

## EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

# Special Issue on Inclusion and Empowerment

A.J. Angulo\* and Jack Schneider\* 

School of Education, University of Massachusetts Lowell, MA, USA

\*Corresponding authors. Emails: [AJ\\_Angulo@uml.edu](mailto:AJ_Angulo@uml.edu); [Jack\\_Schneider@uml.edu](mailto:Jack_Schneider@uml.edu)

Scholars, pundits, and public figures—a large and varied group of them—have begun warning that American democracy faces very real threats.<sup>1</sup> Some see the January 6, 2021, insurrection in Washington, DC, as a crucial turning point. Others focus on the rise of white supremacy movements and expansion of voter suppression efforts. Still others highlight the waves of misinformation and disinformation that wash over the public daily.

This past fall, President Biden consulted with five historians in a prelude to what may become his most important speech.<sup>2</sup> At the heart of the group's discussion was whether American democracy stood on the brink of dissolution. The historians suggested that it was; and the president learned that in rare times like these, such as the lead-ups to the Civil War and World War II, threats to democratic life were real and urgent.

How much President Biden took away from this gathering remains to be seen. But many have pointed out an obvious flaw in the composition of the all-white group. As some have argued, a more diverse and representative set of scholars might have framed history's lessons differently. Rather than seeing threats to democracy as punctuated at specific times, those on the periphery often see the preservation of democracy as an ongoing and elusive struggle. That's because inclusion and empowerment have never really "happened" for many marginalized communities in the US. In that sense, we might see threats to American democracy not as aberrations in time, but as a legacy of racism and authoritarianism.

The long and elusive quest for inclusion and empowerment is clearly written across American history. But it is perhaps most evident in the history of education. Consider the nation's story with regard to racially segregated schools. In the wake

---

<sup>1</sup>Michael T. Nietzel, "More Than 100 Scholars Issue Warning That American Democracy Is In Danger, Call for Federal Reforms," *Forbes*, June 1, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelt Nietzel/2021/06/01/more-than-100-scholars-issue-warning-that-american-democracy-is-in-danger-call-for-federal-reforms/?sh=650b4f126f78>; John Haltiwanger, "Former CIA Director Said He Agrees with Notion That There's No Political Force More 'Dangerous' than Republicans," *Business Insider*, Aug. 18, 2022, <https://www.businessinsider.com/former-cia-director-no-political-force-more-dangerous-than-republicans-2022-8>; "Chomsky: Republican Party 'Most Dangerous Organisation on Earth,'" BBC News, May 11, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-39879374>.

<sup>2</sup>Sandhya Dirks, "Biden's Meeting with Historians over Threats to Democracy Draws Criticism," NPR, Sept. 1, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/09/01/1120599912/bidens-meeting-with-historians-over-threats-to-democracy-draws-criticism>.

## 2 Editorial Introduction

of the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, the US saw a quarter-century of progress. Though often imperfectly implemented and designed, desegregation efforts allowed millions of children to attend racially integrated schools. Yet such efforts were often contested and undermined. And the work of a generation was calculatingly undone. As Gary Orfield and Chungmei Lee noted in 2007, "Nearly 40 years after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., we have now lost almost all the progress made in the decades after his death in desegregating our schools."<sup>3</sup> In Massachusetts, where *HEQ*'s editorial offices are located, the number of predominantly white schools has fallen over the past few decades as the state has become more racially diverse. At the same time, the number of intensely segregated schools has increased. In other words, schools are gaining increased capacity for racial diversity, yet the structures and cultures that separate people by race continue to exert a troubling influence.<sup>4</sup>

The broad contours of this story apply to all aspects of American education, but particularly so for African Americans. Black history has won a place in the curriculum, only to be attacked and distorted. Black leaders have gained positions of influence, and then found themselves vilified and marginalized. Black texts have been included in reading lists, and then met with attempts to remove them. Black students have won equal treatment and defense of their rights, only to face new threats and violations.

In this issue, *HEQ* offers histories of progress and regress in the fight for inclusion and empowerment. These histories tell the stories of Black educators, activists, leaders, and community members struggling to be seen, to have a voice, and to self-determine in pursuit of more just and equitable outcomes. And we believe that they are particularly powerful when held up alongside present struggles. Although different in their details and trailblazing in their own way, the articles in this issue often share strikingly similar outlines. Through familiar challenges, these authors remind us of what it means when a nation strives for a more perfect union.

---

<sup>3</sup>Gary Orfield and Chungmei Lee, *Historic Reversals, Accelerating Resegregation, and the Need for New Integration Strategies*, Civil Rights Project, UCLA, Aug. 2007, <https://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/historic-reversals-accelerating-resegregation-and-the-need-for-new-integration-strategies-1/orfield-historic-reversals-accelerating.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup>Jack Schneider, Ashley J. Carey, Peter Piazza, and Rachel S. White, *School Integration in Massachusetts: Racial Diversity and State Accountability*, Beyond Test Scores Project and Center for Education and Civil Rights, Summer 2020, [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60aea369b2b1517a8d2afb0c/t/60b00f9a2dd26-f3a72e1c78f/1622151076845/Demography\\_Report\\_FINAL\\_7.24.20.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60aea369b2b1517a8d2afb0c/t/60b00f9a2dd26-f3a72e1c78f/1622151076845/Demography_Report_FINAL_7.24.20.pdf).