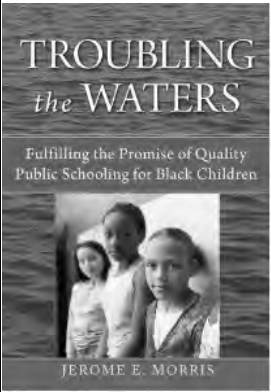


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Troubling the Waters: Fulfilling the Promise of Quality Public Schooling for Black Children		
Author:	Jerome E. Morris (2009)	
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v + 201pp.	978-0-8077-5015-5	\$27.95 U.S paperback; \$64.00 U.S. cloth



The US Supreme Court’s 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision has been an historical marker that has fostered disappointment, celebration, and enduring debates regarding fulfilling the promise of a quality education for Black students. Morris’ *Troubling the Waters: Fulfilling the Promise of Quality Public Schooling for Black Children* arrives as a welcome addition to the literature that takes to task the inherent assumptions about all the good the Brown decision did for Black children and de jure segregated schooling.

Conventional rhetoric of segregated schooling has carried deficit-oriented themes for Blacks and their schools: (a) very little of educational value existed; (b) the educational quality was deficient; and (c) students’ identities were psychologically maligned. Morris positions his text in opposition to conventional recounts of Blacks’ quests for educational equity. In eight chapters divided into three parts, *Troubling the Waters* advances research heretofore missing in scholarly renderings of US desegregation literature. The settings for Morris’ work were St. Louis, Missouri and Atlanta, Georgia, two cities known for their binary racial milieu: Black and White. Beginning in 1994 in St. Louis and 1999 in Atlanta, Morris uses over three years of intensive ethnographic data to provide a multilayered treatise of Black communities’ choices, advocacy, resilience, and challenges towards providing quality public schooling for their children.

The first of two chapters in Part I: Visions of the City provides an account of the historical legacy and contestations of Blacks’ perceptions of integrated schools. Morris chronicles and frames the premise of Blacks’ perceptions of schooling as not one-dimensional, as often reported. He argues that not all Black people ascribed to the notion of integrated schooling as

paramount to providing their children with a good education. Morris adeptly lays out a chronology of shifting views of Black education and the maintenance of White supremacy in the midst of legal advocacy to mandate quality education. Providing this history helps situate the current status of Black educational issues.

For chapter two, Morris segues to the larger historical context of the intersecting roles of race, economics, and social consequences in shaping the schools and communities featured in the study. Morris further discusses policies, practices, and advocacy reflected in the efforts of Blacks and Whites regarding schooling. Morris surveys a considerable amount of history illuminating complexities without over simplifying the intricacies of Black (and White) efforts regarding educational issues viewed through the St. Louis and Atlanta communities.

Part II: Beyond Central Cities: In Search of *Brown's* Second Promise presents a rationale and view of the other academic choices some Black parents made for their children's education other than sending them to the community's all Black schools. Chapter three focuses on charter and magnet schools and the initial consequences of the St. Louis desegregation plan. In chapter four, Morris asks the question of whether Black students in White schools functioned as ambassadors or sacrificial lambs in advancing the benefits of integrated schooling. The Black student experience in White schools was not always affirming yet, this did not negate the exercised agency and the resource benefit that parents assumed was possible by attending a predominantly White school.

Two all Black elementary schools are the primary foci of the four chapters in Part III: Quality Schooling in the New Black Metropolis: Possibilities and Dilemmas. Morris' fifth chapter makes an important invitation to researchers and policy makers to consider what works in high achieving Black schools. While acknowledging tensions between validating the legal precedence for supporting integrated schools, Morris asserts the equal value of noting what makes Black schools successful to inform policy and practice.

Chapter six details the significance of generational wisdom and care presented through a St. Louis community member, Mr. Wooden, as a witness to the changes, roots, and growth of the community. Chapter seven amplifies the voices of Black educators from history and from his study whose perspectives are often minimized or absent in issues of educational reform.

In chapter eight, Morris further explicates the framework of *communally bonded schools* to support quality educational practices. In juxtaposition to the marginalization that intentionally and unintentionally occurred in the predominantly White schools in which Black children attended, Morris relates an asset-based interpretation of the characteristics of successful racially homogenous Black schools. Among the characteristics were: (a) generational and cultural bonding, (b) school outreach to families, (c) the presence of capable Black teachers, (d) principles as cultural bridges and academic leaders, and (e) schools as pillars in the community. These characteristics fostered the academic and social success of students, fortified the relationship among schools, learning, and families, and positively supported the well being of the surrounding community.

Morris offers well documented empirically solid information that links findings to historical and contemporary literature and poses important questions regarding the consequences of educational policy. The level of detail was at times laborious but ultimately necessary for Morris to substantiate his argument and to fulfill his articulated purposes—each potentially its own book. Additionally, Morris invokes the cultural use of metaphor to shape the readers'

consciousness regarding Black education. The flow and focus of the narrative would have been improved if Morris' use of a consistent metaphor (i.e., troubling the waters) had been more explicitly interwoven throughout the text.

Those engaged with teaching linguistically marginalized children will recognize the challenges Blacks experienced in the racially predominantly White desegregated schools: (a) school structures that limit or prevent parents from participating directly in the life of the school; (b) disparate expectations for academic success between teachers (lower expectations) and parents (higher expectations); (c) "cultural disregard;" (d) being labeled as deficient; and (e) one-way cultural exchanges that did little reciprocally to inform the predominant White norms.

The persistent challenges brought to mind the connections between racism and linguistic—discrimination based on language. For example, the first successful legal challenge to school segregation, *Robert Alvarez v. Lemon Grove School District* precedes *Brown* by 23 years and involved a California community's Anglo school board building a separate (Americanization) school for the children of Mexican decent (despite the reality that most of the children in question were born in the US and some did not speak Spanish). Anglo community members expressed concern that the Mexican students were English deficient thereby compromising the faster learning pace of the Anglo students. Although this case did not have *Brown*'s legal reach, it illustrates the enduring pursuit for educational quality and the persistence of racism that has pervaded US educational history.

Furthermore, applying Morris' characteristics of *communally bonded schools* to other examples of successful desirable circumstances for culturally and linguistically rich communities is not difficult. The work of educator Leonard Covello in East Harlem, NY in the 1900s with linguistically and ethnically diverse immigrants harkens to the same community connections that proved successful in Morris' all Black schools. A challenging curriculum that reflected the students' experiences, strong community connections, and a tireless effort to enhance the educational experiences of all the students were also hallmarks of Covello's schooling success.

Morris' text speaks to the importance of cultivating a cross-cultural understanding of historical and contemporary movements for educational equity. Such explorations can build an alliance of understanding of the common acts of resistance and agency that marginalized groups have exercised on behalf of maximizing the promise of a fulfilled democracy through education. Therefore, educators and policy makers concerned with a racially and/or linguistically just education will find this text a useful reference.

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