Preventing and Producing Violence: A Critical Analysis of Responses to School Violence

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Do the strategies that schools adopt in response to "disciplinary problems," including violence, actually perpetuate violence? In this thoughtful article, Pedro Noguera traces the history of institutional disciplinary measures, showing that the underlying philosophical orientation toward social control exacts a heavy toll on students, teachers, and the entire school community by producing prison-like schools that remain unsafe. Noguera maintains that a "get-tough" approach fails to create a safe environment because the use of coercive strategies interrupts learning and ultimately produces an environment of mistrust and resistance. He offers alternative strategies for humanizing school environments, encouraging a sense of community and collective responsibility.

The problem of violence in schools, which is part of the overall problem of violence in society, has become one of the most pressing educational issues in the United States. In many school districts, concerns about violence have even surpassed academic achievement — traditionally the most persistent theme on the nation's education agenda — as the highest priority for reform and intervention. Public clamorings over the need to do something about violence in schools has brought the issue to a critical juncture; if schools fail to respond decisively to this problem, popular support for public education may be endangered. The escalation of violent incidents and the apparent inadequacy of traditional methods to curtail them has led to a search for new strategies to ensure the safety and security of children and teachers in schools.

Accepting the fact that it may not be realistic to expect that schools can ever be completely immune from the violence that plagues our society, this article seeks to understand why schools may be especially vulnerable to its occurrence. Current efforts aimed at combating violence may, in fact, have the opposite
effect, particularly given the weakening of the moral authority schools once enjoyed. Following a brief critique of popular strategies used to curtail school violence, my analysis begins by examining how the early preoccupation with social control influenced the design and operation of schools at the turn of the century. From there I consider the practical and symbolic effects of the ways in which discipline is typically exercised in school, and analyze the race and class dynamics among the population that is most frequently targeted for punishment. Finally, I discuss alternative approaches to addressing the problem of violence and strategies that have been shown to be effective alternative routes to school safety.

The search for solutions to the problem of violence in schools has generated a package of remedies that closely resembles those used to combat the threat of violence and crime in U.S. society. Some of the more popular measures include: the installation of metal detectors at school entrances to prevent students from bringing weapons onto school grounds; the enactment of “zero tolerance” policies that guarantee the automatic removal of students (through either suspension, expulsion, or transfer) who perpetrate acts of violence; and the use of police officers and security guards to patrol and monitor student behavior while school is in session. Accompanying such measures has been an increased tendency of school officials to treat violent incidents (and sometimes nonviolent incidents) involving students as criminal offenses to be handled by law enforcement officials and the courts, rather than by school personnel. In their desire to demonstrate toughness and reassure the public that they are in control, school officials have become increasingly rigid and inflexible when meting out punishment upon students who violate school rules, even when the infractions are not of a violent nature.

Other, less punitive approaches have been introduced to reduce the incidence of violence in schools. Conflict resolution programs have been promoted as a way of teaching children to settle disputes nonviolently. Mentoring programs that pair students with adult role models have also become popular in school districts across the country, serving to reduce violence by providing students perceived to be at risk with the attention, support, and counseling of an adult. Teachers have been encouraged to design curricula that teach children how to avoid violent situations and to explore in their classrooms the ethical and moral issues related to violent behavior. Finally, a variety of counseling programs have been implemented by establishing partnerships between schools and social service agencies to provide direct services to students.

Though some of these less coercive strategies for reducing violence have proven relatively successful in particular schools, the overall momentum of school policy has been biased in favor of the “get-tough” approach. In response to the pervasive fear of violence among parents and students, politicians and school officials have pledged to quell the tide of violence by converting schools into prison-like, “lock-down” facilities, and by increasing the penalties incurred for committing violent acts. Yet despite the tough talk, the track record of these methods provides little reason for optimism. For example, in California, law
enforcement officials have attempted to reduce gang activity by increasing penalties against juvenile felons who are alleged to be gang members. While such measures have contributed to a sharp increase in the prison population, there has been no reduction in gang activity in targeted communities. Additionally, gang activity has become such a major problem in the state's prisons that gang affiliation must now be considered when convicts are being assigned to correctional facilities.

Relatively speaking, young people may in fact be far safer in school than they are in their neighborhoods or, for that matter, at the park, the roller rink, or even in their homes. For many parents and students, the fact that schools are "relatively safe" provides little solace, given the expectation that schools should be absolutely safe and therefore should not be judged by the same standard that we use to gauge security in other public, or even private, places. Schools are controlled institutions, public spaces where individuals sacrifice a measure of individual liberty in exchange for the opportunity to learn. In such a setting, the threat of violence constitutes more than just a threat to personal safety. It represents a fundamental violation of the social contract between school and community, an abrogation that could easily hasten the collapse of popular support for public education.

To address the problem of violence in schools effectively, I believe we must begin by asking ourselves why schools are vulnerable to the occurrence of violence. What is there about the structure and culture of schools that has, in recent times, increased the likelihood that acts of violence will be perpetrated within them? In the following pages I will demonstrate why I believe that many of the popular strategies for disciplining students and curtailing violence in schools are ineffective. I will focus on urban schools, where violence tends to occur more frequently, because I believe that social and economic conditions in urban areas add considerably to the extent and degree of the problem. I believe that it is in the context of fulfilling goals that have traditionally prioritized maintaining order and control over students, as opposed to creating humane environments for learning, that schools have become increasingly susceptible to violence. As an alternative approach, I will argue that schools must seek ways to create more humane learning environments, both to counter escalating violence and to transform social relationships within schools, so that those who spend their time there feel less alienated, threatened, and repressed. As I argue for this alternative, I will also consider the ways in which issues related to the symbolic representation of violence, and the fight against it, influence interaction between adults and children within school, paying particular attention to the ways in which race and class inscribe these images.

This article draws heavily from my years of working directly with schools in the San Francisco Bay Area in a variety of capacities: as a classroom teacher, a school board member, a university-based researcher, and a consultant. My experience leads me to avoid offering specific remedies or to claim that I know what should be done to address a problem that is so complex and multidimensional. Still, it is my hope that suggesting new ways of approaching the question "What
is to be done about violence in schools?" will enable educators to open the door
to new strategies, based on a different conceptual framework, for dealing with
the issue of violence in schools throughout this country.

Waging the Fight against Violence

The phrase "fighting violence" might seem to be an oxymoron. For those con-
cerned with finding ways to prevent or reduce the occurrence of violence, “fight-
ing” it might seem to be the wrong way to describe or to engage in the effort to
address the problem. The choice of terms, however, is not accidental. The pre-
vailing wisdom among policymakers and school officials is that you must counter
violence with force; that schools can be made safe by converting them into
prison-like facilities; and that the best way to curtail violence is to identify,
apprehend, and exclude students who have the potential for committing acts of
violence from the rest of the population. Therefore, it is important to examine
the ideological stance held toward violence when critiquing the methods used
to fight it, for without doing so it is not possible to understand why failed strate-
gies remain popular.

In the campaign against school violence, school officials often point to statistics
on the number of weapons confiscated, and to the number of students
suspended, expelled, or arrested for violent reasons as evidence that something
is being done about the problem. The number of reported violent incidents is
also used to demonstrate that while valiant efforts are being made to reduce
violence, the problem persists, and therefore the fight against violence must
continue. The compilation of such data plays an important role in rationalizing
the expenditure of resources on security-related services — resource allocations
that often result in the elimination of other educational programs and services.
Such data is also instrumental in framing the public discourse about violence,
for as long as it can be shown that quantifiable results are obtained as a result
of the fight against violence, combatants in the war can be assured of continued
financial backing.

For parents and students who live with the reality of violence and who must
contend with the threat of physical harm on a daily basis, data on how many
students have been arrested, expelled, or suspended does little to allay their
fears. When engaging in once ordinary activities such as walking to school or
playing in a park evokes such extreme anxiety so as to no longer seem feasible,
news that arrests or suspensions have increased provides little reassurance.

In my capacity as a consultant to a local school district, I recently attended a
meeting with school officials from an urban school district on the West Coast,
at which we were discussing the problem of violence and what could be done
about it. While reviewing data from the past year on the incidence of violence,
I remarked sardonically, “Here’s some good news; homicides are down 100 per-
cent from last year.” To my amazement, an administrator replied, “Yes, the news
isn’t all bad. Some of our efforts are beginning to pay off.” What surprised me
about the comment was his apparent belief that since there had been no murders at any of the schools in the district at the midpoint of the school year, compared to the two that occurred the previous academic year, there was reason for hope and optimism. I found it hard to believe that district administrators, who generally have little contact with school sites on a regular basis, could accept a statistical analysis as evidence that the schools had in fact become safer. And even if data on crime shows that homicides are down, statistics don’t tell us whether or not teachers or students feel any safer.

Within the context of the fight against violence, symbols such as crime statistics take on great significance, although they have little bearing upon how people actually feel about the occurrence of violence. Pressed to demonstrate to the public that the efforts to reduce violence are effective, school districts often pursue one of two strategies: either they present statistics quantifying the results of their efforts, or they go to great lengths to suppress information altogether, hoping that the community will perceive no news as good news. Metal detectors, barbed wire fences, armed guards and policemen, and principals wielding baseball bats as they patrol the halls are all symbols of tough action. And while most students that I have spoken to during my visits to schools realize that a student who wants to bring a weapon to school can get it into a building without being discovered by a metal detector, or that it is highly unlikely that any principal will hit a student with a baseball bat, the symbols persist, masking the truth that those responsible for school safety really don’t have a clue about what to do to stem the tide of violence. Rather than looking to solve this problem through increased security or improved technology, school administrators must begin to ask more fundamental questions as to why these institutions have become so vulnerable to violence. I believe that this is a question that must be answered in the context of the purpose and social function that schools have historically performed.

The School as an Agent of Control

To understand why violence has become rampant and how a climate of fear and intimidation gradually came to be the norm in so many schools, we must examine the influences that guided the creation of public schools and consider the social role that they were expected to perform. When public schools were being developed in northeastern cities during the latter part of the nineteenth century, their architecture, organization, and operation was profoundly influenced by the prevailing conception of the asylum. Whether designed to house the indigent, the insane, the sick, or the criminally inclined, the asylum served as the model for human service institutions. While the client base of the early prisons, almshouses, and mental hospitals differed, those who developed and administered the institutions shared a common preoccupation with the need to control those held in custody. The custodial function of the institution should not be confused with rehabilitating or reforming, for in post-colonial America, crime,
immorality, hunger, and poverty were seen as inherent to society. David Rothman writes:

Although eighteenth century Americans were apprehensive about deviant behavior and adopted elaborate procedures to control it, they did not interpret its presence as symptomatic of a basic flaw in community structure, nor did they expect to eliminate it.23

The role of the asylum was to regiment, control, and discipline the social outcasts who were housed there. These goals were accomplished through the routinization of every aspect of life within the asylum, and through the imposition of a set of rules and regulations that were rigidly enforced.24 A military tone characterized life in the asylum, as did a focus upon sanitation, orderliness, punctuality, and discipline. Since the goal of these institutions was not to prepare the inmate for readmission to society but to eliminate the threat they posed to the safety and security of others, the managers of the institutions believed that this could best be done by enforcing rigid discipline and by removing undesirables indefinitely from the community.

Although schools were designed with a different purpose in mind, Rothman suggests that it was logical for the architects of the first large urban schools to turn to the asylum as the blueprint for these new public institutions.25 Though schools were never envisioned as asylums for the young, the need for them to serve as a vehicle for controlling the minds and bodies of youth helped to convince many of those who questioned the merits of public education that it was an enterprise worth supporting.26 Educational historian Lawrence Cremin identifies three dominant and distinct agendas among the many influences shaping public education at the turn of the century that were pursued in relation to the public schools: 1) the need to provide a custodial function for children and thereby serve as an agent of social control; 2) the need to acculturate and “Americanize” large numbers of children born of European immigrants; 3) the need to prepare future workers for U.S. industry. At times overlapping and at other times conflicting, these goals influenced the content of school curriculum, the training of teachers, and most importantly for the purposes of this analysis, the way in which the schools were to be administered.

Though the goals of education tended to be framed in humanitarian terms, the need to regiment and control the behavior of students dominated the educational mission.27 Motivated by a combination of benevolence related to child welfare, and fear related to the perceived threat of crime and delinquency, schools were called upon to assume greater responsibility for the rearing of urban children. Defining the problem in moral terms, reformers felt that “raised amid intemperance, indulgence, and neglect, the lower class urban child began life predisposed to criminality and unprepared for honest work.”28 Educators such as G. Stanley Hall called for the creation of pedocentric schools, which were to be designed so that the school’s central mission was to treat the social and psychological needs of children.29 Though child-rearing was seen primarily as a responsibility of the family, social reformers feared that many poor and immigrant parents were unfit to raise their children properly.30 For this reason, public
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schools were seen as the vehicle through which poor children could be "saved." Regarding this point, Cremin writes:

It was to the school that progressives turned as the institution that would at least complement familial education and in many instances correct it and compensate for its shortcomings. The school would rear the children of ordinary families, it would provide refuge for the children of exploitative families, and it would acculturate the children of immigrant families. . . . The school would deliver whatever services children needed to develop into healthy, happy and well-instructed citizens — it would provide meals for the poorly fed, medical treatment for the unhealthy, and guidance for the emotionally disturbed. . . . Though progressives asserted the primacy of familial education, they advanced the pre-eminence of schooling.31

To carry out these social goals, reformers promoted efficiency in the organization and operation of schools. These reformers borrowed from the writings of Frederick Taylor, an engineer who championed the idea that industrial production could be made more efficient through the application of scientific techniques. His ideas were later applied to the operation of schools, where the need for order and efficiency were perceived as essential to effective management.32 Supported enthusiastically by many of the businessmen who served on local school boards, efficiency and routinization of school activities were emphasized as ways to bring order to city schools. The combination of rising enrollments — due to the steady influx of immigrant and rural children into eastern cities — and inadequate facilities had gradually transformed urban schools into little more than warehouses for children. Cremin's descriptions of schools during this period is helpful in understanding why a focus on order might have seemed warranted:

Whatever the high-minded philosophies that justified them, the schools of the 1890's were a depressing study in contrasts. . . . In the cities, problems of skyrocketing enrollments were compounded by a host of other issues . . . school buildings were badly lighted, poorly heated, unsanitary, and bursting at the seams; young immigrants from a dozen different countries swelled the tide of newly arriving farm children. Superintendents spoke hopefully of reducing class size to sixty per teacher, but the hope was most often a pious one. Little wonder that a desire for efficiency reigned supreme.33

Acting under mandates issued by authorities who were almost always far removed from the direct management of schools, superintendents and principals employed a variety of strategies to control the students and teachers in their charge. In many school districts, teachers and students were tested on a regular basis "to see if the program was being followed."34 Specific instructions were given to teachers that addressed not only curriculum and methods, but ways to discipline and control the bodies of their students as well.35 Describing this preoccupation with disciplining the body, one observer wrote that students were required to comply with the following set of instructions when asked to recite memorized text: "Stand on the line, perfectly motionless, bodies erect, knees and feet together, the tips of shoes touching the edge of a board in the floor."36
To ensure that students were trained appropriately for the kinds of work they would perform after graduation, specialized high schools were created in several cities. Vocational high schools were set up to cater to lower-class immigrant youth, and academic high schools were established to prepare middle-class students for higher education and professional careers. At the vocational schools, the curriculum was designed to provide the skills and training needed to obtain industrial employment upon graduation. In this respect, David Tyack's comment that "urban education in the nineteenth century did more to industrialize humanity than to humanize industry" is helpful in understanding how the relationship between education and the economy influenced the character of schools.\(^{37}\)

Though many of the newly created urban secondary schools sought to provide vocational training, what the expanding industrial sector primarily required was an ample supply of low-skilled, cheap labor. Schools helped to meet this demand by emphasizing citizenship training for the children of newly arrived immigrants, and offering a curriculum that placed greater weight on punctuality and obedience than on the acquisition of technical skills.\(^{38}\)

While students were sorted and educated differently to satisfy the needs of industry, educators still wanted them to undergo a common socialization process to prevent fragmentation and to insure that "American" values would remain dominant and undiluted. Fearing that the arrival of this "illiterate, docile mass" would "dilute tremendously our national stock, and corrupt our civic life," educators were called upon "to assimilate and amalgamate these people as part of our American race, and implant in their children, so far as can be done, the Anglo-Saxon conception of righteousness, law and order, and popular government."\(^{39}\) An important part of the assimilation process included conforming to an assortment of rules governing student behavior and to values promoting the virtues of hard work, punctuality, and obedience.\(^{40}\)

While there is some evidence that schools were challenged in their attempts to fulfill their role as the keepers of children, in most cases it seems they succeeded in producing "docile bodies"; students who could be "subjected, used, transformed, and improved."\(^{41}\)

**Discipline as an Exercise of Power**

With concerns about order, efficiency, and control dominating the thinking that guided the early development of schools in the United States, we must ask ourselves how this legacy has influenced the current character of public schools. As the demographics of cities began to change in the 1950s and 1960s with the arrival of new immigrants (e.g., West Indians, Puerto Ricans, and other Latinos) and the migration of Blacks from the South,\(^{42}\) and as social and economic conditions within urban areas began to deteriorate,\(^{43}\) the character and condition of schools also began to change. However this shift did not produce immediate changes, for while the student population changed, in many cases the teachers remained the same, with most still relying on methods of control that had proven successful in the past.\(^{44}\) Writing about the conditions of schools in what he de-
scribed as "slum areas," James Conant spoke of the need to impose a harsher standard of discipline to insure that discipline and order prevailed:

Many educators would doubtless be shocked by the practice of on-the-spot demotion of one full academic year, with no questions asked, for all participants in fights. In one junior high school I know of, a very able principal found so intolerable a situation that he established that very rule. As a consequence, there are fewer fights in his school among boys, many of whom at one time or another have been in trouble with the police. The school must attempt to bring some kind of order to their chaotic lives... This formal atmosphere appears to work. School spirit has developed... Children must stay in school till they are sixteen or till graduation to prevent unemployed, out-of-school youth from roaming the streets.45

By the mid 1960s, however, the situation had changed. Students' insubordination and aggression toward teachers was becoming increasingly common, and violence within schools, especially among students, was widely seen as the norm.46 Some educators made the connection between the difficulty schools were having in maintaining control over students, to the political turmoil that accompanied the civil rights movement, and the riots that took place in many cities across the country.17 Describing the political dimension of this problem and advising teachers about how to respond to it, Allan Ornstein wrote:

Some Negro children have newly gained confidence, as expressed in the social revolution sweeping across the country. Some see themselves as leaders, and not helpless, inferior youngsters. This new pride is evidenced by their tendency to challenge authority. The teacher should expect, encourage and channel this energy toward constructive goals.48

With control and compliance increasingly difficult to obtain, many urban schools lowered their expectations with respect to student behavior.49 The preoccupation with enforcing rules was gradually replaced with a desire to maintain average daily attendance, since this was the key funding formula for schools. As teachers have come to realize that they cannot elicit obedience through the "terror of degradation,"50 concerns about safety have led more of them to think twice about how to reprimand a student, lest their attempt at chastisement be taken as a challenge for a physical confrontation, for which most are unprepared.51

Still, schools have not given up entirely on the goal of exercising control over students: though the task may be far more difficult now than it ever was, schools are still expected to maintain some form of order. Beyond being a threat to the personal safety of students and teachers, violence in schools challenges the authority and power of school officials. In carrying out their duties as caretakers of youth, school officials serve as both legal and symbolic representatives of state authority. With the power vested in their position, they are expected to control the behavior of those in their charge. When violence occurs with impunity, a loss of authority is exposed. Therefore, the issue of violence is seldom discussed in isolation from other control issues. More often, violence is equated with insubordination, student misconduct, and the general problem of maintaining
order in school. The way the issues become melded together is indicative of how schools perceive their role in relation to the social control function that schools have historically performed in the United States.

The Disciplining Event

The exercise of discipline in schools takes on great importance because it serves as the primary means through which symbols of power and authority are perpetuated. In analyzing the symbolic issues associated with discipline and violence in schools, it is helpful to consider the work of Michel Foucault. Writing about the role of punishment meted out upon criminal offenders in France during the nineteenth century, Foucault describes what he calls the "juridico-political" function of the act:

> The ceremony of punishment is an act of terror. . . . The practice of torture was not an economy of example . . . but a policy of terror: to make everyone aware, through the body of the criminal, of the unrestrained presence of the sovereign. The public execution did not re-establish justice; it reactivated power . . . its ruthlessness, its spectacle, its physical violence, its unbalanced play of forces, its meticulous ceremonial, its entire apparatus were inscribed in the political functioning of the penal system.52

While the kinds of public executions and tortures carried out in France during the nineteenth century may seem far removed from the forms of discipline carried out in schools today, Foucault's focus on the relationship between the disciplining act and the "reactivation" of power is relevant to understanding the symbolic role of discipline. The disciplining event, whether it occurs in public or private, serves as one of the primary means through which school officials "send a message" to perpetrators of violence, and to the community generally, that the authority vested in them by the state is still secure. Particularly within the current political climate created by the fight against violence, the disciplining event provides an opportunity for school authorities to use those accused of committing acts of violence as an example to others.

From a symbolic standpoint, within the context of the school, the student expulsion hearing is perhaps the most important spectacle at which the meting out of punishment upon those accused of violence can be used for larger political purposes. As a quasi-judicial ceremony, the formality of an expulsion hearing often contains all of the drama and suspense associated with a courtroom trial. Though the event itself is closed to the public, news of the decision rendered by the school board or hearing officers often travels quickly, particularly when the student is charged with committing an act of violence.

I had the opportunity to attend an expulsion hearing at an urban school district for which I was working as a consultant. I describe what happened because I think it helps to illuminate important dynamics of power and knowledge embedded within the disciplining event. The accused in this case was charged with bringing a loaded gun to school. The education code in this particular state called for automatic expulsion hearings whenever students were apprehended
for bringing weapons to school. When asked to explain why he had brought the
weapon to school, the student informed the board members that his father and
mother had recently separated, and that his father, who was distraught over the
separation, mentioned that he was thinking of killing himself. He instructed his
son to remove his 9-mm handgun from the house so that he wouldn’t harm
himself or anyone else.

The boy informed the board that during the summer, his grandmother had
attempted to commit suicide by slashing her wrists, and that he and his father
had to apply pressure to her bloodied arms in order to prevent her from bleed-
ing to death while they waited for an ambulance. With vivid memories of that
traumatic event in his head, and fearing that his father might follow through on
his threat to take his own life, the boy placed the gun in his backpack and took
it with him to school. He explained that he later showed it to a friend at school
because he wanted to talk to someone about what was going on, but that he had
not shown the weapon to anyone else, nor had he brought the gun back to
school after that day.

In questioning the student about his actions, one
board member noted that
the student possessed an exemplary academic record, and that all of his teachers
spoke highly of him, referring to him as “respectful, honest, hard working, etc.”
He was then asked whether in retrospect he would have handled the situation
differently. The student explained that he still wasn’t sure what he should have
done, but thought that maybe he could have hidden the gun in the bushes near
his house instead of bringing it with him to school. Upon hearing this, one of
the board members proceeded to lecture the student and his father who had
accompanied him to the hearing about the danger of guns. One board member
commented that the student didn’t seem to have learned a lesson from this
serious error in judgement. Exasperated by their doubts, the student claimed he
had learned a lesson and promised to never bring a weapon to school again. A
board member then asked what punishment the school principal recommended,
and was told that the principal wanted to see the student expelled so that “we
send a clear message that guns on campus will not be tolerated.” After deliber-
ating for several minutes, the board responded with a unanimous vote for ex-
pulsion.

As an observer of this event, I was struck by several aspects of what took place.
First, all five board members judging this student, as well as the principal who
presented the evidence against him, were White and middle class, while the
student was Black and from a low-income family. From the questions they asked
and the lectures that they directed at the student and his father, it seemed
evident that they were unable to identify with the student and the situation that
he was in. While I felt uncomfortable hearing the student and his father divulge
the problems they were having in their personal lives, there was no apparent
consternation among board members over the imbalance of the situation, and
no attempts were made to communicate that they could empathize with the
anguish and pressure that either the student or his father must have been expe-
riencing. After hearing one board member ask the student if he would have
handled the situation differently in retrospect, I wanted to ask how she would have handled it, or if she or any of the others had ever experienced anything similar. The gulf in experience between the board members and the student seemed to be compounded by the obvious differences of race, class, and age. However, I sensed no indication that the board regarded this as a problem, nor did I sense any effort on their part to understand the student’s actions from his point of view.

Second, despite evidence that this incident represented an aberration from this student’s “normal” behavior in school, and despite the fact that no one at the school was actually threatened by the presence of the gun, the board members and principal seemed primarily concerned with using the case to communicate a message about guns in school. No effort was made to try to figure out an appropriate way of responding to this student’s particular situation. In this respect, the hearing provided an occasion through which the district’s power could be communicated. By ignoring the circumstances of the offense, and focusing exclusively on the issue of the gun, the board could demonstrate its toughness and intolerance for those who threatened the security of others. While there was no evidence that the punishment of this individual student would have any influence on the behavior of others, his expulsion reinforced the institutional authority of the district leadership by serving as an example of their prerogative and power to punish. In a setting where most perpetrators of violence are not apprehended, and where most efforts to ensure the safety of students and teachers are ineffective, the act of punishment becomes an important exercise for showing who has control.

Finally, the disciplining moment also reveals the way in which the adult professionals, and to a lesser extent the student and his father, were constrained by the “discipline” embedded in the roles each party occupies within the institution. To the extent that the board members and the principal have power or authority, it is derived from their relation to an institutional structure—a structure whose history is rooted in nineteenth-century preoccupations with social control. In their roles as prosecutor and judge, their sense of how to discipline this youngster is profoundly influenced by a body of knowledge or “discipline” that is rooted in the power relations that exist between the state and the school as a social institution. This power/knowledge limits the ability of the board and administrators to identify with the student on a human level, for to do so would open up the possibility that there might be other ways to understand his actions. To recognize that there might be another way of viewing this behavior that goes beyond a focus on crime, violence, and misconduct might lead to a different type of intervention. However, school board members and administrators typically see their job as protecting the institution and the staff, students, and teachers in their charge. The state provides explicit guidelines on how this is to be done, but there are also implicit guidelines pertaining to notions of how schools are supposed to operate and function, and how students are supposed to behave. To explore alternative ways of responding to violent, or potentially violent, behavior would necessarily require a fundamental change in how the
institution and the provision of educational services were conceptualized by those in authority, a prospect that at the disciplining moment often seems unimaginable.

Though a less sympathetic case could have been selected for analysis, I chose this one because I feel it demonstrates how the act of violation is in many ways irrelevant to the form of discipline that is employed. Beyond their real-life effects, violence and discipline take on a symbolic life of their own, symbols that play heavily on interactions within schools and that ultimately influence how schools and violence are perceived by others. In the pages ahead, I will pursue further how a preoccupation with control limits the ability of administrators to respond creatively to the crisis created by the increase in violence in schools.

Race, Class, and the Politics of Discipline

In many school districts across the country, considerable controversy has been generated over the disproportionate number of African American and, in some cases, Latino students who are subjected to various forms of school discipline.\(^5\) In California, legislation has been proposed to limit the ability of school districts to use suspensions and expulsions as a form of punishment, in response to the imbalance in the number of Black and Latino students subjected to these sorts of penalties.\(^6\) Although the legislation has little chance of being approved by the state legislature, the fact that it was proposed indicates the depth of feeling in many Black communities that Black children are being treated unfairly. In Cincinnati, Ohio, the disproportionate number of Black students who are suspended and expelled in public schools prompted a judge to call for teachers and administrators to be held accountable for “student behavior management” as part of a court order monitoring desegregation in the district’s schools.\(^7\)

Although there is evidence that schools that serve White middle-class students in the suburbs also have problems with violence, this is downplayed in the public media.\(^8\) Just as the threat of violent crime in society is characterized largely as a problem created by Black perpetrators, violence in schools is also equated with Black, and in some cases, Latino, students.\(^9\) While the correlation between race and who gets arrested, suspected, or expelled in schools is so consistent that it is impossible to deny that a linkage exists, the issue tends to be avoided in public discussions, due to the controversy and tensions surrounding racial issues in U.S. society. To avoid the charge of racism, many school officials argue that the connection between race and punishment disguises what is really more an issue of class than an issue of race, since most of those receiving discipline come from lower-class families.\(^10\) While this may be true, the correlation between race and class is also high in many school districts, and so the three variables — race, class, and violence — tend to be associated.

The unwillingness to confront the implications of these kinds of correlations is replicated in the general refusal of most policymakers and school officials to place the problem of violence within the broader context of race and education. Not only is school punishment consistently correlated with race, it is also highly
correlated with academic grouping and high school graduation rates. Those most likely to receive punishment in school are also more likely to have been placed in classes for Educationally Mentally Retarded (EMR) or Trainable Mentally Retarded (TMR) students. The consistency of these trends is more than mere coincidence. Such patterns point to what some have described as a "second-generation discrimination effect":

In every case where policy reflects positively on a student, black students are under-represented. In every case where policy reflects negatively on a student, black students are over-represented. . . . That a pattern similar to the one revealed here could occur without some discrimination is virtually impossible to believe.

The Role of Teachers

While police officers, security guards, and administrators generally assume primary responsibility for managing and enforcing school discipline, in most cases teachers make the first referral in the discipline process, and therefore have tremendous influence in determining who receives discipline and why. In my work with urban schools, the most frequent concern I hear from teachers is that they have trouble disciplining and controlling their students. This has been especially true in schools at which the majority of students are Black and the majority of teachers are White. Having taught in urban public schools, I am familiar with what teachers are up against, and recognize that some semblance of order and safety is essential if teaching and learning are to take place. However, whenever I conduct workshops in schools, I generally try to shift the focus of talk about discipline to discussions about what teachers know about their students. I do this because I have generally found that teachers who lack familiarity with their students are more likely to misunderstand and fear them.

Two years ago, I had the opportunity to conduct a workshop on student discipline for a multiracial group of teachers at an urban middle school located in an economically depressed community. Before addressing what I knew to be their primary concern — a recipe for controlling student behavior in the classroom — I wanted to impress upon the teachers the importance of knowing the students with whom they worked. These teachers, like many in urban school districts, did not live in the community where they worked and knew little about the neighborhood in which the school was located. From our discussions at the workshop, it was clear that most of the teachers also knew little about the lives of the children they taught, and most assumed that the majority of children came from deprived, dysfunctional, and impoverished families.

In an effort to increase the awareness of the group about the importance of knowing the community in which they worked, a community with which I was familiar, I presented them with a hypothetical situation: If you were invited to teach in a foreign country, what kind of information would you want to know before leaving? The teachers responded by generating a long list of what they felt was relevant information that would assist them in teaching in a land that they did not know. The list included information about politics, culture, the economy, history, and geography. After discussing why they felt this information
was important, I asked how much of this information they knew about the community in which they worked.

Two of the teachers said that they didn’t need to know this sort of information in order to teach effectively because the school was located within the United States, and therefore was part of familiar territory. Most of the others, however, recognized the inconsistency in this perspective, particularly after being primed by the previous discussion, and acknowledged that a lack of knowledge might pose a problem for them in their work with students.

I suggested that we visit some of the housing projects and neighborhoods where their students lived, the stores where families shopped, the health clinics, libraries, parks, and some of the noteworthy historic landmarks in the community. I pointed out that a brief tour of the community would provide them only limited useful information, but that it could be a start at becoming better acquainted with their students.

They agreed to go, and the following day we piled into my van for a four-hour tour. Interestingly, after the tour nearly all of the teachers told me that they resented me for taking them on this excursion because it made them feel like tourists. “Didn’t you see the people staring at us?” one teacher commented. “They were probably wondering why we were there.” Only one teacher disagreed with the group’s reaction and expressed appreciation for being exposed to the community in this way. As it turned out, this teacher had lived in this community when she was a child, and the trip had served as a reminder to her that most of the residents in the area were working-class homeowners. The winos and crack addicts who were visible on certain street corners, and who many other teachers believed were typical of a majority of the residents, actually constituted a small minority. However, the other teachers took up the position espoused by two of their colleagues earlier, insisting that they did not need to know the community in order to teach effectively. One asserted that “A good teacher can work with any child. I don’t have to become an anthropologist to teach.” I responded by asking if it was possible to be an effective teacher if you did not know your students, but by this point most of the teachers were unwilling to pursue this line of inquiry.

For me, this experience illustrated, in a profound way, the gulf in experience between teacher and student, which is typical in many urban schools. The pretense operating in many schools is that teachers should treat all students the same, although numerous studies on teacher expectations have shown that race, class, and gender have considerable influence over the assumptions, conscious and unconscious, that teachers hold toward students. Although multicultural education and student diversity have become popular topics of discussion among teachers, understanding how the politics of difference influences teacher-student interactions generally remains largely unexplored, except at the most superficial level.

When teachers and administrators remain unfamiliar with the places and the ways in which their students live their lives outside of the school walls, they often fill the knowledge void with stereotypes based upon what they read or see in the
media, or what they pick up indirectly from stories told to them by children. Many teachers, like others who live outside of poor urban communities, tend to hold negative views toward these areas, views that are rooted in a fear of violence and in media representations of the people who reside in the inner city as less than civilized. This fear invariably influences the interaction between teachers and administrators and their students. In the eyes of these teachers and administrators, who are "foreigners" to the school's community, the students often seem to embody the traits and exhibit the behavior of the hoodlums and thugs they have heard about or seen from afar. Many of the teachers with whom I have worked in urban schools seem to fear the children that they teach; more often than not, where the students are aware of it, they may attempt to use the teacher's fear to their advantage.

This is not to say that violence in schools is an imagined problem. I do believe, however, that it is a problem exacerbated by fear. A teacher who fears the student that she or he teaches is more likely to resort to some form of discipline when challenged, or to ignore the challenge in the hope that she or he will be left alone. Rather than handling a classroom disruption on their own, they are also more likely to request assistance from the central office.

My work with teachers and students at a number of urban schools has shown me that students often know when their teachers fear them. In many cases, I have seen students use a teacher's fear to assert their control over the classroom and, if possible, the entire school. I have visited schools where children openly gamble and play dice in the hallways, and where the presence of an adult is insufficient reason to put out a cigarette or a joint. When adults are frightened or intimidated, disorder prevails, and acts of crime and violence become the norm. Moreover, when fear is at the center of student-teacher interactions, teaching becomes almost impossible, and concerns about safety and control take precedence over concerns about teaching.

From speaking to students and teachers at such schools, I have found that they typically share a common characteristic: the adults don't really know who their students are. Their sense of what the children's lives are like outside of school is either distorted by images of pathological and dysfunctional families, or simply shrouded in ignorance. School personnel who hold such views may make little effort to increase parental participation in school because they can't see any benefits that might be gained through parents' involvement. School staff and faculty may also be reluctant to reach out to the community to establish partnerships with community-based organizations and churches that are interested in providing services to youth, because all they can see in the neighborhood are problems that are best kept out of the school. Fear and ignorance can serve as a barrier greater than any fence, and can be more insulating than any security system.

In many schools, differences in age and life experience make it difficult for students and teachers to communicate and understand one another. When such differences are compounded by race and class differences, a huge gap can be created that can easily be filled by fear and suspicion. Anonymity and ignorance
create shields that protect the identities of those who perpetrate acts of violence and crime. In such an atmosphere, adults and students may welcome armed guards, metal detectors, and barbed-wire fences because they can’t envision another way to ensure their safety. Even if they come to find the prison-like conditions depressing and oppressive, they are likely to cling to such measures because chaos is worse, and no other alternative seems imaginable.

Humanizing the Environment: Alternative Approaches to Violence Prevention in Schools

In critiquing the approach to discipline that is most widely practiced in the United States today, I in no way want to belittle the fact that many teachers and students have been victims of violence and deserve the right to work at and attend safe schools. In many schools, violence is real, and the fear that it produces is understandable. Still, I am struck by the fact that even when I visit schools with a notorious reputation for the prevalence of violence, I can find at least one classroom where teachers are working effectively with their students, and where fear is not an obstacle to dialogue or even friendship. While other teachers in the school may be preoccupied with managing their student’s behavior, an endeavor at which they are seldom successful, I have seen the same students enter other classrooms willing to learn and comply with their teacher’s instructions.

Many of these “exceptional” teachers have to “cross borders” and negotiate differences of race, class, or experience in order to establish rapport with their students. When I have asked students in interviews what makes a particular teacher “special” and worthy of respect, the students consistently cite three characteristics: firmness, compassion, and an interesting, engaging, and challenging teaching style. Of course, even a teacher who is perceived as exceptional by students can be a victim of violence, particularly because of its increasingly random occurrence. I have, however, witnessed such teachers confront students in situations that others would not dare to engage, boldly breaking up fights or dice games, or confronting a rude and disrespectful student, without showing the slightest bit of apprehension or fear.

What is there about the structure and culture of the institution that propagates and reproduces the destructive interpersonal dynamics evident in so many schools? The vast majority of teachers that I meet seem genuinely concerned about their students, and sincerely desire to be effective at what they do. Even those who have become cynical and bitter as a result of enduring years of unrewarded work in under-funded schools generally strike me as people who would prefer more humane interactions with their students.

What stands in the way of better relations between teachers and students, and why do fear and distrust characterize those relations, rather than compassion and respect?

My answer to these questions focuses on the legacy of social control that continues to dominate the educational agenda, and that profoundly influences...
the structure and culture of schools. The pervasive dysfunction that characterizes social relations in urban public schools is not accidental, but is due to the severity of social and economic conditions in the inner city. However, it is also not unavoidable. There are a few important exceptions to this norm, schools where teachers and students support each other in pursuit of higher personal and collective goals. Such schools, however, are not typical or common. Rather, the average urban high school tends to be large, impersonal, and foreboding, a place where bells and security guards attempt to govern the movements of students, and where students more often than not have lost sight of the fact that education and personal growth are ostensibly the reasons why they are required to attend this anonymous institution five days a week.

I have visited urban schools that have found ways to address effectively the problem of violence, ways that do not rely upon coercion or excessive forms of control. At one such school, rather than hiring security guards, a grandmother from the surrounding community was hired to monitor students. Instead of using physical intimidation to carry out her duties, this woman greets children with hugs, and when some form of punishment is needed, she admonishes them to behave themselves, saying that she expects better behavior from them. I have also visited a continuation high school, where the principal was able to close the campus, not permitting the students to leave at lunch time, without installing a fence or some other security apparatus, but simply by communicating with students about other alternatives for purchasing food so that they no longer felt it necessary to leave for meals. Now the students operate a campus store that both teachers and students patronize. Such measures are effective because they make it possible for children and adults to relate to one another as human beings, rather than as anonymous actors playing out roles.

I believe that there are a variety of ways in which to humanize school environments, and thereby reduce the potential for violence. Improving the aesthetic character of schools by including art in the design of schools, or by making space available within schools for students to create gardens or greenhouses, can make schools more pleasant and attractive. Similarly, by overcoming the divide that separates urban schools from the communities in which schools are located, the lack of adults who have authority and respect in the eyes of children can be addressed. Adults who live within the community can be encouraged to volunteer or, if possible, be paid to tutor, teach, mentor, coach, perform, or just plain help out with a variety of school activities. The above examples are meant to begin a discussion of alternative practices for building humane school communities. There are undoubtedly a variety of ways this can be done, and while such efforts may not eliminate the threat of random violence, they can help to make schools safer, less impersonal, and better able to provide students with a sense of stability in their lives.

The goal of maintaining social control through the use of force and discipline has persisted for too long. While past generations could be made to accept the passivity and constraint such practices engender, present generations will not. Most urban youth today are neither passive nor compliant. The rewards dangled
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before them of a decent job and material wealth for those who do well in school are seen by too many as either undesirable or unattainable. New strategies for providing an education that is perceived as meaningful, and relevant, and that begins to tap into the intrinsic desire of all individuals to obtain greater personal fulfillment, must be devised and supported. Anything short of this will leave us mired in a situation that grows increasingly depressing and dangerous every day.

The urban schools that I know that feel safe to those who spend their time there don’t have metal detectors or armed security guards, and their principals don’t carry baseball bats. What these schools do have is a strong sense of community and collective responsibility. Such schools are seen by students as sacred territory, too special to be spoiled by crime and violence, and too important to risk one’s being excluded. Such schools are few, but their existence serves as tangible proof that there are alternatives to chaotic schools plagued by violence, and controlled institutions that aim at producing docile bodies.

Notes

1. Several educational organizations have designated violence prevention their highest priority. For example, the Association of California School Administrators made efforts to reduce violence in schools their top priority for the 1993-1994 school year. For a discussion of national education priorities since 1980, see Beatrice Gross and Ronald Gross, eds., The Great School Debate (New York: Touchstone Books, 1985).

2. Evidence that there has been an escalation in the number of violent incidents occurring in schools is provided in an analysis of trends in Jackson Toby, “Everyday School Violence: How Disorder Fuels It,” American Educator, Winter (1993/1994), 4-6.

3. Numerous bills for curtailing violent crimes are presently under consideration in the Senate and House of Representatives. For a critical discussion of the Clinton administration’s crime bill, see Elliott Currie, “What’s Wrong With the Crime Bill?” The Nation, January 31, 1994, pp. 4-5.


5. Kemper, “Disarming Youth,” p. 27.

6. A recent example of such an approach can be seen in Denver, where Assistant Principal Ruben Perez at the Horace Mann Middle School suspended ninety-seven students in a three-day period for a variety of nonviolent infractions. In defense of his action, Perez argued that “the troublemakers weren’t doing us any good. They were just interrupting the educational process for good students who come to school every day.” See Florangela Davila, “Denver Debates School Ousters,” Washington Post, January 20, 1995, p. 18. There is also the case of Dejundra Caldwell, who was sentenced to three years in prison for stealing $20 worth of ice cream from the school cafeteria at a high school in Birmingham, Alabama. See Kenneth Freed, “Youth Receives Three Years for Stealing Ice Cream,” Los Angeles Times, September 30, 1994, p. 23. See also Harold Foster, Ribbin’ Jivin’ and Playin’ the Doses: The Unrecognized Dilemma of Innercity Schools (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, 1974). Foster hypothesizes that Black males are suspended and expelled more often than Whites because they exhibit certain “cool” behaviors, which teachers and administrators perceive as rude, arrogant, intimidating, sexually provocative, and threatening.

8. For a discussion on how to address violence through the curriculum, see Tim Daux, “Fostering Self-Discipline,” *Rethinking Schools*, 4, No. 3 (1990), 6–7.

9. For a discussion of this approach and others being used by urban school districts to improve the delivery of social services to students and their families, see Jeannie Oakes, *Improving Inner-City Schools: Current Directions in Urban District Reform* (Madison, WI: Center for Policy Research in Education Joint Note Series, 1987).


11. For example, during 1992, in the city of Oakland, California, the number of violent crimes committed by juveniles while on school property was substantially less than the number of violent crimes committed away from school property. See Oakland Police Department, “Oakland Police Department Report on Crime in the City of Oakland,” September 1992.

12. According to a recent national poll on attitudes toward public education conducted by Public Agenda, a national organization that conducts research on educational issues, the need for safety in schools was identified as the most important issue of public concern. For a summary and discussion of the survey, see Jean Johnson and John Immerrwahr, “What Americans Expect from the Public Schools,” *American Educator*, Winter (1994/1995), 4–13.


14. An example of the “get-tough” approach can be seen in the policies advocated by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Citing figures that indicate a dramatic rise in violence in public schools throughout the country, the AFT compiled a list of the tough actions being taken by school districts and new policies adopted by state legislatures to curtail the problem. The AFT also recommended that its local affiliates include violence reduction strategies in collective bargaining agreements. See Priscilla Nemeth, “Caught in the Crossfire,” *American Teacher*, 77, No. 2, 6–7. Also see an editorial by AFT President Albert Shanker, “Privileging Violence: Too Much Focus on the Needs and Rights of Disruptive Students,” *American Educator*, Winter (1994/1995), 8.

15. During a recent visit to an urban high school, I commented to a school administrator that I was impressed by the lack of graffiti on school walls. The administrator laughed and told me, “This is a lock-down facility. They can’t even get out of their classrooms while class is in session without being picked up. We run this place like San Quentin.”


17. A clear example of how traditional approaches to fighting school violence have failed can be seen in Richmond, California. Despite making a substantial increase in funding for metal detectors and other security measures, several schools in the district have
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reported an increase in violence. In fact, two students were shot recently at Richmond High School, even though metal detectors were installed at the school entrances two years ago. See Rob Shea, "High School Kids Want Security Program Junked," West County Times, April 21, 1994, p. 14.

18. Statistics frequently cited as evidence of the problem include: the number of students who report bringing weapons to school (13%), the number of teachers (one in ten) and students (one in four) who report that they have been victims of violence at school (Associated Press report on a Metropolitan Life Survey sponsored by American Teacher, December 17, 1993); and the perception of students, teachers, and administrators regarding the degree to which violence is a problem. See John McDermot, Violent Schools—Safe Schools (Washington, DC: National Institute of Education, 1978).

19. In Richmond, California, although the school district was still in the process of repaying a $30 million loan to the state after declaring bankruptcy in 1989, it set aside $50,000 in 1993 to pay for the installation of metal detectors. One teacher remarked: "They're spending money on this and we still need paper in our classrooms." In defense of the expenditure, a school administrator responded, "The overall program of the district is to provide a safe environment regardless of the cost. It's something we have to do." Ikimulisa Sockwell, "Detecting Weapon-free Schools," West Contra Costa Times, December 8, 1993, p. 11.

20. A recent opinion poll conducted by the Los Angeles Times found that concerns about safety remain high, despite a 12 percent decrease in the number of violent crimes committed in the state. See Belinda Lawson, "Fear of Crime Remains High Despite Reduction in Crime Rate," Los Angeles Times, October 22, 1994, p. 17.


22. For a discussion on how the conception of the asylum influenced the design and operation of public schools, see David Rothman, Discovery of the Asylum (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), pp. 83-84. Also see David Tyack, The One Best System (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 51-58.

23. Rothman, Discovery, p. 15.
25. Rothman, Discovery, pp. 137-139.
27. The progressive intentions of educators and social reformers is documented in Cremin, American Education, pp. 164-179.
34. Tyack, The One Best, p. 82.
36. The observer was Edward Joseph Rice, a pediatrician who visited thirty-six schools in 1892 to prepare a series of articles on the condition of urban schools. Focusing again on the body, Rice observed one teacher scold her students by asking, “How can you learn anything with your knees and toes out of order?” From Edward J. Rice, *The Public School System of the United States* (New York: Century Press, 1893) p. 98.
41. Writing about disciplinary practices used in the military and in prisons in eighteenth-century France, Michel Foucault describes a preoccupation with the production of “docile bodies” in which “power is dissociated from the body, and aptitude is turned into a capacity which it seeks to increase. . . . If economic exploitation separates the force and the product of labour, let us say that disciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination.” Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) p. 138.
42. For a discussion of how changes brought about by migration and immigration changed the character of eastern U.S. cities, see Daniel P. Moynihan and Nathan Glazer, *Beyond the Melting Pot* (Cambridge, MA: Joint Center for Urban Studies, 1963), pp. vii–xxi.
43. The factors leading to the deterioration of urban areas is well described in William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
46. Describing the loss of school control as a “crisis in authority,” Mary Haywood Metz analyzes how school districts attempted to respond to this situation in *Classrooms and Corridors: The Crisis of Authority in Desegregated Secondary Schools* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).
49. In a study on the changes in school culture that accompanied desegregation, Metz describes how many schools experienced a crisis of authority, much of which she attributes to fundamental miscommunications between White teachers and Black students. See Metz, *Classrooms and Corridors*.
50. Tyack, *The One Best*, p. 54.
51. In response to the rise in attacks on teachers, the American Federation of Teachers has developed a victim support program. For a discussion of the program and the problems responsible for its creation, see Nemeth “Caught in the Crossfire,” pp. 6–7.
52. Foucault, *Discipline*, p. 54.
53. During the hearing, the father mentioned that he had recently lost his job and that the financial problems created by his unemployment had added to the problems he was having with his wife.
54. In describing how power-knowledge relations constrain the ability of those designated to exercise authority to use their own judgement, Foucault writes: “Power-knowledge relations are to be analyzed not on the basis of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to the power system, but, on the contrary the subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many
effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations." Foucault, Discourse, pp. 27–28.

55. A national study carried out by the U.S. Office of Civil Rights reports that Black students are 74 to 86 percent more likely than White students to receive corporal punishment; 54 to 88 percent more likely to be suspended; and 3 to 8 times as likely to be expelled. See Kenneth Meier, Joseph Stewart, and Robert England, Race, Class and Education: The Politics of Second Generation Discrimination (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 84–86.

56. In 1991, Assembly Bill #2140 was proposed by Barbara Lee, D-Oakland, to insure that the removal of students from school was viewed as a last resort and "not to eliminate from the classroom students who are difficult to teach." See "Assembly Bill Would Alter School Suspension Policy," Oakland Tribune, November 27, 1991, p. B1.

57. Black parents and community members in Cincinnati also worked to defeat the approval of a school facilities bond measure that would have raised $348 million to finance repairs to deteriorating schools because of their anger over the treatment of Black students. See Adrian King, "Student Rights vs. School Safety: School Districts Grapple with the Racial Implications of New Security Measures," Education Week, January 19, 1994, p. 8.

58. A study conducted at Xavier University and cited by the New York Times supports the idea that violence is not solely an urban issue. The study found that 52 percent of the 294 suburban schools and 43 percent of the 344 small town schools surveyed reported an increase in the number of violent incidents. See Daniel Goldman, "Hope Seen for Curbing Youth Violence," New York Times, April 21, 1993, p. A12.

59. For a discussion of how the equation of Blacks with crime has become central to public discourse about violence and crime, see Amos Wilson, Black-on-Black Violence (New York: African World Infosystems, 1990), pp. 1–34. Also see Richard Majors and Janet Billson, Cool Pose (New York: Touchstone, 1992), pp. 33–35, for a discussion on perceptions of Black male violence.


61. Meier et al., Race, Class, and Education, pp. 81–84.

62. Meier et al., Race, Class, and Education, p. 89.


64. For a discussion on the various forms of multicultural education and the discourses associated with it, see Christine Sleeter, Empowerment Through Multicultural Education (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), pp. 1–23.

65. "Border crossing" is a phrase coined by Henry Giroux to describe the personal transformation experienced by teachers and students engaged in critical discourse and pedagogy. He writes: "Critical educators take up culture as a vital source for developing a politics of identity, community and pedagogy. Culture is not monolithic or unchanging, but is a site of multiple and heterogeneous borders where different histories, languages, experiences, and voices intermingle amidst diverse relations of power and privilege. Within this pedagogical borderland known as school, subordinate cultures push against and permeate the alleged unproblematic and homogene-
ous borders of the dominant cultural forms and practices. . . Radical educators must provide conditions for students to speak so that their narratives can be affirmed.” Henry Giroux, *Border Crossings* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 169.

66. These interviews were part of a survey that I conducted with 125 students at an urban continuation high school in northern California in 1990-1991.


69. This school was also the only junior high school in the district where no weapons were confiscated from students. See “Selected School Characteristics,” Office of the Superintendent, Oakland Unified School District, December, 1993.

70. Continuation high schools are set up for students who have either been forced or who have volunteered to leave a regular high school. Many students at continuation schools have a record of poor attendance and/or poor behavior in school. Some students are required to attend continuation school as a condition of juvenile probation.

71. Efforts to close a campus for security reasons have often met with resistance from students. In Richmond, California, the district’s attempt to close high school campuses at lunch time led to protests and walkouts from school. See Sockwell, “Detecting Weapon-free Schools,” p. 13.