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Overcoming Injustice: A Tradition of Resilience

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Numerous studies have explored the concept of resilience and its influence in the face of alienation, adversity, or abnormality (Benard, 1991; Cairns & Cairns, 1994; Gordon, 1995; Krovetz, Speck, & Luther, 1991; Werner, Smith, & Sagor, 1996). Even more noteworthy, a significant body of this research has considered the role of resilience in the management of social complexities such as gender bias and institutional racism (Bressler, 1967; Centra, 1970; Davis, Loeb, & Robinson, 1970; Heussenstamm, & Hoefner, 1971; Kiernan & Daniels, 1967; Marjoriebanks, 1980; Middleton, 1963; Newman, 1980; Reed, McMillan, & McBee, 1995; Seginer, 1986; Solomon, 1989; Taylor, 1970; Wilson, 1979).

Gordon's (1995) work views resilience as the ability to thrive, mature, and increase competence when confronted with adverse circumstances. These circumstances, which can be either biological or environmental, become obstacles as one attempts to increase social competence. Sometimes the circumstance may be chronic and consistent and other times severe and infrequent. In any case, it represents a loss of opportunity to thrive, mature, and increase capacity for competence. Studies by Gordon (1995) and Luther (1991) found that resilient people possess an internal locus of control, not found in non-resilient people, and that the resulting social competence held by the former group plays an important role in overcoming stressful situations.

Dealing with racism at school, in the workplace, in neighborhoods, and in business has long been a stressful situation for African Americans. It is one of the primary forms of adversity with which resilience researchers have concerned themselves (Bressler, 1967; Centra, 1970; Chesley-Carter, 1998; Davis, Loeb, & Robinson, 1970; Kiernan & Daniels, 1967; Taylor, 1970).

From these studies that link resilience to racial prejudice, several things are clear. People need 1) cultural identity, 2) psychological acceptance, 3) feelings of relevance, and 4) fulfillment of cultural needs and goals. Another thing that the research on resilience tells us is that people need people. In study after study (Cairns & Cairns, 1994; Christenson, 1992; Garmezy, 1991; Gordon, 1995; Jorgensen, 1979), it appears that the influence of a dependable role model, constant buddy, or a caring adult figure (in the case of youth) is a highly significant factor in one's overcoming obstacles.

Resilience and Social Justice

Two essential characteristics mark the behaviors and mindsets of people who are considered resilient (Chesley-Carter, 1998). These are having a sense of personal power and control over life's events and the capacity to make meaning through a role model. There seems to be this inextricable connection between resilience and social justice. How can one go about the work of social justice without a sense of personal power and without reference to another role model? Kant's (1959) philosophical work recognized the importance of resilience. He wrote about the outcomes of moral action and suggested that actions and decisions have worth when they are done out of duty, which is always connected to a sense of good, or goodwill. Even if the action did not succeed, if it was done out of a spirit of goodwill, it is still considered successful.

Leading for social justice is a consequence of conscious moral action. In the body of work on moral action (an important aspect of social justice) there are leaders who really want to help improve situations for people. They do three things: 1) ensure that there is capacity to initiate action that supports the mission (illustrates the characteristic of 'meaning'), 2)

sustain and weather the unforeseen obstacles (illustrates the concept of resilience), and 3) handle the external issues (illustrates the characteristic of control)(Hill, Foster, & Gendler, 1990). These leaders make the mission clear, the benefits of 'the struggle' clear, and establish covenants and commitments designed to see the effort through to the end. These leaders take whatever initiative is necessary to bring about change. They socialize those around them. They consider themselves accountable to the larger community. This is leading for social justice.

Motivations for moral action vary, probably to the extent that leaders do. Paccione (2000) reports that motivation to act morally comes from job situations, influence of family/childhood experiences, discrimination due to minority status, and interactive/extended cultural immersion experiences. She adds that some derive their 'calling' from training, educational courses, or books. Her work on motivation to lead suggests that childhood exposure to diversity provides a solid foundation for a strong disposition and commitment to the cause of justice. She finds a correlation between social competence (the primary effect of resilience) and high commitment to lead.

Models of Power and Meaning

I don't know if I used the term 'social justice' before 1996. At that time I was studying at the university of North Carolina-Chapel Hill under Drs. Richard Hunter, Frank Brown, Dave Clark, and others who frequently used the language of social justice. While I may not have had the language, I have always understood social justice as a part of my personal experiences and witnessed by my family.

My Grandmother

As a very young child, I observed my grandmother's activism in the local branch of the NAACP. There, in the small town of La Plata, in the state of Maryland, Lillie Mae Butler and others who lived with injustice everyday, literally led the march toward social justice. These women followed in the footsteps of leaders like Ida B. Wells and Mary White Ovington, the women who helped to form the NAACP in 1909. My grandmother was about 10 years old then, I suppose. She would adopt as her role models the likes of Fannie Lou Hamer and Septima Clark. My grandmother was from a family of teachers born in the south. Like Septima Clark, they were told where they could and could not teach, and began working through local branches of the NAACP to eradicate prejudice in the job market.

Grandma, who had a Business certificate from Peabody High School in Petersburg, Virginia, needed work upon the death of my grandfather. He was one of the first minorities in the country, we believe, to have his own shop where he repaired and sold Singer sewing machines. When Grandma couldn't find work in her field, because of segregation, she did what was called *day work*. In other words, she began working in white folks' kitchens. I remember my mother telling me when I was about 8 years old that my grandmother was paid \$8.00 a day. She worked about 3 days a week. My grandmother spent much of the other two workdays in the cause for justice. She believed she had a responsibility to bring about political, economic, and social change. She applied her business knowledge from her education in Petersburg, Virginia to the work of the NAACP.

I was looking through some treasured family artifacts recently. There are things like a book of ration coupons that my mom's parents never finished using after the war, the deed to her parents' house in Baltimore, Maryland in the early 20s, and the minutes that my grandmother took at a 1963 NAACP meeting. The minutes reflected their annual program of work which included 12 things: "1) First class citizenship; 2) establishing bi-racial committees; 3) equal opportunity; 4) better housing; 5) home loan opportunities; 6) integration of public schools; 7) integration of public offices; 8) increasing voter registration; 9) Negro responsibility to self, community, and county; 10) increasing NAACP membership; 11) community improvement; and 12) assist youth activities" (Butler, 1963).

I remember going to these meetings, nearly every one of them, freezing in the winter because it took time to heat this big old community hall with a single wood stove. My grandmother was responsible for lighting the stove before the meeting. While my sisters and I sat, for what seemed an eternity each time the grown folks met, we gained a true appreciation for community service and commitment to justice for all.

My Mother

My mother's involvement in community and social justice emerged from grandmother's influence and was phenomenal. One of the most compelling acts of leadership on her part was her response to a situation that, until that time, had only served to anger 'Colored' people. In Charles County, MD, as in most cities and towns before the Civil Rights act of 1964, Black children and White children attended separate schools and of course rode separate buses. It was in 1957, two years after Rosa Parks decided that she would keep her seat on the bus, that my mom decided it was time to correct the busing situation in LaPlata.

For the few colored children who attended the Catholic school there was no transportation. My older sister, Phyllis, was

one of the first. The 'colored' population at this school with grades 1-12, and approximately 500 students, was less than ten. Even 45 years later, I recall their names, which I believe speaks more to the import of their integrating that school than of my memory's acuity. There were 3 families--the Monks (Betty Jean, Mary Ellen, and Sonny), the Greys (Sharon, Ann, Lynette, and Monica), and my sister, Phyllis Chesley. I would join the ranks two years later as would siblings of the other trailblazers mentioned here.

While the church did not allow segregation in schooling, it had not taken the next step -ensuring that we could get there in the same way White children did. Our parents could not take us by car, as did some of the white kid's parents. Most colored parents only had one car, if they had one at all. Our parents had to work from sun up to sundown to pay the tuition. This church supported school did not own its own buses, and so made bus arrangements with the public schools' transportation system for the children whose parents could not bring them to school. For the colored children, this meant not being able to get to the school because we were not allowed to ride the public schools' 'white only' buses. The public school bus that went to the heart of La Plata, where the Catholic school was, was for white children. The colored children's bus went in a different direction--toward the colored school.

After several appeals to the school system, to no avail, my mother, Mrs. Mable Chesley got up one morning about 5 a.m. and typed a letter to the governor of Maryland. I suppose this was pretty gutsy for the times - the mid-fifties. We're talking about a colored person, and a woman at that, directly appealing to the governor! She received a reply from the governor's office advising her of her rights. My mother, supported by my father and the Grey family, who were also African Americans, filed the case and rode two hours to Baltimore on their court date. My mother said, "It is time," probably in a similar tone to that of Dr. King when he said from his jail cell, "If not now, when?" Until this time, getting my older sister to school took some planning. My dad had to drive more than one hour into Washington DC everyday to work, something he did for 38 years. So my parents found someone who would take Phyllis to school.

I often wondered why Mrs. V. Freeman did it. It surely was not money. I doubt she accepted anything. Why would she give of her time like this, getting up early every morning and going back to get my sister every evening, sometimes dealing with her car breaking down? I remember that car. A big, old black humped back car, perhaps a '48 or '49 Plymouth or something. I'll have to ask my dad, he'll remember, even at 82 years old. I remember the running board on the car was so rusty that it had begun to corrode and crack. Phyllis scraped her leg on this rusty metal so many times, in the same place, that my mom started to worry if the wound would ever heal and if this would cause cancer. Many believed this was a cause of cancer-sores that did not heal well. For now, getting an education was the priority.

Witnessing Victory

On the day the judge ruled in favor of my mother, she knew she would have to continue the fight of working for social justice. Her assertiveness had paid off. No longer could the buses in Charles County MD discriminate (even though the schools still could). Monday morning, Phyllis would be riding the bus with other little children. I now know that Mrs. Freeman made the sacrifice every morning because it was what she could do to help advance social justice. As an active member of the NAACP, alongside my grandmother and a man named Mr. Luther Stuckey, this lady knew that the war against racism would only be won, one battle at a time and with each soldier carrying his or her share of the weight.

Such intentional behaviors are critical to advancing the cause of justice. When I think back on these days, these events, I recall everyone being so serious about all of this. Righting injustice was serious. It was focused. Nothing else got in the way--not women's issues, not differences in religious denomination, not household responsibilities. Mahatma Ghandi's advice to a fellow Hindu leader was, "There will be many turnings along the way. It will be easy to get lost on attractive bypaths that lead nowhere. Resist deflections." Ghandi's words were all about staying the course, being steadfast and resilient. This advice may well have been the mantra for my mother and her contemporaries.

My Role Begins

I joined the NAACP Youth Council in the mid-sixties. Though the Civil Rights Act had been signed in 1964 and the dirty little "Whites Only" sign had come off the bathroom door at a gas station in La Plata, many small towns like this continued to discriminate. The NAACP found itself extremely busy in these days, dealing with issues of non-compliance. I recall a drug store in La Plata. As colored children, we could never sit to the counter when we ordered a milkshake or ice cream cone. We had to order and stand behind the red leather swivel stools as we waited for our food. We would just stand there, spinning the stool with our hands, entranced in its whirlwind, the way a little kid watches a ferris wheel he's yet not allowed to ride.

Our trips to the movie theatre are also memorable, for colored people had to sit upstairs. The NAACP and its youth group decided that the time was right to stop such discrimination. While we were too young to remember the Greensboro, North Carolina sit in of 1960, we read about it and let it inform our action. We organized a boycott and a march on LaPlata to demonstrate our opposition to injustice. I remember the kids in the youth group getting together to

make the signs and banners. I remember the Saturday when we marched. I felt that I was doing something really important. I learned, when I went to school on Monday, that my peers, mostly white, began to regard and respect me as an activist. These were white children coming of age in a world of “Two Nations: Separate, Hostile, and Unequal” (Hacker, 1992).

My senior year *Most Likely* list stated that I would most likely lead protests and become a militant. I was not a militant, nor did I have plans to become one, but I had made an impression. I knew that white people who had never witnessed Blacks' opposition to oppression, even if peaceful, considered any kind of fighting back to be militant. After the march and several boycotts, the right to sit at the lunch counter became ours, and the dream of full citizenship, a bit more fulfilled. I was learning the value of conviction. I was becoming an activist for justice.

My civic role began to impact my influence at school. More often now, I observed my classes holding open discussions about race and equality. We had debates, essay contests, and public speaking events around issues of equality and freedom. My early efforts in the promotion of social justice produced the kinds of awards that looked good on my college application, with one being particularly intriguing. I wrote an essay on the assigned topic, “Citizenship” and won. The sponsors happened to be the Daughters of the American Revolution, who are remembered by many to have taken a very boldly racist position on Marion Anderson's invitation to perform at Constitution Hall in 1939. I did not know this fact then—we were not taught such history. I just remember my mother being very amazed by this honor! Perhaps The Daughters did not know I was a colored girl.

Realizing Resilience

In my nearly all white Catholic school, a bit removed from the real world, I never felt alienated, but as color barriers were being broken down in the community, many white people hoped that feelings of alienation would cause us to reconsider our desire for integration and 'go back to where we came from.' But I had learned to be resilient.

Resilience is that force that overcomes or opposes feelings of alienation. Resilient people are not governed by powerlessness and meaninglessness, the most common expression of alienation. They do not give in to fears, rather they operate on the expectancy that their own behaviors can determine outcomes. They seek to understand their environments and to figure out where they fit and how they can care for that environment (Seeman, 1959). They believe in their own sense of influence over a given situation versus the belief by the non-resilient (or less resilient) that things get better over time, simply as a matter of chance, good luck, or manipulation.

I remembered my grandmother's power and my mother's sense of meaning. I felt my own resilience emerging. Fighting injustice would be “a culturally valued objective” (Middleton, 1963) whose attainment could only be blocked by powerlessness and meaninglessness, neither of which defines me!

My First Administrative Position

After ten years of teaching, which I loved, I became Assistant Principal of a high school. I knew that I had been sent there to be a gatekeeper for Black students. My reputation for being socially conscious and outspoken when necessary preceded me, and that was OK. The school was rural, set apart from the growing cosmopolitan ambiance of the city. This southern city that was beginning to attract industry from all over was in stark contrast to this rural, very traditional town where there were occasional stories about hate group activity. Out there, things were slow to change. Teachers were used to saying, “Oh honey, I've been doing this for 19 years!” Many administrators were equally accustomed to defending them even in their unwillingness to be fair to students. As a result, many black students were left to succeed the best way they could. Expectations for them were not high. Appreciation for their experiences was not a priority. My work in social justice at this juncture would happen through teacher supervision.

Veteran white teachers resented a young black woman pointing out teaching practices that needed improvement. They were particularly offended by my suggestions that they develop a more culturally relevant approach to teaching. Engaging them in race and culture issues was extremely difficult. Many were teaching black children for the first time. This school had been a white school until the late 70s, and here in 1984, some were still adjusting! It was clear that many teachers were determined to not change their attitudes or practices. Many

believed that black children from certain communities would never produce excellence.

Achieving equity was not highly valued among the teachers. Students whose parents received federal assistance and who already had low grades were not encouraged to prepare for the PSAT or SAT. These students were placed in special courses with 'special' names. They were not advised to take Algebra II or a foreign language (neither of which was required for graduation then), which left them deficient when they decided during their senior year that college was in their future. This was an injustice and apparently not an inadvertent one. The faculty held only a few good black students in high regard at this school. The teachers thought that they were a credit to their race.

Of the four administrators in the school during my four years there, two were Black. Attempts to address the issues of inequity were seldom collaborative and spirited. I saw what looked like apathy, and sometimes fear in my Black colleagues, and felt they preferred keeping the peace to working for justice. I later realized that their methods were just different from mine. They would simply maintain a low profile until they had the chance to run a school of their own one day. Often assistant principals have to make such choices. I began to work closely with students. I met with them frequently on a one to one basis just to talk, to establish relationships, to prevent the kind of conference where disciplinary action is in order. My friends and business contacts began to come to the school to tutor students who needed extra help.

Parents, who had felt little connection, began to come to school. In- school and out- of- school suspensions went down, because I refused to do as many as had been done before. This of course was not popular with the teachers who wanted unruly students to be punished, regardless of the circumstances. Somehow, this did not ring of justice to me. Between their dissatisfaction with decreased suspensions and my citing improvements needed in their teaching (which often suggested the need for a more culturally relevant approach), complaints made their way to the area supervisor. I would soon know the repercussion.

Seeking Promotion

A family move led me to interview with nearby school systems. Shortly after a very successful interview, I received a call from the Personnel Director. He called to offer me the position—a principalship at an elementary school. In the same breath, however, he told me that they were so impressed with me, and really wanted me to consider a high school principalship, and he named the high school that had a vacancy. We talked a bit and I expressed some trepidation, feeling that elementary would be a bit easier for my first principalship. He asked me to just think about it. He would be in touch soon. I did not hear back. I called. They stalled. Nothing. I learned from a source, that a particular administrator in my school district had blocked the process—even after the offer to accept a position had been made. The words she passed along were *arrogant* and *injudicious*. This is not unlike the comments made about most strong Black female leaders, as I would later come to know.

I knew that this was the backlash for carrying out my duties as teacher supervisor and evaluator. I asked teachers to be fair, to take time to know their minority students, to give equal access to positions on sports teams and placements in 'gifted' classes. I had not punished enough black males who lost their cool after a teacher embarrassed them in the classroom. I had not suspended them from school. For this, I was being punished. It hurt at first.

I had desperately wanted this principalship. I wanted to lead a school where all

children would have the opportunity to soar. I knew though what I was dealing with and that it would probably follow me from one district to another. Sure there were other minority administrators but some of us had to be dealt with –just as a reminder! I thought about my grandmother and my mother and knew that my energies had to remain positive. I could go to court to fight this or I could focus my sights on higher achievement and widening my circle of influence. I chose the latter.

I realized that sacrifice is essential to change and progress, and that many times it is a personal sacrifice. Yes, it was alright, especially when I recall speaking up to put an end to this school's homecoming tradition of holding a Slave Auction. In this event, the girls would buy football players and use them to carry their books, or do whatever tasks they wished throughout the school day. Most of the athletes were Black and the girls buying them were White, and the rest of the story has already been written.

The Real Test of Resilience

My next assistant principalship was at an other high school. I felt was sent to take care of those for whom the system did not work. I would try to represent the system in a more positive light. Black parent organizations had called for a more socially just education. Real desegregation did not happen until 1995 with the merger of the city and the county systems. The time and climate for change seemed never to be right for some, so by 1995, the county commissioners led by Mr. Bill Bell, made the decision for the two districts. Without their leadership, the two school boards may never have come to consensus!

After moving into my office, which was located in the administrative suite of this new school, I was approached one morning by the principal. He walked up to where I was doing hall duty and moving students along to their 1st period classes. He said, "You know, I'm going to have you move down here, so you'll be with the freshmen." I was the 'freshman class administrator.' I had taught freshmen for several years and loved that age group. So working primarily with this group was fine. He proceeded to tell me that this had always been in the plan, even before I arrived. (Uh, huh). I said, "Well Dr. B., where will my office be located? I knew there were no available spaces. This school was filled to the gills. He said that he would probably have the classroom on the corner divided into 2 or 3 offices. Well that seemed alright.

I did not voice any dissent. Nothing happened for two weeks, nor did I ask any questions about the move, until Dr. B. came to my office with the most demeaning and dehumanizing decision that he could have mustered at the time. He said, "I'm going to have the men take the sink out of that custodial closet down the hall and get some carpet in there, and fix that up so you can move down there in the next day or so." The rage welled up inside of me. I began to feel hatred and rebellion, and the need to 'go off on him.' But a little voice down inside of me said, "Stay calm, count to ten, always maintain pride and dignity." This is the response my mother and grandmother would have approved.

I asked him a series of questions to allow myself time to get calm. I asked, "Why a closet, why not the classroom renovation? I asked how he would feel if this was done to him? I said, "I suppose you know what this looks like!" I finally said, "Dr. B., I am not going down there." As his face turned a lighter shade of red, he walked away with defiance and guilt, and I sat there for a few moments, feeling sorry for myself, asking myself if I had come this far in life, trying to look out for others, only to be treated this way. In considering how to move forward, I knew that racial tension in the Durham schools was so high, and ignorance about other cultures so pervasive that telling my story was just going to be one more piece in a fairly ugly puzzle.

Several friends told me to report him. I feared that if I handled this in my usual assertive manner, I would lose, not because he was right but because he was connected in this racist environment. The other Black assistant principal had already been moved out of his front office prior to my coming to the school. His office was on the ground floor near the cafeteria. He did not protest it because he was just biding his time until retirement. My move would leave the two White administrators in the office suite at the front of this shiny new building. Ah, impressions!

This incident caused me to consider what injustice can do to people emotionally, intellectually, and even physically. I understood for a few moments the kind of rage that is born of oppression and bigotry, the kind that robs one of self-esteem and dignity, and often leads to destructive behavior. I made a very conscious decision to not fight it in the way most would expect. No, I had not become weak. Rather, with each battle, we learn better how to choose our strategies. A good offense as my best defense would work, I thought.

My decision was to make a plan that not only would respond to the incident in a constructive way, but would have greater impact. I would let this injustice inspire me to new endeavors for myself and those I serve. I would let this inform my behavior as a leader in my next position. The feelings that resulted from exclusion and marginalization would remain with me to guide my actions with others. No school administrator, nor teacher, nor teacher's assistant or secretary should have been subjected to such treatment anywhere-- and this was a new 25 million dollar school building with no room in the inn.

Dr. B. had the school custodian take the nameplate off of my door in my front office location, and screw it into the custodial closet door where the name "Custodian" had been. The buzz started. Teachers and students alike were asking--no, bombarding me with questions. Despite my newly determined strength and plan of action, it did hurt. I felt embarrassment, inferiority, and pain. I felt like an outsider, very alienated, different from the other administrators. I felt I would lose the respect of the very people I had to supervise and mentor. I was sure that this was in the plan. I had all of these bad feelings, and I had done nothing wrong. This is how injustice feels. Black students were angry and empathetic. White students were sympathetic or indifferent. The word got to parents. I got calls and had to try and explain this injustice.

When the used carpet came in from an old school that had just closed down, and the sink had been ripped from the wall, I was told I needed to move down there. I still did not. I figured, if he were serious, he would have the men move my things. I certainly was not going to ask them to do it. That is not the kind of fool I am. He did. They moved my items, as I discovered one morning, leaving behind all of the furniture (for this new full size office furniture would not fit in a janitorial closet turned Assistant Principal's office). I proceeded down the hall with conjured up dignity to retrieve those things I needed to work on and walked back up to the front office to do my work. I did not need to see my name on the door. I continued to do this for 2 weeks as I thought of my next move. I endured the embarrassment of people seeing me in the closet office at times during the day when it was not feasible to go back and forth between offices. The experience became a prayer; it was a time for reflection, for increasing humility and introspection. I learned to get quiet and just listen to my heart and soul. I learned more about finding purpose. I gained an extra measure of resilience.

After two weeks of playing the game, allowing the custodial closet to be my office of record, and working up front where I belonged, I decided the game of charades ends at some point. One day, very impulsively, I jumped out of my chair, rolled it down the hall, filled it with my things, one trip, another trip, and

nine more trips, bringing them back to the office up front. Something just said, "It is time!"

I didn't say a word to anyone. I passed by Dr. B. in the hallway as I made the 6th trip. He said nothing. I borrowed a screwdriver from the custodian and took my nameplate off of the closet door and put it back where it belonged. I began to appoint my office the way I liked while deciding that I would stay until I chose to go somewhere else. I quietly applied for a Principalship. My principal was very upset that I had not told him about my application. The words in my response to him were all about fairness and respect. I became the principal of an elementary school where my work for ensuring justice would continue.

A Climate of Injustice

Gordon (1995) explains resilience as the ability to thrive, mature, and increase in competence in the face of adverse circumstances and says that the adverse circumstances may be chronic and consistent or severe and infrequent. The incident I endured spoke of the sick racial climate throughout the district during those years, a condition that was certainly chronic and consistent.

At this school people of color, custodians, and cafeteria workers were not treated as first class citizens. The suspension rate among Black males reached 60%! The dropout rate was high, and the token Black male teacher upon my arrival was a coach who taught Physical Education. Monday afternoon administrative meetings seemed dedicated to the topic, "How to get more Black students out of school." I would not participate in the scheming. I was admonished more than once for not suspending more students. I was told that we were a team and that we needed this consistency or it would cause problems for the teachers and students.

I love teams, especially when they play the game fairly. I was there to help kids make better decisions, to teach them a better way to react to anger, and respond to injustice. I was there to keep them coming to school, whatever it took. My job was to provide as much encouragement and assistance as possible to make graduation a reality. Dropout really concerns me. I do not believe that children want to leave school for the streets, but will do so when they perceive an environment of uncaring adults. I wanted our administrative team to focus on reasons for the resistance and rebellion seen in Black youths. Several studies (Taylor, 1970; Kiernan & Daniels, 1967; Hacker, 1992) on student alienation suggest that we consider the effects of forced school choice and Eurocentric focus on Black student alienation. I wanted our team to be more concerned with culture and society and pay more attention to issues of identity, community, and economics.

In her studies on race, class, and power in schools, Lipman (1998) found that the influence of the principal was critical in reculturing a school and trying to move them to a more responsible place on the spectrum of social justice. Lipman's work cites suspension rates for Black males that look much like those I mentioned earlier. The restructuring efforts that she helped to implement in the participating schools were designed to reduce these suspensions, which would reduce missed work, school failure, and dropout. Lipman reports that when suspensions dropped, teachers sought yet other ways to punish these students, primarily African American males. In one district where Black student made up 64% of the population, they constituted 83% of the suspensions.

At the school where I was serving as AP, Black students made up 30% of the population but nearly 60% of the suspensions. When these students returned to class many would withdraw; they were demoralized, ashamed, and disengaged.

They did not see justice working for them. Teachers unabashedly shared their predictions that these kids would not go anywhere in life. After repeated undeserved suspensions, I observed some of these young Black men becoming angry, and why not? I recall the words of Dr. Martin Luther King before he set out for a particular boycott. He declared that patience at some point must yield to protest. He said, "There comes a time when people get tired of being trampled over by the iron feet of oppression." Our students though, did not know how to protest, nor were they allowed to do so.

Being the Role Model

Besides my personal experience here with injustice, I had taken it upon myself to improve the school climate for students of color. I continued to push for hiring more Black teachers and reducing the number of Black male suspensions. This effort was consistently met with excuses and procrastination and each reminder only served to increase the principal's obstinacy. Once more, I would work for justice within the place and space I had found myself—this time working under a principal who had no intention of creating a climate of equity. (The fact that two Black administrators worked there was no indication of his desire to provide equity. We were both sent there by the superintendent.)

I started Tuesday afternoon lunch chats with students, giving them a safe place to express their feelings about the school climate, about teacher attitudes toward them, and their perceived opportunities for success. On occasion, the time was given to career preparation talks. As assistant principal, I needed to know how the students felt about their school and their achievement. Spending the lunch period with my students allowed me the opportunity to teach appropriate strategies for dealing with prejudice. Ninety percent of the students who came to the lunch talks were African American. Certain teachers were curious. The principal was uneasy. African American parents were appreciative and supportive. My work was simply that of social justice---taking moral action. My goal was to increase the competence of these young people.

Across the country, African American students fail to score well on the SAT. The situation was no different during the early 90s when I served as Assistant Principal. One observation was that only a few Black students could afford to take a test preparation course. I called on my church member to offer test prep sessions after school. Parents helped me to organize the classes. We sold pizza and soft drinks. The students learned new techniques in test taking and had fun doing it! I smiled when students came to let me know they had scored well, and that they felt more confident in taking the test after having learned the techniques.

I won funding from the Geraldine Dodge Foundation to start a mentoring organization for African American high school boys, which I called *Black Men Tomorrow's Teachers*. Through this project, I was able to reach young Black males in a positive, supportive manner, whether they ultimately became teachers or not. My protégés visited college campuses, helped younger children with schoolwork or introducing them to new things like tennis and Japanese food, and spent weekly time with male mentors who were Black and dedicated to the profession of education. The program set a new standard for the Dodge Foundation's *Celebration of Education Grant Program*. The Foundation's marketing materials endorsed my initiative as a model for replication.

As the city and county labored toward better relations in support of a merged, integrated school system, the County Human Relations Department and area churches and synagogues sponsored a series of town meetings designed to open discussions and heal hurts. I was asked to help plan these meetings and to serve as moderator.

My role in justice was expanding. I would have to continue on this path of making a difference. I gleaned an almost inexplicable satisfaction from seeing others grow in their confidence to handle life's hurdles. I was doing the work of my grandmother and my mother. Now and then, I would reassess the principal's decision to 'put me in the closet,' each time more convinced that this was the narrow-minded attempt to drive me away. My role at that school had become anything but what he had envisioned and charted out in his head. Something had to be done to keep me in check, so moving me where I would be out of sight, out of mind seemed the only option.

A Role Model in Higher Education

Fighting for justice is about commitment. It never stops. Sometimes it's for us, sometimes for others. Regardless, I believe that it is a cumulative process; every battle gets us closer to winning the war. We can't ignore injustice and think it will just right itself one day. It never works that way. We have to take action. We must be intentional. The students at the high school came to understand a bit more about justice. They also learned that battles are often fought in ways that are sometimes quiet and unobtrusive, ways that move you to an even more effective position, where your impact is felt in an even greater way.

I now teach those who will be principals of our schools. I have the greatest opportunity possible to impact the minds and hearts of these future school leaders. I teach the graduate course titled "The Principalship," and on the first day of class I ask each of them, "Why are you here?" I ask, "What do you expect to change in this business of education?" And again, I ask, "But why you, what makes you suited for this position that requires so much?" While there are no right and wrong answers to these questions, I am looking to see what kind of work I will have to do with them in the realm of justice. What is their appreciation for social justice? What experiences have they had of being treated unfairly? What did they do with the experience?

Most of my students are White females, often disturbed by my candor, my asking them to think about white privilege. I force them to consider the things they take for granted—the same things that are not assumed or automatic for people of color. I ask them to think about leading a school in the poorest section of town, where most of the families are Black and or Latino and test scores are woefully low. I see the unrest in their body language and hear it in their words when all of this gets to be too much for them. Now and then I hear the same thing I heard from my very privileged white students at a nearby private university a few years ago, "Oh, I'm never going to teach in that kind of school." To that I tell them that if they leave feeling unprepared to teach in "that kind of district" then they should consider themselves less than prepared to lead any school! An excellent administrator is an excellent administrator anywhere. Of course, some settle for just being good.

Leading for Social Justice

My work in promoting justice goes on, in the lessons I teach, the guardianship I continue to provide to students of color, and my daily collaborations with colleagues. I ask myself from time to time, "What have you learned from these experiences of injustice?" After a few moments of reflection, the answer is clear.

I have learned that leadership for social justice is all about resilience, about pressing on in the face of obstacles, about never feeling powerless, and remaining ever aware of the meaning behind the struggle. I know now, only after years of observing such resilient people, that these leaders are not the kind of leaders who constantly, if ever, receive public attention. They do not get the

medals or pages in the history books, but are no less honorable or significant for their endeavors.

I've learned that leadership for justice is groomed and good leaders in this arena look for someone to carry on the work in a new place and time. My grandmother and my mother provided that necessary stimulation for me as a child, to chart my own path as a leader for justice. They modeled the characteristics and work ethic I would need to adopt in future years. They modeled tenacity and perseverance, as they sang, "We shall not be moved." I can recall though, that as a child, I was considered too bold, too daring, a bit 'bull headed' as my dad would say. Often, in the course of growing and trying new things, I would not accept a "No!" I believe now, that amidst the constant admonishments to "slow down," I was encouraged to be a leader.

I have learned that a woman in leadership must possess an intricate package of talents and skills for her own survival and the success of those she leads. She must be ready to address a wider audience than simply working within a specific domain. (In my mother's case the 'wider audience' was appealing to the Governor's Office.) She must be willing to confront those in authority and always feel equal to those in positions of more authority. She believes in her own thoughts; she sees her insight and vision as meaningful and powerful and as good or better than what currently exists. She does not surrender easily, cognizant of the fallout that can occur and willing to take that chance. She knows that to assume a lesser position leaves her vulnerable to another who is more assertive. Women who lead for justice are moved by an internal system of morality. We know the value of moving beyond our safety zones. We know that in doing so, we may not get that for which we strove, but would ultimately gain something greater—a better opportunity to lead or a better opportunity for the next person. We are competitive people. We enjoy positions of control but for the right reasons—to attain goals that are humanitarian and socially just.

Women in leadership for justice don't always work within the confines of organizations, workplaces, or other specific domains. Often we invent our own environments for change, especially in the latter years of our professional careers. We learn that it is necessary to take time out to study new venues for effecting change. We share our stories more readily than when we were, say, twenty-five years old. We now know that telling our stories is powerful and helps others to discern meaning in their own lives.

There are things I dreamed of doing when I was a child and numerous things I have accomplished in my adulthood. Nothing among these however is as great as the difference that I believe I have made by taking a stand when equality was in question or justice denied. I may not have moved mountains or shattered the earth by anything to which I put my hands, head, or heart. I have however, attempted to seize a few moments where I could change the path or chart a new one. I pray that my son and daughter, in their own place and time, will do the same.

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