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Swept Behind Black Children

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Abstract

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On August 25, 2005, the city of New Orleans was hit with Hurricane Katrina, leading to billions of dollars of damage and the loss of over 2000 lives (datausa.io). Like COVID- 19, the government was aware of the potential damage but failed to provide adequate protection. According to James Elliot’s (2006), people from a lower socio-economic class felt unsupported, because the government failed to provide acceptable resources and warning to those in the city of New Orleans. Hurricane Katrina had the most impact on Blacks (especially from a lower socioeconomic status) since most of the damage was done in New Orleans, a predominantly Black city (2000 Census). This travesty created negative outcomes on education, emotional trauma, and financial stability. Mirroring Hurricane Katrina is COVID-19. Within Los Angeles County, COVID-19 has caused job loss, stress, and increased financial hardships among lower socio-economic families (Los Angeles Times, 2020). Currently, LA students are required to engage in distant learning, which requires access to the internet and a computer (all of which are not free). Therefore, increasing the potential stress for families that are no longer receiving free meals for their children at school. Education support that is provided at school is not easily accessible; some parents may also find it difficult to locate a safe place for their children to be

while they are at work (Los Angeles Times, 2020). Due to these stressors, underserved students can be at risk to be more educationally disadvantaged. Using the previous knowledge gained from the effects of Hurricane Katrina on education, there will be a qualitative comparison to the current state of COVID-19 on Black youth's education.

Section 1: Introduction

The documentary focus is to show how public education among Black youth is impacted after catastrophic events. We will be comparing the impact of Hurricane Katrina in the New Orleans education system and the influence of COVID-19 on the education system in Los Angeles, specifically among Black students in both areas. Our focus is on Black students because of the educational disparities within the population and a history of systemic racism in education.

The foundation of the documentary is that free, quality public education is a civil right. This documentary will highlight how a government's actions before, during or after a catastrophic event have impacted underserved populations in two different events, years apart and in different regions. In this case we are looking at the impact of Hurricane Katrina in the New Orleans [NOLA] education system. It is crucial to bring into view how the government's plan to rebuild the NOLA community after Hurricane Katrina affected the attendance of students, particularly in the Black community. Like the impact of Hurricane Katrina in NOLA to Black youth, it is important to research how COVID-19 government decisions in Los Angeles County have influenced the education system within Black communities, specifically attendance rate. Since the pandemic is ongoing there can be a qualitative discussion about the current educational challenges especially absenteeism, help with processing and understanding educational material, technology barriers and dropout rates.

Data from those interviews conducted in New Orleans will be compared to interviews conducted in Los Angeles with high school teachers of black students, parents of black high school students and nonprofits working with high school black students in Los Angeles County during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Section 2: Racial Disparities in the Hurricane Response

On Martin Luther King Jr Day in 2006, then New Orleans mayor Ray Nagin said, “New Orleans was a chocolate city before Katrina. It is going to be a chocolate city after.” When he says that he was encouraging the Black residents to return to the city and not let developers gentrify New Orleans. The damage done and the government's response from Hurricane Katrina highlighted the racial disparities in the city. Such disparities include access to resources and aid, FEMA response, state of buildings and public housing. Those disparities also made it harder for poorer and Black communities to rebuild and to return home. “It was frequently alleged that blacker, poorer, and more devastated communities faced relatively low rates of return by 2007, jeopardizing their long-term ability to recover from the storm in their original homes and exacerbating pre-storm racial and economic disparities,” (Green, Kouassi, Mambo, 2011, pg. 148), this gives the opportunity for gentrification. Critical Race Theory (insert citation) argues that race is a part of everything in American Life. This can be seen in the school to prison pipeline, criminal justice system, black maternal death rate, and income disparities. Therefore, when analyzing the data and studies of what the response and effects were, it is important to consider and reflect on the role of race.

Evacuation is expensive and there must be an opportunity to access resources. Evacuation requires some sort of transportation, which is costly. “Poor households were more likely to have stayed up to or through the storm, or to have left at least one family member behind,” (Brown & Thiede, 2013, pg. 806). The ones who stayed behind were more likely to come from a lower economic status consequently were the ones who were dependent on government aid in the aftermath of the hurricane. Following Hurricane Katrina, the media displayed images of people on their roofs of their houses or waddling through the water trying to

access resources and to seek safety. Some people went to the convention center or the Superdome for assistance. “Katrina hit New Orleans early on Monday morning, August 29. By late Tuesday afternoon, promised food, water, and buses to evacuate residents at the Superdome had not been delivered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA),” (Stives, 2007, pg.51). Those in need of basic resources were without because of the government’s failure to provide those resources. Another thing to consider are the characteristics of neighborhoods that were the most damaged in the storm, they were poor and Black. “The communities that received the highest level of floodwater and suffered the most death and destruction were African-American,” (Adeola & Picou, 2017, pg.235). This is described as environmental injustice, people who have the intersectionality of being poor and a minority live in communities that have harsher environment effects. “The pre-existing structure of social inequality shapes environmental injustice and makes certain groups and communities especially more susceptible to disasters than are others,” (Adeola & Picou, 2017, pg.233). In the case of New Orleans, the Lower Ninth Ward, one of the hardest hit places, was majority Black. “As in other American cities, practices of racial segregation concentrated middle- and upper-income whites in outlying suburbs (in New Orleans, literally on higher ground) and blacks in the central city, where flooding was the worst,” (Stives, 2007, pg.50).

Coming back to New Orleans for Black involved complex obstacles. First and most important was housing. “Public and private housing throughout New Orleans was devastated by Hurricane Katrina, although housing in neighborhoods with the largest percentages of African Americans tended to be hit the hardest,” (Green, Kouassi, Mambo, 2011, pg. 146). Hurricane Katrina brought to light the decay and neglect of buildings. But the government’s failure to rebuild in neighborhoods with higher concentration of Blacks, put Black further behind. “Five years later,

these augmented disparities remain in the form of unrepaired homes in the Lower Ninth Ward, the loss of approximately half of the public housing units that actually had weathered the hurricane with little damage, and the prospect of the construction of mixed income housing to replace demolished public housing leading to even fewer units available for the original residents,” Green, Kouassi, Mambo, 2011, pg. 159). Without the financial means and resources, it makes it very difficult to either return or pay for the repairs, especially when the government does not provide the funding to do so. With the loss of public housing, individuals who did not lose their home to the hurricane lost it through another avenue. “Prior to Katrina, the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) owned 7,379 public housing units of which approximately 5,146 were occupied,” (Green, Kouassi, Mambo, 2011, pg. 156). A few years after Katrina the public housing units’ numbers drastically decreased. “In 2010, after some renovation and new construction, there were only 3,000 public housing units in New Orleans,” (Green, Kouassi, Mambo, 2011, pg. 159). Instead of the government funded mixed use housing, thus lowering the amount of affordable housing. Beyond the lower number of units, the local government did not allow people to return to their homes, even when there was minimal damage, without a concrete reason why. “After the hurricane, public housing residents were told by HANO not to return to their homes because of alleged damage to the units. Most public housing units were closed with steel doors and ringed with barbed wire. Demolition of most public housing was approved in 2007 even though only a few of the public housing structures had been severely damaged by the hurricanes (Green, Kouassi, Mambo, 2011, pg. 156). The government legally supported, allowed and created the structural oppression of people living in or slightly above poverty, which were mostly Black.

Section 3: Racial Disparities in the COVID-19 Death Rate

“Recent data from Los Angeles County show a 14 percent mortality rate among African Americans, who make up 9 percent of that county’s population”(Azar et. al., 2020, p. 1260).

According to the California Health Care Foundation, there is an elevated risk among the Black population in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic as “a perfect storm of irrefutable evidence that people of color are caught in a web of social inequality” (Azar et. al., 2020, p. 1260). Dr. Barbara Ferrer, LA County Health Director, highlighted disparities in COVID-19 deaths among people of color, especially among Black residents and those living in poverty.

In May 2020, Los Angeles County records showed that the death rate from the virus was 34 per 100,000 Black residents in Inglewood, while the number of deaths was 18 per 100,000 residents in Glendale, which is a white majority community (Cal Matters, 2020. Inglewood and Glendale are 14 miles away from each other and the number of deaths is drastic when comparing between both cities (Cal Matters, 2020). Dr. Gregory Taylor, who works in a downtown hospital, mentioned that the cause of COVID-19 deaths among Black communities is due to underlying health conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and respiratory diseases. Therefore, those underlying conditions are a major cause contributing to the higher rates of death among Black individuals in Los Angeles County. Dr. Ferrer noted that “the disproportionately higher number of deaths from COVID-19 among Black people is an indication of the impact of racism and discrimination on health and well-being” (Los Angeles Times, 2020). That does not only apply to COVID-19, but to other diseases as well. There are higher rates of the underlying health conditions mentioned among Black communities. “It starts at the beginning of life when black babies are three to four more times likely to die before they reach their first birthday and at the very end of life when black residents die, on average, six to 10 years younger than all others”, Dr

Ferrer (Cal Matters, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to consider how society structures, systems, and practices are the root cause of these inequities.

Section 4: Racial Disparities in the COVID-19 Unemployment Rate

When looking at historical data of disparities in employment rates among the Black population, we can see that “Black employees’ unemployment rates increased to double digits and remained high for more than six years after the 2007-2009 Great Recession. Contrastingly, the unemployment rates among White employees did not reach double digits during that time (Williams, 2020). Educational, age, and experience differences can play a role in the data outcome, however, they do not explain racial disparities in employment (Williams, 2020). Research shows that Black individuals with college degrees have close unemployment rates to White individuals with just a high school diploma. “At every educational level, Black workers have higher unemployment rates compared to their White counterparts” (Williams, 2020). In one study they found that when it comes to loans, Black-owned businesses are consistently left behind in comparison to White-owned businesses (Los Angeles Times, 2020). Terri William, President and Chief Operating Officer of OneUnited Bank, said the reason for the disparities is “absolute racism” (Los Angeles Times, 2020).

Even with the employment disparities, in the beginning of 2020 the unemployment rate among Black employees was the lowest in comparison to previous years. However, when the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded in California, it lowered the unemployment rate again within the Black community (Williams, 2020). “A higher percentage of Black employees reported being permanently laid off than did White employees” (Williams 2020). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, by August the unemployment rate for Black employees was 13%, while for White employees it was 7%. LA Times reported how racial disparities in unemployment are being exposed and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Lola Smallwood Cueva, the founder of the Black Worker Center in South Los Angeles to LA times that “Nearly half the

Black community has had either no job or a poverty, dead-end job that doesn't pay basic needs of housing and food" (LA Times, 2020).

Section 5: Education Reconstruction post Hurricane Katrina

It has been 15 and half years since Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans. During that time, there has been a major reconstruction of the Orleans Parish School System. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, Orleans Parish School District was deemed one of the worst school districts in the county. “In 2004, one year prior to Hurricane Katrina that caused devastation in New Orleans, the Orleans Parish School System (OPSS) that serves primarily Black students was ranked the worst in Louisiana, a state that measures 49th in education in the U.S, “ (Parsons & Turner, 2014, pg.106).” The hurricane opened a door for a fresh start.

In the beginning of the city’s recovery process many schools in the school district was turned over to the state. “In 2005, over 100 Orleans Parish schools were transferred to the state's RSD,” (Green, 2015, pg. 4). This was done with Act 35. “Act 35 recalculated failing from an original score of 60 to 87.4 on the school performance matrix. The nearly 30-point increase essentially allowed more schools to be governed by the RSD. After Act 35, 107 schools were included in the RSD’s portfolio, compared with their operation of only five schools prior to the passing of the Act. Again, during this period, it is critical to note that these policy prescriptions took place while most African Americans were displaced due to Hurricane Katrina,” (Dixson & Henry, 2016, pg. 223). This means when communities returned home following Katrina, they were met with a new school district. This was the beginning of the transformation of public schools in New Orleans. Another major act was the mass dismissal of the teachers. “It is important to re-state, however, that the firing of all 7500 of the employees in the Orleans Parish School District, a majority of whom were Black teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals, had a devastating effect on the racial balance of not only the education community in New Orleans but also the Black middle class,” (Buras, Dixson, & Jeffers, 2015, pg. 289). This

allowed non-locals to come into New Orleans and influence the education system and change the racial landscape. White teachers from programs such as Teach for America then migrated into the city with the intent to change the school system (Buras, Dixson, & Jeffers 2015).

As of 2021, OPSS is an all-charter school district. “Dispossessing African American parents and educators their right to weigh in on the education of their children, the state governor, Kathleen Blanco, issued Executive Orders 58 and 79, which eliminated preexisting charter school laws that called for votes of approval from parents, faculty, and staff before a school could be taken over as a charter. In the case of New Orleans, this meant a codified and state-sanctioned silencing of the majority Black community—parents, educators, and students—in decision making regarding charter schools,” (Dixson & Henry, 2016, pg. 222). With the passing of these laws, it made it easier for schools to become charter thus starting the evolution of all schools becoming charter. As stated, prior, Hurricane Katrina was the catalyst for educational reform since communities were misplaced. This brings into question if this new system creates more equity in the school district. “In the immediate aftermath of Katrina, exclusionary practices were common with one third of school leaders admitting to steering some kids away from their school,” (Beabout, Kotok, Nelson, Rivera, 2017, pg. 821). The charter school system permitted schools to choose who could attend the school, this takes away opportunities for youth to attend better rated schools. One example is, ““In the more recent past, years prior to Hurricane Katrina, the St. Bernard public schools instated caps on enrollment for students transferring from failing schools to schools with higher achievement scores,” (Parsons & Turner, 2014, pg.105). In other words, if a student is attending a lower rated school, it would make it harder for the child to transfer to a higher rated school. Charter schools are their own entities, so have the legal right to do this. This is legal segregation. “All forms of school choice

have the potential to affect student racial and socioeconomic integration because of their ability to decouple housing from school assignment” (Beabout, Kotok, Nelson, Rivera, 2017, pg. 821).

“For African Americans, schools, like churches, served as places of physical, emotional and psychological freedom and opportunity. Schools were places of civic, social and educational opportunity where African American communities could be authentically themselves, “(Green, 2015, pg. 5). Charter schools took this away from Blacks because it took away the ability for the community to be involved with their schools. “Structural barriers limited parent and community participation in decision making indicated specifically by the lack of easily accessible information, the individual rather than communal understanding of parental involvement, and the disregard for community dissatisfaction with the changes made in the name of reform,” (Cook, 2018, pg. 94). This can be seen in the passing of the acts that allowed the state to have more schools in the recovery school district and that changed the process of converting a school to Charter. “Act 35 was passed when little resistance could be mounted, and communities mobilized as the people and educational institutions of New Orleans were in the midst of coping with the devastation of the storm. This was intentional not accidental,” (Cook, 2018, pg. 98). One of the most important things to note is the racial makeup of the Orleans Public School System, “Ninety five percent of the public-school students are African American compared to 93.5% prior to the flooding; 90% of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch compared to 80% before the flooding,” (Green, 2015, pg. 5). So, the school district comprises most Black children living in poverty. Most the decision- makers do not mirror the population, instead a majority are non-local white who created a system where the local Black residents are not able to have a voice and a choice in the community schools (Buras, Dixson, & Jeffers, 201)

Section 6: Educational Disparities among Black youth in Los Angeles

As William Edward Burghardt Du Bois stated, “the color line still divides us” (Hammond, 2016). Black youth in Los Angeles County continue to face a numerous number of disadvantages, which inhibits their academic success and places them at greater risk of structural disenfranchisement (Noguera et al., 2019). Despite the reform initiatives in place, such as the 2011 enactment of No Child Left Behind, there is still a persistence of racial disparities in academics. Across the United States there are many children from marginalized communities underperforming in their academics (Noguera et al., 2019). In comparison to students from other races/ethnic groups, “Black students continue to perform at lower levels on most measures of academic achievement and attainment” (Noguera et al., 2019). Prior to COVID-19, Black youth had a history of challenges within the educational system, with higher rates in absenteeism, low test scores, and graduation rates (Noguera et al., 2019). For every White student suspended, there are approximately 4 Black students suspended, and more than 1 in 5 Black students miss 15 or more days of school (Innovative Schools, 2017). The gaps within the educational system are evident, as schools are falling short in preparing Black students.

“If LAUSD Black students were served by one district alone, that district would be the 11th largest in the state” (Innovative Schools, 2017). There are more than 50,000 Black students enrolled in the school district, which makes up 8% of all students. However, 3 out of 10 of those students are on a grade level for English, and 2 out of 10 are on a grade level for math (Innovative Schools, 2017). Although most Black students in LA are enrolled in traditional district and magnet schools, “more than half of Black students don’t consider their school to be a supportive and inviting place to learn” (Innovative Schools, 2017). According to a UCLA study, there is a high number of Black students in LA county attending schools that are identified as

“low-performing”. These are also schools that are short in supply and lack in resources such as nurses, social workers, educational programs, and highly qualified educators. “Black children are also not recognized as one of the groups in need of targeted support” (Noguera et al., 2019).

Contributing to the educational disparities among Black students, is the failure to address the “out of school factors”, such as the economic conditions where students live. “Failure to recognize how poverty, health and educational performance interact has made it more difficult for educational policy to have a positive impact on the needs of the most vulnerable children”. Majority of Black students attend schools that are racially isolated and located in poor communities (Noguera et al., 2019); these schools are considered a red category, meaning they have poor ratings. With the current COVID-19 pandemic school campuses have closed and caused them to transition to distance learning utilizing technology, as a result, making the educational disparities much worse.

During pre-COVID, the National Assessment of Education found that 18% of Black students in the 8th grade reached reading proficiency and 17% of Black students in the 12th grade were proficient in reading. “Fewer than 2 out of every 10 Black high school graduates had the baseline skills they needed to succeed” (LA Times, 2020). Currently, with virtual learning many students do not have internet access, especially those living in poverty or attending schools such as those in the red category. Research shows that low-income Black families were less likely to have home internet. USC professor, Hernan Galperin, stressed that students are less motivated to attend online school and are more likely to complete fewer assignments than their peers when they are without appropriate internet connectivity or devices for virtual learning (Tat, 2020). Six months into the COVID pandemic, a great number of students remained without adequate digital access, especially students from low-income communities (LA Times, 2020).

According to Compton’s Unified School District Supt. Darin Brawley, “Our kids are struggling to find a spot on the property or the house where their device (hotspot/iPad) will actually work” (LA Times, 2020). Among Black students in LA, the weekly online school participation rate was 67 percent for middle school and 71 percent for high school students. By comparison, White students had 88% participation for middle school and 85% participation for high school (Tat, 2020). Due to the additional academic challenges with COVID, most Black students from low-income communities are now left behind even more, as they are still not receiving the adequate support, they need from their schools to academically succeed. According to Tyrone Howard, UCLA education professor, “Unfortunately, what these data remind us is that race, socioeconomic status, disabilities and disadvantage still matters” (ABC-7, 2020).

Section 7: Study Design

This is a qualitative documentary film, which will address important questions about knowledge production, such as who is entitled to create meanings about the world; how some meanings and not others are accorded the status of knowledge; and how race and class factor into these entitlements. Outcome will be a Qualitative discussion on pre- and post-Katrina educational issues related to Black youth, and COVID 19 educational issues related to Black youth in LA. Addressing evaluation and endpoint definition means taking a critical stance toward power, knowledge, and self can usefully begin with actively theorizing our social, cultural, and political positionality—factors such as race, class, and ability, among others. The study will be using the critical race theory. The critical race theory, developed by Derrick Bell, argues “that the law and legal institutions are inherently racist and that race itself, instead of being biologically grounded and natural, is a socially constructed concept that is used by white people to further their economic and political interests at the expense of people of color,” (Curry 2009).

Los Angeles Participants

In Los Angeles we are focusing on recruiting parents of Black youth, educators, educational organizations, and researchers within the LA education system. Participants are considered individuals who have experience working in education and have advocated towards equity in the Los Angeles educational system. Our researchers have extensive background in studying educational disparities among Black youth and have written studies on the subject. In addition, participating organizations share similar goals and missions, which strive towards addressing and removing systemic barriers in schools to provide equal educational opportunities for Black students. Parents of Black youth and high school teachers will also have the

opportunity to share their concerns and challenges with supporting their children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

New Orleans Participants

In studying New Orleans there will be interviews with a variety of individuals from different fields. There will also be personal interviews from individuals who were in high school in New Orleans in the 2005/2006 school year to bring to light experiences of Black students during Hurricane Katrina. Experts include those who study the intersection of education, oppression, and natural disasters to help identify issues students will face from a sociological perspective. Other experts include Dr. Paez, who will explain the importance of using a CRT framework while studying education. The executive director of the New Orleans Parks and Rec department will explain how the department responded to the Hurricane while trying to keep teens safe and engaged while most of the facilities were destroyed. The other participants will explain how Katrina changed the landscape of the educational system in New Orleans and how that has affected Black youth.

Section 8: Materials

Participants will be recruited through social media, LinkedIn, and email. Flyers to recruit parents of Black youth will be posted throughout Los Angeles. Participants will be interviewed in person using social distancing guidelines or via video-call using our CSUN Zoom account, which is considered secure and is HIPPA compliant. A Sony video camera will be used to film in person interviews which are saved on the PI's password protected computers. Questions are provided to the participants a week prior to the interview. Flyers to recruit participants in the New Orleans part will be posted on social media, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram. For our research we are using peer reviewed articles and research done by participating participants utilizing the CRT framework as the lens.

Filming Procedures

Filming locations will be over Zoom with participants from NO and LA; we have developed qualitative questions for participants to dialog. The purpose of the interview is to get the perspective and knowledge of those who were either directly affected or have been studying the risk and potential long-term effects.

Section 9: Data Analysis

“So much has changed and yet we still have Jim Crow results,” stated Nahlia Webber, Executive Director of New Orleans Public Education Network. While it may apparently seem that there have been changes in the education system, the injustices still exist underneath it all till this day. According to Dr. Lori Peek, a year after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, about 200,000 students had still not been enrolled in schools. Many of these students had to leave to another state to continue their education leaving behind a place they called home.

Hurricane Katrina did not cause the educational disparities in New Orleans; the educational injustices among Black youth already existed due to a history of systemic racism in education. New Orleans organization leaders spoke about the educational challenges among Black youth, such as lack of access to quality schools, lack of diversity in teachers, and an overall lack of resources. Dr. Ducote, Executive Director from Greater New Orleans Collaborative of Charter Schools, stated there currently is a need for more diversity within the school system; Black youth are also in need of access to quality schools.

When Katrina struck, the inequalities and racial disparities became even more severe, as “red-lining” already played a huge factor in describing the educational disparities among Black students in New Orleans. According to Dr. Ducote, despite the improvement of some schools prior to Hurricane Katrina, there were still a lot of schools who were failing, were problematic, had low achievement, and had poor leadership. Therefore, a lot of challenges and problems still needed to be addressed within the school system. When it came to the more developed schools, parents waited in lines outside of the schools to register their children, because they wanted them to receive a better education.

As a result of Hurricane Katrina, Black students and families suffered greatly as the access to quality education became even more sparse. There was a mass dismissal of teachers, which was primarily of Black females in the workforce. Therefore, as previously stated students were not receiving any educational support. Dr. Cassandra R Davis from the University of North Carolina stated, “The recovery part is way longer than we ever anticipated”. The recovery after hurricane Katrina was planned to take a total of 20 years. As Dr. Davis mentioned, it has been 15 years since Katrina hit New Orleans and they are far from recovering. It is evident that the educational disparities among Black youth are not caused by catastrophic events. Despite the educational challenges and disparities among Black students, New Orleans organization leaders described the Black community as resilient, as they continue to push forward.

“Systemic racism,” a word with so much history and issues behind it. Organization leaders in Los Angeles used the term, systemic racism, to refer to the disparities within education.

among Black youth. Dr. Alicia Montgomery, CEO from Centers for Powerful Public Schools, described the educational challenges among Black children as an extra brick they carry on their back. Dr. Montgomery described the bricks as the effects of racism on Black families.

Throughout our interviews we see that there is a pattern of issues that were voiced by the participating organizations. Not only do Black youth and families deal with the challenges within education, but there are so many more underlying issues such as, financial disparities, health disparities, unequal access to employment opportunities, and environmental factors. As the organization leaders mentioned, these issues are due to capitalism, white supremacy, and a long history of racism. According to Jewett Walker, Director of 100 Black Men LA, Black students/families have the lowest graduation rates, highest suspension rates, lowest home

ownership rates, high low-income rates, disproportionately represented in the homeless population and have the highest imprisonment rates. Like Mr. Walker, participants pointed out how these problems are not caused by COVID-19, rather they are amplified by the current COVID crisis, because it is continuing to put Black youth and children at the bottom.

Our Los Angeles organization leaders shared about the current challenges with COVID and education. Due to the current state guidelines, schools have been moved to online learning; it has been about a year since schools transitioned to the online platform. Specifically, in Los Angeles, all student learning has been impacted; however, when focusing on Black youth, we can see there is a greater impact. Elmer Roldan, CEO of Communities in Schools Los Angeles, brought up the issue of “red lining”, which is one of the many issues among lower socioeconomic Black communities. Like in New Orleans, red lining was described by organization leaders as a discriminatory practice that puts services, such as internet/Wi-Fi out of reach for residents of certain communities based on race, ethnicity, or financial status. According to our interviews, red lining is one of the causes lower socioeconomic communities do not have equal access to technology, internet/Wi-Fi, or other services. In addition, if families are provided with these resources, they are limited to them or they are not of good quality. In response to the lack of Wi-Fi or devices during COVID, some families have received a hotspot or a laptop. According to David Rattray, CEO of UNITE- LA, “that is just a band aid”. Mr. Rattray describes the distribution of hotspots and technology devices as band aids, because it is only a temporary relief. Mr. Rattray argues that the problem is not the lack of Wi-Fi or technology devices, the problem is policies, and the way systems are set up around education and lower socioeconomic Black communities.

Section 10: Results

In comparing New Orleans to Los Angeles, we can see that the education system has failed to support Black students prior to catastrophic events. As our documentary participants mentioned, the changes within the educational system towards Black student achievement have been like “band aids”; “there is a difference between something radically changing and something fundamentally changing”, stated by Nahliah Webber. Unfortunately, New Orleans has not fully healed from Hurricane Katrina because there has not been a fundamental change. Currently, we are dealing with COVID-19 and if there are no fundamental changes being made, these educational disparities will continue among Black youth, continuously leaving Black children and youth swept behind in the educational system not only in New Orleans and Los Angeles, but across the United States.

Section 11: Discussion

Given the history of the systemic disparities that the documentary highlighted, one can see that racism is rooted deep in the United States. All the systems in our society intersect and when one system is failing it is like a domino effect. The documentary displays numerous issues that continue to affect Black students and families till this day. Catastrophic events such as Hurricane Katrina and COVID only increase the problems with racism towards Black communities. In the documentary, organization leaders stressed the need for fundamental changes in how the government addresses disparities. Dr. Jose Miguel Paez, CSUN MSW Professor, stated the importance of utilizing Critical Race Theory when analyzing the gaps in the education system. Utilizing CRT as the framework for the documentary served to dive deeper into the causes of educational challenges among Black youth in Los Angeles and New Orleans. As previously stated by David Rattray, CEO of UNITE-LA, a lot of policies in response to issues among minorities are often superficially evaluated. CRT serves as a tool to create effective policies that challenge White Supremacy and dismantle its practices.

Section 12: Implications for Practice

One of the goals of the documentary is to show individuals how systematic barriers affect Black students. Catastrophic events are not the reason for these barriers, rather it is due to deeper racism issues that have not been thoroughly addressed in society. The documentary can serve to further educate individuals on how catastrophic events increase the educational issues among Black students and the importance of considering the main causes for the disparities. Educators can challenge the low-test scores, high suspension rates, low graduation rates among Black students by considering how the problems are broader and caused by the roots of racism.

Conclusion

“We are a society that has been structured from top to bottom by race. You don’t get beyond that by deciding not to talk about it anymore. It will always come back; it will always reassert itself over and over again” (Kimberle Williams Crenshaw). The purpose of the documentary is not only to further educate individuals about the systemic issues affecting Black students and families, but also to challenge social work students and individuals viewing the documentary to utilize a CRT lens when reevaluating their programs and/or approach in delivering services to Black communities. Racism is real and it plays a major factor in how systems are structured in society. As Kimberle Williams Crenshaw stated, deciding not to talk about racism does not fix the problems.

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