each school won its de-annexation case, temporarily staving off the "identity crisis" that might have resulted from the sudden departure of White and middle-class students. Though faculty felt uneasy about demographic change, this external threat caused them to redefine demographic change and school identity on their own terms and in their own interests. I address the salience of this point in a later section.

Maintaining an identity as a "good" school seemed to be a primary concern and challenge for Kelly, Johnson, and Parker High Schools in the midst of, and in spite of, demographic change. However, "good" did not always imply good academics; rather, it described a subjective, locally contrived interpretation of "goodness of fit" between the school, teachers, and the community. More important, this definition of "good" had racial implications as the growing African American population signaled a threat to their "goodness." Nevertheless, demographic change caused schools to assess and/or reassess established, taken-for-granted identities within schools and school communities. Inevitably, these personal and organizational identities

and their meanings had many significant political implications associated with them (Blase, 1991).

Power and Politics in the Struggle for Meaning

As previously suggested, racial meanings and interpretations affected school identity with implications for faculty's professional identity. Tied to these taken-for-granted, established identities are the myriad personal, professional, and organizational interests, including power, values, resources, control of symbols and messages, and decision making (Blase, 1991). It must be recalled that the de-annexation lawsuits represented a potentially threatening "identity crisis." Actions on the part of community members and school officials affirmed their perceptions of the negative symbolism attached to being a "black" school. However, evidence revealed that school officials also considered the potential impact of de-annexation on student enrollment and funding that could affect school programs and personnel, particularly teacher and administrator positions and salaries. School officials claimed that community members reacted to demographic change with racially motivated de-annexation lawsuits. Yet the data suggest that when school officials' own professional identities, indeed their professional livelihood, were at stake, they waged lengthy and expensive political battles and effectively played the political "race card." In the end, school administrators maintained not only the right to define the school in their own terms but also control of much-needed financial resources.

The Politics of Diversity

From the aforementioned situation, it appeared on the surface as though school officials used political power in support of inclusiveness. Yet several examples show that school personnel did not always use their political leverage to support inclusiveness within their schools. For example, Johnson High experienced both real and implicit "pressure" from the White community, as well as the new, growing African American community. This contentious power struggle involved school goals and values, discipline, curriculum, instruction, and school events. So when faced with the White student protest against the schoolwide African American history assembly, Johnson officials consciously engaged in policy making for public relations by canceling the schoolwide Black History assembly. Johnson school personnel found it politically prudent to act in the interest of the White constituency, rather than in the interests of the predominantly African American community, which represented more than 60% of the school population.

Political conflict of a different sort occurred at Kelly High between certain school board members, the teachers' union leadership, and certain administrators. Respondents suggested that key members among the district and school leadership represented a "good ole boy network" that worked to maintain the status quo and blocked attempts at dealing with diversity. For example, when "other" school board members or administrators suggested the formation of a multicultural committee or encouraged minority hiring, the "good ole boy network" used their positions of authority and influence to thwart these efforts. Also, the human resources director decided not to implement a school board–mandated minority hiring initiative because he deemed it unnecessary. According to respondents, neither the school board nor the school administration held him accountable to this mandate and other initiatives. They claimed that his power and political influence on other political matters, such as the distribution of school contracts, provided the leverage he needed to control other school decisions.

Different from Kelly and Johnson, Parker's primary power struggle involved teachers and administrators. Discipline proved to be the main point of contention. An important point to note here is that the district administration hired the African American administration to help the school's transition from mostly White to mostly African American. As stated earlier, the school administration held the teachers as the gatekeepers of order and decorum, student behavior, and student learning. In conflict with school administrators, teachers did not feel capable or compelled to deal with the misbehavior of African American students, even though some respondents contended that former White students misbehaved in the same or similar ways. Teachers labeled the African American administration as "lax" on discipline, expressed resentment toward them, and refused to deal with even minor disciplinary infractions, and in some cases refused to teach. This political act increased the number of disciplinary referrals, most of which were handled by school administrators. In political maneuvering of their own, school administrators dismissed many of the "trivial" discipline referrals, which disempowered and angered teachers.

Discussion

This article described several factors that shaped how and why schools responded to demographic change in the ways they did. Key explanatory factors emerged that illustrated the interrelatedness of different elements from various levels of influence on school beliefs, actions, behaviors, and decision

making. Also important were the patterns within schools and across schools that exemplified organizational or institutionalized beliefs and norms. These illustrations present the ways in which faculty efficacy and agency, school identity, and power and politics impacted school response to demographic change. Furthermore, the findings show how racial meanings varied across the sociohistorical contexts of school organizations, which shaped school response differently in different schools. At the same time, this study reflects the ways in which race plays a fundamental role in shaping the social, structural, political, and ideological dimensions of school organizations and school communities.

Racial Interpretations and School Response to Demographic Change

Consistent with a long line of research, the findings situate race and racial interpretations at the forefront in understanding school processes, school structure, and school function, and in this case school response, as they pertain to African American students (Gay, 1974, 1975; Good, 1987; Irvine, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1994b; Paley, 2000). In this study, racial interpretations became evident in several ways. School faculty across all schools espoused similar beliefs about African American students, which seem to reflect a normative element within society that shaped their expectations, actions, and behaviors. Furthermore, as some respondents suggested, they made interpretations based on their interactions with African American students, which presumably affected their subsequent interactions and decision making.

Moreover, a critical race analysis reveals implicit racial interpretations situated within nonracialized discourse about demographic change. Both Lewis (2001) and Buendia, Ares, Juarez, and Peercy (2004) describe how racialized meanings have been attached to geographic locations around which inhabitants form identities and use them to cast "otherness" on individuals from outside those communities. Consistent with these studies, the findings show how school personnel used nonracial discourse (i.e., "they are not from here" or "kids from the city") in an attempt not only to mask racial messages but also to draw distinctions between themselves and African Americans. Also evident was the notion of the suburbs as a property right, as only certain types of people belonged there or knew how to live there. These discourses connoted racial messages connecting whiteness with something "good" or "right" whereas relating "blackness" or "otherness" with something "not so good" or "wrong."

These explicit and implicit racial interpretations and meanings seem to play a vital role in constructing notions of past, present, and desired school identity. School identity had meaning because it defined the school organization and school personnel in ways that they valued and that they perceived others (i.e., the community) valued. Not surprisingly, school personnel denied any implicit racial implications of their desired identity and image. Inevitably, when faced with demographic change, and based on racial interpretations, a perceived negative identity would ensue, which precipitated the need to maintain or construct a desired identity and protect the various interests associated with those identities. Evident in this study were power and political struggles about how schools would be defined and who would have the power to define them. Individuals or interest groups used various political strategies to garner support or power, to push a particular agenda or ideology, or to resist the actions and decisions of others. The findings also illustrate that schools or interest groups within or around them did not always seem interested or compelled to act in the interest of their African American students.

Moreover, data from this study suggest that racial interpretations influence the agency of school personnel. As previously suggested, agency depends on a number of factors, including personal and collective efficacy, responsibility, will, and capacity. This study supports the notion that agency for school faculty may be influenced by the belief that others—namely, African American students and families—have the responsibility to exercise agency. These beliefs may affect the responsibility, will, and ultimately, the capacity of faculty and schools to respond to different subgroups in productive ways. Power and politics may also thwart the will and efforts of school personnel to act in the interests of African American students. In addition, the degree to which schools and school personnel espoused a color-blind philosophy contributed to a sense of denial of their own agency in creating a school environment that responds to the needs of the changing school population. Finally, the idea of predestination seemed particularly significant as the "that's just they way the are" perception may have functioned to reduce or minimize the agency of school personnel and subsequently affect the school response to demographic change.

Concluding Observations

Demographic change presents a major challenge to schools. Similar to the desegregation era, current school demographic change often positions a

mostly White teaching corps with larger numbers of students of color with whom they have had little experience. Although response to desegregation and to current demographic change has varied, our schools generally have not responded well, sustaining and/or implementing programs, policies, practices, and beliefs that have harmed students of color, or at the very least, failed to benefit them (Bickel & Qualls, 1977; Gay, 1974; Orfield, 1975). In the midst of the current dilemma, there has been little, if any, attention focused on what suburban schools can or should consider when faced with a racially changing school population. It is incumbent on any school experiencing such changes to question, examine, and adapt the manner in which it goes about educating students, with consideration given to the needs of its "new" students, as well as the faculty and staff who must face them. Though this study did not aim to make specific policy recommendations for schools undergoing demographic change, it does suggest that school response should reflect the needs of students and faculty. Furthermore, such schools should consider and prioritize a multifaceted approach regarding matters of curriculum and instruction, staffing, professional development, support services, and other areas of schooling. Furthermore, these adaptations should take into account projections of future enrollment, implying that schools need to remain flexible in their response, making modifications to their approach as and when required.

Finally, consistent with other literature (Cornbleth & Korth, 1980; Dusek, 1983; Nespor, 1986; Washington, 1978), attitudes toward demographic change, and beliefs and perceptions about African American students, generally influenced school approach to demographic change. However, the most significant finding from this study may be the fact that the differences between schools in their response to demographic change emanated not from different belief systems regarding African American students but from differences in faculty efficacy and agency. Faculty agency emerged from a definite local, historical, and organizational context unique to each school, which was affected by racial history, racial meanings, and interpretations. Ultimately, beliefs, perceptions, and interactions with African American students affected the ways in which schools perceived their own efficacy and responsibility, and the ways they enacted their own will and developed their own capacity. This finding suggests the need to know more about the relationship between faculty beliefs (particularly those related to race, class, and other areas of difference) and faculty collective efficacy and agency. Indeed, school actions, behaviors, and decision making on behalf of students of color may well depend on faculty beliefs about different racial groups' perceived capacity and ability to act on their own behalf.

Note

1. At least 15 potential respondents per site were asked to participate in this study. I expected that because of the sensitive nature of this study, some would decline to participate. Also significant and limiting the potential pool of potential respondents was the need to have veteran teachers and administrators. For this study, *veteran* meant working in the school and/or district for at least 13 years (the number of years between 1990 and the time of the interview in 2003). Retired faculty were also considered but could not be reached.

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