ACTING WHITE: EDUCATION AND IDENTITY IN PAREDES' *GEORGE WASHINGTON GÓMEZ* AND ELLISON'S *INVISIBLE MAN*

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(Resumen)

La novela de Américo Paredes. *George Washington Gómez*, y la de Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, retratan hombres jóvenes que asisten escuelas hostiles para la formación de sus propios identidades étnicas. "Últimamente el protagonista de Paredes, Guálinto, falta de identificar con sus compañeros chicanos, mientras el protagonista sin nombre de Ellison identifica con sus compañeros Afro-Americanos. Este artículo examina la proposición que las experiencias educativas de los dos protagonistas son factores en la formación de la identidad étnica. Examina también las diferencias históricas entre la segregación *de jure* y *de facto* en las escuelas encontradas durante el tiempo de las dos novelas, y hace un comentario sobre las consecuencias psicológicas de la segregación. La corrupción de Guálinto está atribuida a las presiones de asimilarse al grupo dominante que los estudiantes chicanos encuentran dentro la escuela segregada *de facto* a la cuál él asiste. La resolución del protagonista sin nombre de Ellison esta atribuido a la falta de presiones de asimilación dentro la "Negro school" segregada *de jure* a la cuál él asiste. Una discusión breve de la oportunidad educativa iguale sigue, que promueve las interpretaciones participales para la reforma de las escuelas públicas.

1. INTRODUCTION

Américo Paredes' novel *George Washington Gómez* portrays the betrayal by a Mexicotexan. George Washington Gómez (Guálinto as he came to be known) of his community, his family, and ultimately his past in Depression-era Texas border country. Guálinto, when young, is full of hope that he can help chicanos in his hometown to rise above the poverty and discrimination they face, yet he grows up to marry the white daughter of a Texas Ranger, changes his name to George G. Gómez, takes a job with the CIA, and begins selling out Jonesville-on-the-Grande piece by piece. Part of the outrage the reader feels at the conclusion of the novel is a reaction to the discovery that the disaster which unfolded was predictable. The seeds of impending disaster germinated early on, and quite noticeably: the difficulty the reader has with Guálinto's betrayal is that the reader knew it was coming and was not able or refused to understand it before it happened. What turned Guálinto into little more than a corrupted tool of white maneuvering, into the sanavabiche Elodia calls him after his refusal to help the political campaign of his friend Miguel Osuna?

An answer, or part of an answer, can be found in a comparison of similar circumstances for whom the end result is worlds apart, and elucidating the differences between

the two. The nameless main character in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* faces a transition to manhood that is. in many respects. quite comparable to that of Guálinto. He is torn by many of the same racial. class. and social divisions experienced by Guálinto; the same sneers and snubs of whites. the same pressures. expectations. and hostilities of his racial. class. and social group peers. He. too. grows up under the mammoth shadow of heavy expectations; where Guálinto is expected to grow up and be a great man. to help his people. so too is the Invisible Man expected to "shape the destiny of his people." (*IM*. 32) The burdens both carry are heavy indeed. the abstractions against which they are both to be measured. immense. Both face antagonism from whites at all stages. and a rejection of participation on many levels in mainstream American culture. through language. dress. values orientation. name. appearance. and so on.

Yet the responses of the two are ultimately quite different. Guálinto sells out; he rejects his Mexicotexan heritage in favor of absolute assimilation into mainstream dominant-group life. wearing suits. even disrespecting his Uncle Feliciano. who he had idolized during childhood. The Invisible Man. however. does not sell out; he drops out. He disappears beneath the surface of dominant-group culture. and begins to live not just in opposition to it. or against it. but rather outside of it. He remains absolutely faithful to what he has come to understand being African-American means; remains absolutely faithful to his own understanding of what shaping the destiny of his people means. and what it requires of him.

Despite having much in common on their respective journeys towards manhood. the two characters become quite different men. What can we point to in the two novels. *George Washington Gómez* and *Invisible Man*. that explains why two characters with similar situations and similar worldviews experience such disparate outcomes?

I propose that we can understand the different reactions of Guálinto and the Invisible Man to dominant-group assimilation pressures by understanding the educational experiences of each character. Schools are the single dominant social institutions encountered by young Americans. and are the major arena in which most students negotiate identities in relation to their age group. class. racial and cultural peers. and as well to external groups and institutions. Schools are of critical importance for adolescent identity formation. and have become in this century the focus for attempts to address racial. class. and ethnic conflicts. Guálinto and the unnamed protagonist of *Invisible Man* are caught up in a period of intense conflicts in the educational realm. and it is clear that their schools have lasting impacts on the type of men they become.

2. CHICANO EDUCATION, 1848-1947

Americans have been grappling on the large scale with the question of coeducating races since compulsory free public education became a reality in the early years of this century. Various debates have arisen over whether coeducation is possible. desirable. Godly. and so on through this day. A major complication of the debate has been. and continues to be. that those with the greatest stake in educational policy-making are frequently those excluded or voiceless: racial and language minorities. women. and other oppressed groups. Historically. the rationale used to segregate Mexicans was based on the idea that Mexicans were indios. unsuitable for

association with anglos (Gonzalez, 1990). Despite the guarantee in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, in 1848, that Mexicans were to enjoy the same political privileges as anglos, state legislators and political parties attempted fervently to violate the agreement (Griswold Del Castillo, 1990). For example, the state constitution of California, ratified in 1849, prohibited "Indian-looking Mexicans" from voting, while extending the privilege to "White-looking Mexican" males (*California State Constitution of 1849*, art. 11, sec. 1). The overall effect of legal and illegal segregation policies was the creation of a school environment that was extremely hostile to all groups not represented by the white, middle-class power structure.

A Supreme Court case decided in 1896, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, legalized racial segregation of public schools, with the introduction of a "separate but equal" clause which allowed for white and non-white schools. Despite numerous challenges (see, for example, *Gung Lum v. Rice* {1927} and *Gaines v. Canada* {1938}). *Plessy v. Ferguson* stood as the guiding legal philosophy for almost fifty years within the Chicano communities of Texas and Southern California. During these fifty years, a divided system of "Mexican schools" (for anyone with a Spanish surname, regardless of family history or education) and anglo-only schools, was the rule.

A challenge brought about by a group of parents in the Westminster, California, school district in 1943 ultimately resulted in the rescinding of *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1947. *Mendez et al. v. Westminster School District* helped to bring about the end of segregation for Chicanos, and as well served as a model for the landmark desegregation lawsuit that followed seven years later, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954).

With the end of *de jure* segregation came immediate clambering to entrench *de facto* racial segregation within schools that had been legally forced to integrate. Justifications for segregating students within schools were similar to justifications for separate schools. Frequently cited were language differences; defendants in the *Del Rio v. Salvatierra* (1931), *Alvarez v. Lemon Grove* (1931), and the *Delgado v. Bastrop* (1948) cases all attempted to use the argument that Chicano students' inability to speak English mandated the use of separate classrooms. Frequently students born in the United States, for whom English was the primary language, found themselves in "limited-English-proficient" classrooms simply because that was where all Chicanos were placed.

Another form of *de facto* segregation within schools was referred to as "academic" or "intellectual" resegregation. This type of resegregation, still prevalent in the form of "tracking" or "ability grouping," was and is still justified by the widely cited disparity between classroom performance and I.Q.s of white students and their non-white peers (see Howe, 1997; Young, 1922). Chicano students were assumed to be, if not mentally inferior, at least incapable of a level of performance equal to that of their white peers. Putting the two groups together in the same classroom, it was thought, would be damaging to both: the Chicano students would be in over their heads, the white students unchallenged.

Academic tracking within schools places disproportionate percentages of whites in "high" tracks, usually pre-college, and disproportionate percentages of Chicanos in "low" tracks, usually vocational. Chicano students were used as pawns in a grand scheme of simultaneously keeping the races segregated and reproducing a pool of working-class laborers. Finally, it was argued that Chicano students suffered from a "cultural deficit" which made full

integration within schools inappropriate for them. The superintendent of L.A. public schools voiced a common opinion in a 1923 address to district principals. "We have these [Mexican] immigrants to live with, and if we Americanize them, we can live with them... (Dorsey, 1923, in Gonzalez, 1990)." Professor E.E. Davis, referring to chicano students in a 1923 publication asserted:

> The American children and those of the Mexican children who are clean and high-minded do not like to go to school with the dirty "greaser" type of Mexican child. It is not right that they should have to. There is but one choice in the matter of educating these unfortunate children and that is to put the "dirty" ones into separate schools till they learn how to "clean-up" and become eligible to better society. (In Gonzalez, 1990; p.30)

Such attitudes continued well beyond *de jure* integration of schools, post-*Mendez*, and continue today. Schools quite consciously attempted to install a homogeneous sense of what it meant to be American, and linked standards of success to the acculturation process.

"[T]he academic success of a Mexican-American child," claims Thomas Carter (1970), "depends on the degree to which his home has been oriented to Anglo middle-class culture." Clark Knowlton concurs in a 1965 address to a New Mexico school district:

> The philosophy of the State and local school systems is imbued with the traditional middle-class Anglo-American value that all minority and immigrant groups should be required to abandon their native languages and cultures, give up their identity, and become absorbed as individuals into the dominant group, usually on a lower-class level. If any group resists full acculturation, it is regarded as somewhat uncivilized, un-American, and potentially subversive. (Knowlton in Carter, 1970; p.95-6)

Attempts at "Americanization," and instillation of dominant culture norms, were certainly not without consequences. Students learned a culture at home and from age-group peers. Schools quite often enforced another and quite different culture. In order to remain in school, and find any degree of success, students were required to drop all aspects of the home culture–at least outwardly–and manifest the cultural characteristics demanded by the school. Few students could live easily or well with the internal conflicts generated by living with two sets of values and cultural mores, and most ended up rejecting completely one or the other. The psychological effects of both *de jure* and *de facto* segregation are extensive, and are seen and understood quite well by students so affected. Israel, a Puerto Rican boy going to school in New York City in the 1990s, comments:

> People on the outside may think that we don't know what it is like for other students, but we *visit* other schools and we have eyes and we have brains. You cannot hide the differences. You see it and compare... Most of the students in this school won't go to college. Many of them will join the military. If there's a war, we have to fight. Why should I go to war and fight for opportunities I can't enjoy–for things rich people

value, for their freedoms. but I do not *have* that freedom and I can't go to their schools? (In Kozol, 1991; p.104)

Both stories here were written. and operate narratively during the *Plessy v. Ferguson* years. Guálinto's school in Jonesville-on-the-Grande, however, was something of an exception in Texas public education, in that Jonesville's schools were fully integrated from grades one through twelve–a fact noted with pride at every election season (*GWG*, 116). The town itself had a primarily chicano constituency, and an active voting population due to the electoral vigorism of groups like Judge Norris's Blues and their counterparts, the Reds. Political rivalry between the groups may have been responsible for the integration of Jonesville-on-the-Grande's schools. Despite the physical integration of chicano and anglo students in the Jonesville school system, it is clear that students still suffered all of the consequences of *de facto* segregation within schools. Social. psychological. and frequently physical harm were inflicted on chicano students attending public schools, the scars of which for Guálinto would never heal.

3. JONESVILLE'S SCHOOLS AND CHICANO "CORRUPTION"

The Jonesville school system was unique among Texas schools only in physically commingling chicanos and anglos: it clearly had no function–and did not even try to function–as a place where racial relations could *change* or *improve*. Nobody was looking to public schools to do anything of the sort: it has only been since the 1960s that the American public has looked to its schools as great providers of life experience. mediators of the kinds of people into which we mature. During the times of both novels–the early 1930s for Paredes. the late 1920s-early 1930s for Ellison–school was thought of by many, if not most of those not belonging to dominant-group culture, as little more than something that was required of males through the sixth grade, and by those ambitious enough to have dreams of bigger and better things for their children, as a "way out."

Guálinto's experience in an integrated school system, then, required that he confront and deal with a system set up not necessarily in opposition to chicano students, but set up as if he and his classmates were not even present. Guálinto was forced to negotiate encounters with hateful students, like La India and Alicia, hateful teachers like Miss Cornelia, and a school culture which saw half its chicano population drop out in their first year, and half of those remaining the next. That the school itself was little more than a political tool of white men like Judge Norris was no accident. The school's instruction and expectations of its Mexican students were representative of the intense assimilation pressures Guálinto felt each year he spent in Texas. The grammar school placed its early emphasis on mastery of the English language, and all instruction after the third grade, when most of the Spanish-speaking students had dropped out, was done exclusively in English. This seems to be an appropriate indication of the values placed by the school on the heritage of the vast majority of its student population: though created and supported by the active participation of its chicano residents, the Jonesville public school system nonetheless was little different in its approach to students and learning than its physically segregated peers.

For Guálinto, and for many of his chicano peers, negotiation of success in school was a corrupting process, in that school was a place where administrators and teachers alike agreed that "...all minority and immigrant groups should be required to abandon their native languages and cultures, give up their identity, and become absorbed as individuals into the dominant group." (after Knowlton, 1965) The pressures on students to embrace native languages and cultures at home, along with pressures to assimilate at school, were immediate and conflicting. Complete assimilation into dominant-group culture, which *required* abandonment of the Spanish language and chicano culture, absorbed and corrupted simultaneously.

However, the *requisite* nature of assimilation for students in schools like Jonesville schools was less than clear. Since the Jonesville system was one which was created in part through the participation of oppressed-group activists and anglos like Judge Norris, the creation and belief in an *externally* oppressive school system was dissonant for Mexicotexans like Guálinto. His teacher in lower-first, Miss Cordelia, was herself chicana, and spoke English with an accent, yet she scorned her Spanish-speaking students, and made relentless mockery of Guálinto and Orestes. This may have been because of her own tenuous position in the school district; it is likely that the school board, which called her a "strict disciplinarian" kept her on only because she was a proper tool for their own agenda, a turncoat of Mexican descent who was willing to discipline students for putting the ch, the ll, the ñ, and the rr in their alphabets. How could students object to such treatment from "one of their own?" Certainly first graders like Guálinto would not have been sophisticated enough to understand the reasons for Miss Cordelia's mockery. The message she conveyed, however–that the Spanish language and oppressed-group culture were not to be valued or practiced in school–would have come through quite clearly. Unlike in *Invisible Man*, the dominant group disguised their tactics well enough that there was no clear target for blame; while the oppression of Guálinto and El Colorado and La Nena and every one of the other students of Mexican descent was real, the route back to anglos and their power was a winding one, and never clear enough for the students to elucidate. That anglos like Judge Norris may have been to a large degree responsible for the terrible conditions chicanos faced in public schools was difficult to see, because men like him often assumed the role of "protector," or Great White Father. Students like Guálinto were then forced to internalize their oppression, to either accept their miserable failures in a system designed with their failure as a goal as their own fault, or to struggle for success within the system blindly, to internalize anglo values and struggle to achieve anglo versions of success, never realizing the corruption that must take place along the way.

The corruption pressures began, for Guálinto, the very first day of school. All chicano students, Guálinto no exception, were subjected to the intense mockery of Miss Cordelia, the chicana teacher of lower-first. Her mockery was all the more intense for Guálinto, because as his sister Maruca correctly infers: "he is smarter than she (p.145)." Miss Cordelia saw in Guálinto a capacity to recognize her corruption, even in the first grade, and was afraid of confronting it herself–and so mocked and beat him into abject silence and passivity. It is the aftermath of the beating that is indicative of Guálinto's internalization of corruption after the model of his Uncle Feliciano. Rather than being beaten again by his Uncle Feliciano and MarÍa as he feared he would be, Guálinto was comforted, and had his welts and scars treated. Feliciano then solicited the support of Judge Roberto's anglo lawyer Shanahan, obtained a

supporting deposition from Don Santiago López-Anguera, threatened to bring in a doctor to examine Guálinto formally, and threatened to sue the school district. In short, Feliciano fell back on the aid and technical knowledge of anglos to get Guálinto back in school, and used the uniquely anglo tactic of suing (or threatening to sue) to resolve a dispute. Rather than demanding the removal of Miss Cordelia, or demanding at the very least an apology for her merciless treatment of Guálinto, Feliciano remained confined within the framework of anglo oppression by accomplishing little more than having Guálinto switch out of Miss Cordelia's class. Feliciano importantly used an anglo tactic, and indicated to Guálinto that an acceptable, even desirable, way to deal with dominant-group oppression is to enlist their help, to use their tactics, and to accept their conditions for the negotiation of rights and roles. This message seeped into Guálinto over the course of his education in Jonesville's schools. That there *was* no clear oppressor, or at least no consolidated figurehead of oppression, primed him for confusion about his own heritage and what it meant to be a Mexicotexan and an American. That there were ostensibly helpful, even benevolent figures, like Judges Norris and Roberto, made it difficult for Guálinto to recognize the racism and oppression virtually omnipresent in dominant-group culture. That there were chicanas and chicanos so absolutely corrupted as Miss Cordelia made it difficult for Guálinto to recognize that there could exist a meaningful and powerful solidarity among members of oppressed groups, and difficult even to recognize that such solidarity might have been desirable. It was at the height of this confusion over dominant and oppressed-group interaction that Guálinto was placed in conflict with the turncoat Miss Cordelia and enlisted the aid of an anglo lawyer to present his case. That his idol Uncle Feliciano chose to turn to the help of anglos to resolve the dispute showed Guálinto quite early on a version of what it meant to be a Mexicotexan, and what the "best" relationship to that heritage could be in los Estados Unidos. Certainly Guálinto's corruption was not ultimately his fault, nor the fault of Uncle Feliciano: it was cumulative. But it is clear that the structure of his school, and the relationships between power, language, and race, were keys in the shaping of what I would call the earliest (and quite possibly, most important) event in the transformation of Guálinto from naïvité to the absolute corruption seen at the end of the novel.

4. AFRICAN-AMERICAN EDUCATION, 1868-1954

Many of the same structural and social barriers to obtaining equal access to public education for chicano and chicana students existed for their African-American peers. The ratification of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution in 1868, commanded that "No State shall... deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." Yet the "Equal Protection Clause," as the Amendment soon came to be known, was never interpreted to mean that segregated facilities for whites and African-Americans were unconstitutional. The Supreme Court's 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* served only to confirm legally the right of states to segregate school-age children by race, as long as facilities for both were superficially "equal." The legal battles waged by various U.S. Latino groups during the twenties and thirties for the rights of their children to attend whites-only schools had two parallels in the African-American community, both in 1949, both involving admission and treatment of African-

American students in graduate schools (see *Sweatt v. Painter* and *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents*). The landmark *Mendez* case, decided in 1947, was not generally seen to be applicable to African-American students, and it was not until *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 that *Plessy v. Ferguson* was declared unconstitutional. As seen for chicano students in the post-*Plessy v. Ferguson* era, African-American students paid exorbitant social and educational penalties for participation in both *de jure* and *de facto* segregated public schools. Success in such schools, created by and for white, middle-class males, depended largely on the degree to which a student was willing to participate and work hard, to attend regularly, to be passive and obedient and accepting of the values and norms of the school. Such acceptance did not bring high costs for white, middle-class males because they had a role in the creation of such value structures within schools and with the creation of criteria for success. Other groups, such as African-Americans, however, played no such role, and the values and criteria for success in public schools were justifiably seen as exclusively those of what Leslie Campbell calls "the devil:" white men (See Campbell in Wright, ed., 1970). Valuing achievement, passivity, meritocratic reward structures, and so on, involved an acceptance of a white male value system, and a high social cost in terms of self-respect and peer esteem. The costs of "acting white," not surprisingly, did not exist for whites, nor did "acting male (competitive)" cost men anything socially. But "acting white" for African-American men, or chicano men, necessitated that they "...learn to operate in two cultural frames of reference; behaving according to dominant-group norms when the need arises, and switching to more ethnospecific forms of behavior when the occasion warrants it." (Solomon, p109). The bipolarity of behavior was even more acute for women, who had not only to "act white" to do well in school, but had as well to "act male."

As well, school expectations and reward structures differed along racial, gender, and class lines. "[T]he cost of being black," Solomon pointed out, "is that whites get greater rewards for any given amount of schooling than non-whites." (p5) Participation in public education brought with it a degree of ethnospecific behavior rejection which involved high social costs for historically disadvantaged groups—who were usually already at economic, political, and linguistic disadvantages.

5. SEGREGATED SCHOOLS AND THE INVISIBLE MAN'S "RESOLUTION"

Despite the many social and educational costs of attending *de jure* and *de facto* segregated schools, Ellison's unnamed protagonist in *Invisible Man*, did achieve some sort of resolution. The claim that "...all minority and immigrant groups should be required to abandon their native languages and cultures, give up their identity, and become absorbed as individuals into the dominant group" for him held no sway. Somehow the segregated schools the Invisible Man attended gave him a fighting chance to avoid the corruption of Guálinto in *George Washington Gómez*. Understanding the segregated school Ellison's protagonist attended provides a good deal of insight into why he was able to resist dominant-group assimilation pressures.

First, and most importantly, the Invisible Man's school lowered the costs of participation in public education for African-American students. By not forcing African-

American students to choose between "acting white," or doing well in school, and "acting black." or conflicting with school expectations for attendance, behavior, performance, and so on. Negro schools (as they were called) allowed African-American students to enter school on a more equal footing with their white peers in contemporaneous educational settings. Second. Negro schools allowed for the development (and, importantly, recognition) of alternative norms, value systems, conceptions of the good life, and reward systems—in tune with the ethnospecific norms, value systems, and so on, that their students brought to school. Negro schools provided an environment for the development of alternative ideals, and a means for their testing and refinement. Finally, and not inconsiderably, Negro schools *involved* people—African-American people. It is no small matter to involve parents in the education of their own children, and it is clear that a school alienated from the values and norms of parents could do little to involve them. Clearly segregated schools created and were a consequence of many social ills, but some did in fact have positive outcomes, frequently in spite of the aims of those who created them in the first place. Despite the fact that many supporters of *Plessy v. Ferguson* probably hoped the idea of Negro schools would wither and disappear (which they often did, for lack of funds, local and national hostility and violence, etc.), some schools in fact flourished and in fact were able to provide the sort of environment which was key in shaping student's self-concepts and relations to members of their own racial, cultural, and ethnic groups.

The main character in *Invisible Man* grew up in a smallish Southern town, where there was no question that races should be kept segregated from each other. Negro schools existed primarily due to the force of law; although African-Americans in the rural South frequently outnumbered their white peers in any given district, they frequently were prevented from any sort of political activity through outright terrorism: lynchings, beatings, harassment, and isolation. Any and all tactics that could be used to prevent the pursuit of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were used, and used often. Although the segregated school the Invisible man attended was by no means ideal, it did not actively seek to weed out its students, nor did it continually place them in psychologically dissonant situations. While segregated schools in the thirties were criminally under-resourced and understaffed, they did allow for the development of a shared experience within an oppressed group, and did allow for the maintenance if not creation and development of a sense of community. While the dominant-group powers that were may well have done their best to eradicate and devalue the education of non-whites during segregation years, they could do little once students were in class with each other, with non-white teachers, struggling against problems that could be viewed as externally imposed, rather than internally corrupting.

It was during his school days, not described in detail in the text itself, that the protagonist of *Invisible Man* grew into an understanding of group solidarity. He was in a Negro school, was taught by Negro teachers, and experienced to an extent what it meant to be a Negro growing up in a time and place where white men wielded most of the available political and economic power. That these men were oppressive, that his school lacked many of the basic amenities and good teachers and a decent infrastructure, and so on, was more or less taken for granted by everyone. It was hardly a secret that those in power had no sympathy for African-American empowerment. But that there *existed* a clear and definite white Other which was actively and clearly oppressing, was key for the main character's grappling with his

grandfather's dying words: "Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open. (*IM.* 9)" The surprise the main character felt at this advice, vigorous and shockingly overt, was heightened by his own perception of his grandfather as one of the meekest, most humble men that he knew, especially with whites. This advice, of course, *had* to be a surprise–because it was inherently subversive, inherently invisible. The only one that could understand what a "yes" meant to a man with an agenda of "overcoming 'em with yeses" *was* that man alone. Keeping separate his word and his deed was to become a primary preoccupation for the main character through his negotiation of assimilation pressures through school and beyond.

That it was possible to "yes" anyone to death–that there was even a clear "'em" to be *yesed* and destroyed gave the main character an object against which he was able to construct his own concept of what it meant to be African-American, and what it meant to take part in brotherhood. The social costs of the Invisible Man's participation in public school life were not as great as they were for Guálinto; the Invisible Man was able to see the possibility of maintaining an uncorrupted within-group identity while negotiating assimilation pressures successfully.

The Invisible Man's successful comprehension of his grandfather's advice was seen for the first time when he faced the betrayal of an African-American peer. The reaction of the protagonist to the corruption of another African-American man (his college president, Bledsoe) was tellingly different from the reaction Guálinto had to the realization that Miss Cordelia (a chicana) was a "witch," as Orestes called her. Where Guálinto was shocked only that Miss Cordelia was an individually corrupt *person,* the Invisible Man was shocked to find that an oppressed-group *peer* could be corrupted. The Invisible Man initially wanted to kill Bledsoe, but quickly chose to move beyond the individual, to further explore what must have caused such absolute corruption, and what some of the consequences must have been. The protagonist of *Invisible Man* was prepared through school to correctly interpret his grandfather's advice, which alerted him to the possible divide within people of thought and action, and to cope in a meaningful way with the pressures of dominant-group assimilation without succumbing. Guálinto, however, had no such preparation, and was not able to distinguish so early on between the corruption of Miss Cordelia, the actions of his uncle Feliciano, and what was possible and desirable in relation to one's oppressed-group peers.

6. DISCUSSION

It appears as if physically integrated school districts such as the one found in Jonesville frequently caused more psychological and social harm than did segregated school districts. At the same time, most liberal educational theories have always advocated the coeducation of races. One problem with liberal theories in general is that it they do not manage to avoid the problem of mandating some uniform educational ideal for all students who attend public schools; it is frequently from this uniform ideal that the justification for equality of educational opportunity springs. Equality in schools does not necessarily mean equality of

inputs or outcomes. but rather equality in the sense that all who participate in public education are given an equal voice in how it is created and implemented. and especially, in what its goals are to be. The fall of *de jure* segregation did not and has not brought about an end to *de facto* segregation–and it is the failure of any sort of meaningful within-school integration or equality to be realized which ultimately corrupts Guálinto. One of the major drawbacks of most liberal educational theories is that they are often quite oblivious to the ineluctable notion of social causation. or (possibly worse). they recognize social causation as a means to present inequality, but fail to provide adequate foundations for grounding the principle of equal educational opportunity. The latter case is common among utilitarian interpretations. such as those found in *A Nation At Risk* (1984). which are pointed towards maximizing the good. which is all too often identified with maximizing economic productivity. Utilitarian theories generally provide little support for special education. ESL classes. remedial and alternative schools. and innovative educational approaches. since they tend to have high costs per pupil.

A liberal-egalitarian interpretation of educational opportunity has the most merit. That most physically integrated schools fail to provide equal educational opportunity is clear. and that failure can be attributed at least in part to social causation is also clear. Compensatory interpretations of equal opportunity. such as the liberal-egalitarian interpretation. seek to provide equal access. by historically disadvantaged groups. to educational institutions that were created largely by and for white men. The primary criticism of the compensatory view is that even if equality of educational access is possible via such interpretations. it is not necessarily an education equally *desirable* for all (see Howe. 1997). A good (if somewhat far-fetched) example would be the creation of compensatory programs to educate African-Americans in a Grand Wizard school for the KKK. Even if equality of educational access were possible. it would not necessarily be desired or valued equally by all groups.

Attempts to resolve some of the problems of liberal-egalitarian compensatory programs resulted in participatory interpretations of equal opportunity. Participatory interpretations generally agree that "[g]roups with different circumstances or forms of life should be able to participate together in public institutions without shedding their distinct identities or suffering disadvantage because of them." (Young. 1990). Participation in the creation of new educational ideals. and new curricula and school structures. where everyone has an equal voice. is designed to overcome the problem of biased educational ideals. However. it seems quite clear that advantaged and disadvantaged groups do exist, and that equal participation in the formation of universal educational ideals is not. and never has been, possible. Participation itself in public education. for many groups. requires acceptance of ideals they did not have any hand in creating. via methods they do not necessarily embrace. The public schools seen by Guálinto. and against which those of the Invisible Man are constructed. have within them a school culture. created by white males. which "...denies the students freedom. masses and fails to differentiate them. keeps them powerless and in a state of spectatorship. provides little human interaction and gives them primarily future oriented and symbolic rewards..." (Marotto in Solomon, p4). For integrated students other than white males. school is a place only haphazardly related to what they themselves value or embrace as worthy conceptions of the good life. It seems likely that any universal educational ideal is going to have differential benefits and rewards. especially one created democratically. where it is subject to

the whim of majority opinion. Giving chicano or African-American students a voice, and giving women a voice, is not necessarily meaningful when African-American students or women do not have sufficient power to have an impact on the educational ideal that becomes universal.

It is clear that there are meaningful differences between such groups; among such differences are preferences, moral principles, and conceptions of the good life (which follow from the first two). As well, and perhaps most importantly here, there are differences in where groups lie on structures of power, socially and educationally. It makes sense that a family of recent immigrants from Mexico will have different preferences, different moral principles, and a different position on the educational power structure than the family of a Texas Ranger. Inevitably some families and individuals will be in a better position to exercise participatory rights than others, even given scenarios (however improbable) where equality of participation in creating a universal educational ideal is possible. The reasons for differences are as varied as the reasons why certain groups are more politically active than others; group members may not be sufficiently well educated, may not believe in the current political structure, may see no point in participating, or the setup of the participatory system may be so burdensome or discriminatory as to render differences between groups in terms of costs related to participation itself.

This last possibility is extremely important. It is one thing to promote participatory interpretations of equality of opportunity, and quite another to attempt to encourage everyone to participate. This is quite clear when discussing current inequalities for historically disadvantaged students in the public educational system; although ostensibly all students are given the opportunity to have free public education through twelfth grade, the exercise of this opportunity comes at different costs to different groups. The "costs" involved can be varied; among them are time, money, group identity and affiliation, accepting or rejecting value systems, and so on—one of the most important social costs being a sense of self, of an identity frequently in opposition to the norms of those responsible for the creation of schools and school culture. Public schools were not created in a participatory fashion, and do not pretend to be value neutral, morally neutral, or even preferentially neutral (or if they do so pretend, it doesn't particularly matter, since they are not). The costs of participating in public education are least for the white middle-class males of any given town, Jonesville-on-the-Grande being no exception, because this group is the one for which public schools have primarily come to be structured (see Kozol, 1991). The values of a meritocracy, of achievement and self-initiative are in accordance with white, middle-class values, and schools are set up to promote and reward participation along such lines. Schools primarily promote, if not success itself, at least the valuation of success of white, middle-class aspirations, such as getting white-collar jobs or going on to higher education. There is little conflict between student groups of this sort (middle-class) and school structure, and the costs of participating are low.

There is a subtle difference, however, between the costs of participation in *de jure* segregated schools and *de facto* segregated ("integrated") schools. Physical segregation of students inherently devalued the education of the oppressed group, although understanding this devaluation came not from an analysis of what politicians meant when they created the schools, but rather in looking at unsubtle reminders like disparate funding, inadequate facilities, lousy teachers, and second-hand textbooks. Seeing the lack of money for maintenance, extracurricular

facilities and activities. field trips. and so on. even the youngest of students could grasp that oppressed-group schools were never equal. nor were they ever meant to be. But unlike at "integrated" schools. such as those in Jonesville-on-the-Grande. the terrible education each student received could be traced externally. to racist politicians that controlled the system that oppressed; to an American public that still was not ready to have races commingle. and truth be told. is still probably not ready to have African-Americans or chicanos going to school in the first place.

There is no doubt that such schools were terrible places to be educated. and were overtly reflective of an insidiously racist system which controlled public education at the time. Yet the problems faced by segregated schools. and by the students attending them. could be understood as problems not created by the oppressed groups. but rather by those with sufficient political power and sufficient will to oppress. For the main character in *Invisible Man.* there is little dissonance in recognizing the terrible education he must have received: schools for African-Americans were bad because whites wanted them that way. and success was only possible through negotiation of such opposition. The negotiation itself was difficult. and by no means was it clear what that negotiation required; frequently the only path to success was in what the Invisible Man's grandfather described as "yessing" the white man to death. But "yessing" white men does not inherently mean a corruption of one's participation in and understanding of oppressed-group community and culture; it only involves a recognition of the structure and operation of current power structures within school.

The similarities between the two characters are as striking as the different responses they have to corruption pressures. The frustration the reader feels at the betrayal of Guálinto is real. because what happens to Guálinto is very real; the capacity to resist and maintain one's integrity while being subjected to conflicting demands and pressures can only be developed under the right circumstances. with the right guidance. While school segregation is certainly not an attractive episode in this nation's history. for the Invisible Man one such school provided a portrait of group solidarity and an "Other" against which could be constructed a model of negotiating dominant-group pressures without corruption. Such "Others" allow value and identity systems to be constructed in opposition by oppressed groups. and can so help to provide senses of solidarity. meaning. and self. The different responses of Guálinto and the main character of *Invisible Man* may thus be seen as responses shaped to a large degree by school. precipitated by differences in structure at the level of peer-group identity formation.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND EDUCATIONAL DIRECTIONS

Most interpretations of equal educational opportunity involve the creation of universal educational ideals. Universal ideals provide foundations for assessing whether or not equality has been achieved. and as such are necessary for evaluating the mechanisms by which equal educational opportunity interpretations have been pursued. However. it does not seem likely that we can currently create universal educational ideals which result in even the barest equality-cost for participation in schools. much less can we equalize the cost of participation in their *implementation.* The major hurdle to the creation of such ideals is a systemic uniformity to

our social and educational institutions which heavily favors majority-group norms, values, and conceptions of the good life. Without any meaningful, or equally desirable conceptions of the good life (that is, without alternative educational goals equally *worth wanting* as current ones which provide access to money, power, higher education, and so on) it is not clear that participation of minority groups in the creation of universal educational ideals will promote diversification, or reduce the social costs of participation in public education. Before we attempt to create such universal goals, we need to have more or less equally desirable alternatives between which to choose.

One specific way to go about creating such alternatives is to allow for the creation of–for example–publicly funded Afrocentric schools with, importantly, all or mostly African-American staff and administration. One could easily imagine schools with a diverse range of philosophical approaches, such as Nel Noddings' challenge to promote caring in schools (Noddings, 1992); the point being to *try something else*, something other than the middle-class white male approach. These kinds of schools have at least three clear purposes. The first, and most important, is to lower the costs of participation in public education for, in the first example, African-American students. By not forcing African-American students to choose between "acting white," or doing well in school, and "acting black," or conflicting with school expectations for attendance, behavior, performance, and so on, Afrocentric schools allow African-American students to enter school on a more equal footing with their white peers in current educational settings. Second, Afrocentric schools allow for the development (and, importantly, recognition) of alternative norms, value systems, conceptions of the good life, reward systems, and so on–in tune with the ethnospecific norms and value systems, that their students bring to school. Afrocentric education can provide meaningful alternatives to achievement and meritocratic orientations of public schools, and provide, importantly, examples of success. Without designing schools that have alternative philosophical and methodological approaches, there can be no such thing as meaningful alternatives from which to choose universal educational ideals. If no one is sure whether a school with an ethic of caring, rather than justice, can "work," it makes sense that not many people will vote for caring as a part of a universal educational ideal. Alternative schools can provide an environment for the development of alternative ideals, and a means for their testing and refinement. Finally, and not inconsiderably, new schools *involve* people. One of the primary reasons African-American and chicano students give for dropping out is that schools are irrelevant, that no one cares, or that it doesn't matter whether or not they go to school. The creation of Afrocentric, or chicano, or Nuyorican schools provides minority group students with a clear example that their own particular values and norms are in fact meaningful, and that their participation does make a difference. It is no small matter to involve parents in the education of their own children, and it seems likely that a school alienated from the values and norms of parents can do little to involve them. Alternative schools may be places where parents can find meaningful voices, and can participate in the education of their own children in new ways. Providing mere lip service to a participatory interpretation of equal educational opportunity, without providing meaningful and equally desirable alternatives, clearly cannot provide meaningful (and universal) educational ideals.

There is no reasonable way to ignore the influence past and present power structures have had on the present philosophical structure of the public educational system. There must be, in order to have meaningful equality of education, participation by all groups in the creation of educational goals. But in order to have that participation be valid, there must first be an equalization in the costs of participating in the first place, which is not yet in sight. The schools encountered by Guálinto and Ellison's protagonist have remained in large part unchanged in philosophical foundation and methodological approach. There is a degree of compensation necessary before a participatory interpretation of equal opportunity is possible; such compensation should be directed towards the creation of schools equally desirable by oppressed groups, and as well towards recognition of the validity of alternative value systems, norms, and conceptions of the good life. Only once that recognition is in place, once the alternatives are real and equally desirable, and once the costs of participating are leveled, can we expect a participatory educational ideal to be attainable.

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