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Those Who Left, Those Who Stayed: Exploring the Educational Opportunities of High-Achieving Black and Latina/o Students at Magnet and Nonmagnet Los Angeles High Schools (2001-2002)

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Those Who Left, Those Who Stayed: Exploring the Educational Opportunities of High-Achieving Black and Latina/o Students at Magnet and Nonmagnet Los Angeles High Schools (2001–2002)

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Being that educational disparities, manifested through socioeconomic instability, were a major contributing factor to the Los Angeles riots, it is important to examine how public high schools are now shaping the postsecondary opportunities of underrepresented students. Using opportunity-to-learn (OTL) and bounded rationality as frames, this article examines the college preparatory experiences of Black and Latina/o students at a magnet and standard

urban high school, specifically focusing on the experiences of high achievers. Findings indicate that students at the two schools had equally high college aspirations, but experienced very different college preparatory environments. Magnet students had access to more college-going resources and greater opportunities to learn, manifested directly from opportunities offered at their school and indirectly from the collective college-going culture shaped by the school, peers, and parents. Bounded rationality allowed students at the under-resourced urban school to perceive their school's resources positively and stay motivated, but limited their efforts to pursue additional resources to enhance their opportunity-to-learn.

The 1992 Los Angeles riots have been portrayed as a turbulent time in U.S. history, during which frustration with economic hardship, coupled with complex race relations, was expressed in violence and civil action. In the aftermath, much of the city's rebuilding efforts focused on economic revitalization, cross-cultural relations, and local business development (Loyola Marymount University Special Collection n.d.; Monroe 1992; Spencer and Ong 2004). Aside from increased school-safety measures, direct city and state funding for K–12 and higher education addressing the sociopolitical educational context of the riots have largely been overlooked even though a college education has long been viewed as a stepping stone to economic mobility (Lareau 2000; McDonough 1997) in American society.

Although strides have been made since the riots, many of the issues continue to remain a work-in-progress, in particular economic development and cross-cultural relations. In urban education, issues such as school safety and violence (Noguera 1996), adequate school facilities (*Williams v. California* 2001), and the need for improved cross-cultural development (Los Angeles Human Relations Commission 2007) continue to be areas of concern for policymakers, school districts, parents, and students. Yet students continue to prepare to access higher education in this postriots environment, with some schools and students being more successful than others. This article sheds light on the college access climate in Los Angeles since the riots by providing an historical overview of access trends before and since 1992, followed by a glimpse into the lives of students at two distinct high schools who were young elementary students during the riots, and have had to navigate college preparatory pathways in the years following.

Historical Background

Pre-riot College Access Climate: 1980's–1992

In the 1980's, urban school districts across the country saw unprecedented demographic changes. Black families had more mobility and flexibility in their

housing choices, and many planted roots in areas previously restricted to only White families. Areas in Los Angeles that once had race restrictive covenants, such as Inglewood and Ladera Heights, saw a large influx of Black families, subsequently diversifying schools in the area. With the ban on Asian immigration lifted in 1965 and federal Amnesty laws enacted in 1982 (Takaki 1989) legalizing the status of many undocumented residents, the Asian and Latina/o population grew and established a permanent base in Los Angeles. Concurrent with the rise and growth of these groups, specifically with the implementation of *Crawford v. Board of Education of the City of Los Angeles* (now known as the Los Angeles Unified School District; 1976, 1980, 1982) reforms, voluntary school integration was institutionalized at the district level. Due in part to political pressure, and as a result of the *Crawford* rulings, new magnet schools were established in areas that served predominately Black and Latina/o student bodies, including King–Drew Medical Magnet High School, Bravo Medical Magnet High School, and Hamilton Humanities Magnet High School. The implicit assumptions with these new magnet programs were to (a) increase access to quality college preparatory programs for local Black and Latina/o students by offering a viable alternative to being bussed cross-town for the same educational opportunities in upper class neighborhoods, and (b) integrate racially homogenous schools by attracting White families to schools in minority neighborhoods and vice versa.

Ten years after the final *Crawford* ruling and on the eve of the LA riots, schools remained segregated within LAUSD. Although *de jure* segregation was eliminated and the district, as a whole, became more diversified by race, ethnicity, and country of origin, *de facto* inter- and intra-school segregation persisted. Despite voluntary desegregation through magnet and permit with transportation (PWT) programs (which provide free transportation for qualified students who participate in school choice as a means of desegregation), schools in the San Fernando Valley and East Los Angeles remained overwhelmingly Latina/o, and the Crenshaw area predominately Black. White and Asian American students were concentrated in the Westside and West Valley. Within schools, *de facto* intra-school segregation, especially manifested in tracking and access to college preparatory courses, continued to be a challenge for Black and Latina/o students and continues to be a major issue today (Oakes 1985; Orfield 1988; Solorzano and Ornelas 2004).

Within the higher education context, the 1980's and early 1990's were a time of growth and increased access to college for urban students of color. Higher education institutions actively exercised affirmative action in admissions, and at the University of California (UC) system, the K–12 school/university partnerships, and outreach work started in response to civil rights legislation in 1965 were beginning to see the fruits of their labor. The UC system saw steady increases in Asian American, Black, and Latina/o representation, with the proportion of underrepresented minority freshman students doubling, from 10% to 19.4% (UC Office of the President 2003).

Post-Riots College Access Climate: 1993–Present

The LA riots came at a time when ethnic and racial tensions were heightened in many sectors across the city, including education. A fervent anti-immigration campaign was underway in the state, culminating with the passage of California Proposition 187 in 1994, which effectively eliminated bilingual education in the state. After nearly two decades of voluntary school desegregation, teachers and parents, especially in affluent and White areas, advocated for charter schools. Nationally, charter schools gained momentum because they would allow students to attend schools in their own neighborhood and provide more freedom in curriculum and administration than traditional schools. In response to mounting political pressure and with a major charter school proponent on the school board, charter schools were sponsored at a feverish pace in LAUSD. In the last 8 years (from 1999 to 2007), there has been a tremendous rise in charter schools that serve low-income, Black, and Latina/o students. Today, LAUSD sponsors 104 charter schools. In addition, there was also a push for school vouchers, which received widespread support from parents who wanted an alternative to their local underperforming schools.

Two major reforms have also changed the landscape of college preparation. At the federal level, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (107th Congress) was passed in 2001 to improve educational outcomes for all children in the next 25 years through the implementation of a multitiered accountability system targeting administrators, teachers, and students. Two key pieces of NCLB legislation included mandating (a) supplemental services, such as tutoring, and (b) public school choice to those who attend a Program Improvement (PI) school (i.e., a low-performing school). In LAUSD, where more than one-third of its schools have been identified as PI, tutoring and after-school educational programs have proliferated. On the other hand, advocacy groups, such as the Alliance for School Choice, point to the fact that school choice programs have been less utilized, with only .2% of eligible students participating in the program (Alliance for School Choice 2006). Most recently, parents along with the Coalition for Urban Renewal and Alliance for School Choice filed an administrative action with the state Department of Education (2006) against LAUSD alleging that the district has provided inadequate information and opportunities to transfer.

At the state level in 2000, parents and students tired of inadequate resources and the inability of school boards to meet their demands sued the state of California in *Williams v. California* (2000) for access to equitable school resources, including instructional materials, qualified teachers, and school facilities. In 2004, the state settled the case and has begun to provide money for more textbooks, toilets, chairs, and qualified teachers. Although the quest for adequate educational resources is far from over, small steps have been taken to address these inequities.

Postriots, public higher education has stalled in its quest to provide equitable access to college with the move from race-conscious to race-neutral admissions. Most

notably, the passage and implementation of California Proposition 209 (1996), which eliminated the use of affirmative action in public higher education, has crippled the state's public institutions from using race as a factor in admissions. Even though, in 2002, the Supreme Court held in *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003) and *Gratz v. Bollinger* (2003) that diversity is a compelling state interest and narrowly tailored affirmative action in higher education is permissible, Proposition 209 superseded the Supreme Court rulings and banned affirmative action in California public college admissions. In ten years, this policy has had a debilitating effect on access to college for Black and Latina/o students. In 2006, UCLA posted a 30-year low and had only 96 (roughly 2%) African Americans in its freshman class of 4,852, which is the smallest percentage of Black students since 1973 (Watford and Comeaux 2006).

Despite this bleak college access climate, a promising piece of policy has emerged with the passage of California House Bill AB 540 (2001). Following the passage of a similar bill, Texas Bill 1403 (2001), AB 540 provides in-state tuition for California residents who: (a) attended at least 3 years of high school in the state, (b) graduated from a California high school or received an equivalent examination, such as a GED or CA HS Proficiency, and (c) file an affidavit stating they have or will (when eligible to) file for legal status, for those students without immigration status. Although undocumented students are not eligible for state or federal aid, this policy then provides undocumented students who apply to, and are accepted to, a public college in California a greater possibility to attend.

Theoretical Framework

An opportunity-to-learn (OTL) framework guides this study, and highlights contextual factors that may effect student achievement, their "opportunity to learn," within and between schools. An OTL framework is commonly used in K-12 policy research to determine equity in public schooling. Specifically, OTL is used to empirically connect context (such as teaching pedagogy and tracking) with learning outcomes to assess educational inequality within and between schools, among different states, and between different nations (Guiton and Oakes 1995; Wang 1998). In examining college access, OTL is helpful in recognizing the importance of context to understand the ways in which college preparation occurs across different high schools.

Additionally, a contextual factor that is often undervalued in studies that examine college access is students' own understanding of college preparation, especially their conceptions of what it means to be "college ready." Even less is known about if and how students' personal views of college preparedness vary across schools types, and how this then affects their access to college. Thus, in addition to evaluating urban students' opportunity for college preparatory information and access using an OTL framework, this article examines students' bounded rationality.

Bourdieu's (1977) notion of bounded rationality is the reasonable deduction of students' own opportunities, based on their lived experience. In this conceptualization, he sheds light on the importance of an individual's sociohistorical context in making decisions. For example, it is often noted that middle class students are more likely to attend college. However, a particular family of middle class students forgo the college route because their family came into middle class status by running a successful construction company—and do not feel the need to go to college to be financially stable. On the surface, it may seem that students have access to plenty of college preparatory resources and that their decision is not rational. However, probing students lived experience and once taking into account their unique financial pathway to the middle class, their decision to not attend college is better understood. Simply put, bounded rationality helps to explain how students' experiences shape their decisions, and how this knowledge influences their assessments of their current school environments and decisions regarding their educational futures. In this study, we explore how the bounded rationality of students at two LAUSD high schools (one magnet and one nonmagnet) may contribute to the achievement–access gap, in which urban students may be academically successful in their high schools but may face constraints when trying to access information about college. We focus on college preparatory school resources and opportunities as the context to better understand students' bounded rationality at the two different school types and then in the larger college access context. The following questions guide our study:

- What types of college preparatory opportunities are available to students at two different school types (magnet vs. non-magnet)?
- Using Bourdieu's (1977) notion of bounded rationality, how are students' college pathways mediated by differential college preparatory opportunities?
- How do students negotiate access to college preparatory resources postriots? What are the implications?

Methodology

Site Descriptions

This study included two public school sites: Montgomery and Carleton High Schools (pseudonyms). The demographic information on each high school is detailed in Table 1. Carleton High School is a medical magnet, and is also located in an urban, low income neighborhood. In 2001–2002, the majority (about 73%) of the 1644 students at Carleton were African American, 24% were Latina/o, and the remaining 3% were Asian American, White, American Indian, and Pacific Islander. Carleton reports consistently high graduation rates, with 96% of Carleton students graduating from high school in 2001–2002. All 276 Carelton graduates

Table 1. High School Demographics, 2001–2002

	<i>Carleton</i>	<i>Montgomery</i>
Type	Magnet	Nonmagnet
Enrollment	1644	1495
African American	73%	41%
Latina/o	24%	58%
Female	71%	51%
Graduation rate	96%	90%
UC/CSU eligibility rate	100%	8%
Student/teacher ratio	20:1	21:1
Student/counselor ratio	411:1	500:1
Counselors	5	3
College counselors	1	0
Students receiving free/reduced lunch	32%	31%

Note. UC = University of California. CSU = California State University.

in 2001–2002 had fulfilled the requirements to attend institutions with the UC and California State University (CSU) systems. Thirty-two percent of Carleton students were eligible for the federal free lunch program.

Montgomery is located in an urban, low income community. In 2001–2002, its student body included 1495 students: 58% Latinas/os and 41% African Americans. Although much like Carleton, Montgomery had a high graduation rate of 90%, only 23% of these students were eligible to attend an institution within the UC or the CSU systems in 2000–2001, and the eligibility rate dropped to 8% in 2001–2002. Also similar to Carleton High, 31% of Montgomery's students were eligible for the federal free and reduced lunch program.

Participant Descriptions

Purposeful sampling was used to select the 34 participants in this study of high academic achievers (Bogdan and Biklan 2003). Demographics on the student participants can be found in Table 2. Participants were identified and selected based on their grade point average (3.0 or above) and enrollment in a college preparatory curriculum. The students in this sample had a mean GPA of 3.56, with 7 participants reporting perfect 4.0 averages. Twenty-five of the 34 students aspired to complete degrees beyond the bachelor's, two students expressed interest in going to law school, seven aspired to attain master's degrees, seven doctorates, and nine medical or dental degrees.

Fourteen of the students were enrolled at Carleton, and all were African American females. Of the 20 Montgomery students, 9 were African American and 11 were Latina/o. Of the 13 females in the sample from Montgomery, 5 were Black

Table 2. Student Participant Demographics, 2001–2002

	<i>Carleton</i>	<i>Montgomery</i>	<i>Total</i>
Participants	14	20	34
Male	0	7	7
Female	14	13	27
African American	14	9	23
Latina/o	0	11	11
Mean GPA	3.7	3.47	3.56
Anticipate taking 3 to 7 AP classes	50%	85%	71%
Anticipate taking 8 (or more) AP classes	43%	10%	24%
Aspire to graduate or professional degree(s)	79%	70%	74%
Had college educated mother	50%	53%	52%
Had college educated father	69%	39%	52%
Mean parental income (per year)*	7.75	6.44	6.97

Note. GPA = grade point average. AP = advanced placement.

*6 = \$25–29,999; 7 = \$30–39,999; 8 = \$40–49,999.

and 8 were Latina. The remaining 7 students from Montgomery were males, 3 Latino and 4 African American.

There was great diversity between students in terms of family background. Although the mean yearly income for all students was \$30–39,000, students reported a wide range of family income, from \$10–19,000 to \$100–149,000 per year. Approximately half of the students (16) noted that their fathers were college educated, and virtually the same number (17) had college-educated mothers.

Procedures

The data for this study was collected as part of a broader research project established to examine the low graduation and college-going rates of historically underrepresented students of color. The CHOICES Project utilized a multimethod approach to explore the academic experiences, college access, and educational support systems of Black and Latina/o juniors and seniors. High schools were invited to participate in this study as a result of their relatively high graduation rates for African American and Latina/o students.

From September 2001 until June 2002, data was collected from ten urban and suburban high schools located in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. The number of students at these schools ranged from 1300 to over 5000, with most of them having student populations that consisted of at least 50% African American or Latina/o. A total of 496 students, 48 teachers, 31 counselors, and 51 parents participated in this project by completing surveys and engaging in focus groups.

All of the juniors and seniors at Montgomery and Carleton were invited to participate in this study. Participants completed a short survey and engaged in a 60

to 90 minute focus group lead by members of a research team made up of faculty and graduate students. Focus groups took place on the high school campuses, and were audio-taped and transcribed. Each focus group varied by size, race, ethnicity, and gender although the researchers aimed to group students by one or more common characteristics. At Montgomery High School, six focus groups were conducted with a total of 38 students. Three of these focus groups were used for this study because the participants were high achievers. Each of these focus groups included a mix of female and male students; one of them was made up of Black students and the other two groups consisted of Latina/o students. At Carleton, three focus groups were conducted with 20 students. The two groups that were used for this study included high achieving Black females.

Measures and Analyses

Quantitative data was collected at the school and individual level. Broad data on each of the schools was collected from the California Department of Education (CPEC 2005). Additionally, the quantitative survey data from each of the participants was entered into SPSS to obtain basic descriptive data. The qualitative data obtained through the focus groups was coded using ATLAS.ti software. Particular themes were assigned to sections of the interviews to allow for organization, identification and comparison. To analyze the data, pattern analysis (Yin 1994) was used to identify major patterns within the findings and match them with predicted patterns based on the theoretical framework of OTL and bounded rationality.

Findings

The participants in this study were equally talented and goal-oriented. The mean GPA for Montgomery students was 3.47, and the mean GPA for Carleton participants was 3.70. When asked what they wanted to do after high school, students expressed their desire to attend some of the best four-year colleges in California and beyond, including University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), University of California at Berkeley, University of Southern California, Columbia University, and Northwestern University. For example, a Montgomery student shared:

I want to become a lawyer, and we all want to go to UCLA. So I want to go to UCLA and get like the highest degree I can get as far as law, and get a bachelor's in Sociology or something. I'm really interested in that—I already have a Sociology class, so I have a little head start.

Similarly, a student from Carleton discussed her extensive educational goals:

I want to stay in California for college because it's more convenient for me. I don't want to go to a state where I have no family, don't know anyone,

and have to start all over again. I would like to apply to like UC schools and Cal State schools because I want to have a choice. . . . I really want to go to UCLA, that would be like a dream come true. Afterwards, I want to go to a graduate school on the east coast, because I think I'll be mature enough to handle whatever comes.

These quotes exemplify another trend in students' aspirations: They were not only focused on attending college, they were also committed to continuing their education in graduate and professional programs. It was unsurprising to find that about half of the students attending the medical magnet, Carleton, expressed interest in going to medical or dental school, and half of the participants at Montgomery expressed an interest in getting master's or doctoral degrees.

Although students at both Montgomery and Carleton reported high aspirations and clear college goals, their narratives and survey responses revealed vastly disparate opportunities to learn between these two schools. Opportunities to learn at each school were assessed across multiple areas: amount of rigorous coursework, teacher quality, and access to college counselors and information. Further, students discussed how they used peers and family to enhance their opportunities to learn and fill in the college preparatory gaps that their high schools missed. Bounded rationality kept Montgomery students positive and encouraged regarding the limited resources they had access to, with disparities in terms of resources and college information often going unacknowledged. This positive outlook appears to have kept students motivated and focused on college; however, these factors unfortunately have the potential to limit college readiness and college preparation. In contrast, students at Carleton benefited from their more balanced view of the opportunities to learn their school offered, and leveraged their more substantial school resources and informational networks to maximize their college preparatory opportunities.

Access to Teachers and Rigorous Coursework

Students at both schools shared that, although not every teacher was the most helpful, there were certainly teachers who were supportive and encouraged their college goals. One student at Carleton shared, "I have a teacher, an English teacher, and she's always supported us in everything that we've done. She never—she'll ask us what college we wanna go to, and if in her opinion it doesn't seem like the college is good enough for us, she'll let us know." Similar sentiments were communicated by students at Montgomery as they recounted tales of teachers that had offered both college support and information. One Montgomery student shared that her encounters with supportive teachers were frequent, stating:

I can't think of any of the teachers that I have that haven't been like stressing how important it is for me to like attend a university after I graduate from here, giving me examples of how it will help me and just always like supporting me if I have any questions. I know that I can always go to them because they're always on me, on my back, you know like, "Have you done this?" and "Have you done that?"

Although there were teachers that offered students encouragement to attend college at both schools, opportunities to learn and be exposed to the most rigorous coursework available varied. The instructors that students revered as having the largest influence on their college-going process, both in terms of academic preparation and offering information, were those teaching advanced placement (AP) courses. At Carleton, there were 21 AP courses offered, and 6 out of 13 students in the Carleton sample anticipated taking 8 or more AP classes before graduating. Montgomery students had fewer opportunities to participate in these courses, with 9 AP classes offered at their school, and two students out of 20 anticipated taking 8 or more advanced placement classes. Students across both schools appreciated the rigorous college preparatory work and environment these courses presented, and Montgomery students, in particular, expressed a desire to be enrolled in these courses, not only for college, but to stimulate their intellectual development in ways that were ignored in their other classes. For example, one Montgomery student shared:

I don't feel that even my other honors classes that I've taken are as rigorous as I think they should be academic wise. And so when I considered taking AP classes . . . my top priority in taking them wasn't exactly to get that college experience. It was more to challenge myself, because here at Montgomery, honestly, it's not like a lot of teachers actually work to challenge you or work to motivate you into wanting to do something academic.

Access to Counselors and College/Career Information

The counselor to student ratios at both Carleton and Montgomery are high, 1:411 and 1:500, respectively, and is indicative of the small counseling staff at California high schools. Carleton offers students access to five academic counselors, one college counselor, and a College Center. Many students appreciated the college preparatory resources they were given, and acknowledged that they were more privileged and given more opportunities to learn by attending a magnet school, as is evident in the following quote:

I mean the—the school gives you different kinds of opportunities. Like for example they let students go to SAT prep for about five, six dollars . . . And, I mean this school is a bit different from other schools because my sisters, they went to different schools and the teachers and the counselors weren't as open and didn't give them scholarship information and things like that. So I think magnet schools, and this school in general, gives students pretty good opportunities.

In addition to these resources, college representatives appeared to visit Carleton regularly, and students were well-versed in the information that they could receive from these conversations. In fact, in one focus group, students commented on their frustration with a recent Princeton representative, who they felt should have talked about information relevant to the Princeton admissions process rather than give an academic lecture. Students also acknowledged that Carleton provided them with opportunities to explore potential career opportunities, especially in medicine. As a medical magnet school, Carleton offers students the opportunity to have summer internships in medicine and other scientific fields.

Access to college resources and opportunities to learn important college preparatory information at Montgomery were more limited. Students at Montgomery had access to three academic counselors, and one of the academic counselors also served as the school's college counselor. Montgomery had also recently opened a College Center, which offered students information on colleges and scholarships. Like Carleton, students also noted that college representatives visited the Montgomery campus, and were very appreciative for the opportunity to collect information from these individuals. Students reported being especially grateful to student representatives from UCLA, who made recommendations about college preparatory classes they should take, noting that without them "we would be lost, we wouldn't know what to do."

Although they had fewer college preparatory resources, students at Montgomery seemed to perceive their opportunities to learn more favorably than the students at Carleton. Montgomery students acknowledged that their counselors, especially their college counselor, did not have all the information that they needed, but they appreciated her efforts to be helpful, and 11 of the 20 Montgomery students (58%) reported that counselors were their primary source of college information, as compared to 6 of 14 (43%) Carleton students. One Montgomery student expressed:

Some of the counselors they kind of like learn right along with us. And our counselor in particular, she tries really hard to make sure that we have the information that is needed, but sometimes she may not have all the information. . . . The people that come from UCLA, there are certain things that we learn that when it came time for us to select our classes for next year. We knew it,

but she hadn't quite got there yet. So it's like she tries, and that's basically what we can ask.

Students at Carleton, however, openly discussed the limitations on their opportunities to learn and where they perceived the college resources that they were offered as lacking. Students noted that there were too many students assigned to each counselor, and that often no one had the time to give them the attention that they needed and desired. Expressing her frustration in gaining access to scholarship information, one student remarked, "It's just too many kids." Another elaborated, and stated that counselors were trying to be too many things to too many people:

The reason why the counselors are not performing correctly is because they're trying to do too many things at once. They're trying to be a counselor right here from 9:00 to 12:00, and then from 12:00 to 1:00 they try to be the security guard. And, then from 2:00 to 3:00 they wanna be an office clerk. They're trying to do too many things and I think they just need to put their whole heart into counseling.

Creating New Opportunities to Learn: Forming Networks

A more critical assessment of the resources at their high school led Carleton students to seek out a wider network of individuals to support their college preparatory process. For example, although both Montgomery and Carleton students drew support and encouragement from their college-going peers, Carleton students relied on their peers as a source of information. Half of the Carleton students noted that their peers were a primary source of college information, and 3 out of 20 of the Montgomery students reported that their peers were information sources. For example, a Carleton student shared how her peers got her focused on applying to college and important tests she needed to take:

My friends play a big role, a huge role in the influence because all my friends are 4.0, 3.0 and above students, and they all have goals. And, they—when I see them planning things that just makes me more like, okay, I wanna do that. It's like I want to think like you, I want to set goals for myself. And, every time I see them do things like that, I'm going to go and get on the Internet, research scholarships so I can be prepared for whatever. Especially for the SAT's. I wasn't even thinking about taking the SATs this year. And, so they [my friends] came from the college counselor, College Center, and had the package, SAT-1, SAT-2, and the ACT. And I was like, okay. As a group, we

all scheduled it at the same time, took it at the same place, and we decided to take the SAT again this year in September.

Much like Carleton parents, the parents of Montgomery students were extremely supportive of their children, encouraging them to pursue their college goals and dreams. However, Carleton parents (and often siblings) had more concrete information to offer their children. There were similar rates of college-going amongst the mothers' of these students, but on average, the fathers of Carleton students were more educated. The average Carleton student's father had attended some college, and on average, Montgomery fathers were high school graduates. Six of the 14 Carleton students listed their parents as a primary source of college information, as compared to one Montgomery student, and Carleton participants shared how their parents and families influenced their college preparatory processes and shaped their aspirations. For example, according to one student at Carleton:

Ever since third grade, or before that, I wanted to go to college because my family stresses college. Everybody in my family went to college, and if they didn't they wanted everybody, like me and my cousins, to go. Plus, I have two older brothers that I look up to, and each one of them went to a university. I don't want to be the only person to go to a junior college or something like that, because since they went to universities, I feel that I have to go—to go higher than that or beyond what they did.

Discussion

An examination of the student experiences at Montgomery, a nonmagnet public high school, and Carleton, a magnet high school, highlights the varied opportunities-to-learn that were available in each context. A comparison of the survey data and narratives offered by high achieving students from these two schools illuminates the disparities in college preparatory resources. Although students at both schools interacted with supportive teachers, Carleton students had more access to the AP courses that would prepare them for college. Moreover, Carleton students had more access to counselors knowledgeable about the college application process, college representatives, and opportunities to explore higher education and career options. In contrast, Montgomery students described their counselors as often lacking the college-related information that they needed, even though these school agents were one of their primary resources.

Through the lens of opportunity to learn, we can examine how disparities in college-related resources influence the college preparation of Montgomery and Carleton high achievers. In this context, the opportunity-to-learn can be conceptualized as an “opportunity to attend college” framework. As a result of the resources

available to them, including a more extensive college preparatory curriculum and college-related information and guidance, Carleton students have more opportunities to achieve their goals to attend college. These opportunities for college attendance are vastly different than those of the Montgomery high achievers who, as a result of their school's dearth of college-related resources, may be less informed and less prepared to pursue their postsecondary education.

Despite the lack of access to adequate college information, Montgomery students described their opportunities more positively than Carleton students. Bourdieu's (1977) notion of bounded rationality provides a lens that helps us understand this inconsistency. As a result of their existing knowledge about accessing college, Carleton students were more aware of the resources that were lacking at their school. Montgomery students, however, were more receptive to their school's limited courses, information, and support because of their limited knowledge of what should be available. Although this perception kept Montgomery students motivated, the concept of bounded rationality suggests that Montgomery students may make unrealistic assessments of their college options as a result of their school's limited academic opportunities.

Students' college information networks also seemed to have an influence on their college preparedness. On one hand, our findings indicated that Carleton students were more likely to utilize peer and parental networks, possibly because they were aware of the limitations of their school's resources. In contrast, Montgomery students, who were less aware of the inadequate preparation and information provided by their school, may not have seen a need to look beyond their school. Moreover, when Carleton students utilized their parental and peer networks, they had access to richer sources of information than their Montgomery counterparts. The college experiences of Carleton parents resulted in their children being able to more frequently use their mothers and fathers as a source of concrete college information, unlike students at Montgomery. From another perspective, higher parental education levels may have contributed to Carleton students' heightened knowledge of the college preparation process, and thus a more critical view of the high school resources available to them. In addition, Carleton students had a more expansive and knowledgeable peer network that furthered their college access by providing an additional source of information and motivation.

As a magnet school, Carleton High School students are collectively directed towards both college preparation and attendance. Admissions counselors and outreach programs particularly target these students for their level of academic achievement and commitment to higher education. They and their parents had both the interest and knowledge to transfer into a magnet program to heighten their college potential, despite the challenges of the transfer process and the subsequent geographic and time inconveniences (i.e. taking a bus for an hour or more to attend the school). Colleges and universities spend much of their time and resources on these students, as they self-select to attend these rigorous college preparatory

institutions and may have better training than a regular nonmagnet school. As a result, these students are “more than the sum of their parts”, collectively effective in supporting each other through the college process. Thus, these Carleton students have more access to college-related information and, thus, can be better judges of their future college opportunities. Montgomery students, in contrast, are potentially less effective at assessing the opportunities available at their school and how well it is preparing them for their educational futures. Although they have high postsecondary aspirations, they do not have the advantage of Carleton’s collective support and knowledge. Instead, they are forced to often “go it alone” as they pursue a college education.

The findings from this study call into question the educational trends that have occurred since the Los Angeles riots. The struggle for equitable schools and resources, such as *Williams v. State of California* (2000), has made some progress in providing for adequate teaching materials and a viable educational environment. However, this study indicates that people must move beyond a conversation about equity of resources and instead focus on equity of opportunity to learn. This approach looks at the availability of resources, but also goes beyond that to examine students’ access to college preparatory curriculum and information through school agents, as well as peer and parental networks. Through this lens, we find that students at Montgomery students not only experience a disparity in concrete academic resources, but also are highly limited in their access to the information and support from college representatives, school agents, peers and parents. Moreover, we can imagine that even if Montgomery students had an equal number of AP courses, counselors and college representative visits, they would still lack the opportunities that Carleton students have as a result of students’ collective knowledge.

Considered at the macro level, the development of magnet schools provides important opportunities in developing students academic and career interests to a select group; however, at the micro level, one must acknowledge the cost to schools like Montgomery. Magnet schools can build a strong culture of college going via students and parents who have applied to these specialized programs. However, regular public schools are left drained of a critical community: highly motivated students and parents who are able pass on their college knowledge to those with the aspirations and academic ability, but without adequate information and resources. This trend of increased school choice reflected in magnet schools, charter schools, and PWT programs implemented through NCLB is arguably not choice if the transfer process is complex and students and parents are uninformed of their options. Moreover, it cannot be considered a choice if, like at Montgomery High, students do not realize the limitations of their high schools, and thus do not see the benefits or importance of attending a magnet school. As a result, gifted and magnet programs enhance the opportunities of some high achieving students, but marginalize those who may have less knowledge of their options. Although

these magnet schools were created to provide an equal opportunity for college preparatory education in predominantly Black and Latina/o neighborhoods, these schools have concentrated high quality college preparatory opportunities to the select few and, instead, recreated disparities across lines of parental education and class within the Black and Latina/o community.

Along with its direct implications for magnet school reform, this study also brings up important questions about other trends. For example, current anti-immigrant and race-neutral admissions policies ignore the different experiences that students have in the educational system. As we can see here, students have very different experiences that must be addressed within our educational and social systems. These findings indicate that these differences are not surmountable solely through equal treatment of students, but instead must take into account their existing base of knowledge and experience and allow for equal opportunity. The initiatives to equalize resources in schools and provide in-state tuition for undocumented students indicate some advancement for marginalized populations. But to succeed, all students, not just the magnet students, need to have access to college preparatory resources.

After the Los Angeles riots, the educational opportunities for African American and Latina/o students within these two schools continue to be unacceptable, and thus, are likely contributors to the persistent economic and social instability that caused the riots in the first place. Post-riot educational reforms have moved educators two steps forward and three steps back in attempts to provide quality educational experiences for underrepresented youth. They had just begun to see the progress of desegregation at the school level and affirmative action at the college level when it was undermined by racial separation through such trends as charter schools and the banning of race-based admissions in higher education. Although the legal cases fought to improve school resources and access to the school transfer process and California Bill AB 540 promise some positive change, consistent advancement must occur to ensure that the LA riots will not occur again.

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The Undereducation and Overcriminalization of U.S. Latinas/os: A Post-Los Angeles Riots LatCrit Analysis

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At 40.4 million strong (14% of the U.S. population; U.S. Bureau of the Census 2005), Latinas/os are the largest and fastest growing U.S. ethnic minority group. In the last 15 years, since the Los Angeles riots of 1992, Anglo perceptions that the Latina/o population is too large, growing too fast, and too illegal have both continued and perpetuated anti-Latina/o educational policy and criminal law that influence Latina/o perceptions of U.S. education, law, society, justice, and equity. The central question of the article is, *What have been the effects of the last 15 years of educational and criminal justice policy on present-day urban Latina/o injustice and inequality?* A Latino Critical Theory framework is used to interpret and understand the nexus of Anglo reaction (through educational policy and criminal law) to a perceived U.S. Latina/o-ization, and Latina/o counterreaction through resistance, agency, and protest. We focus on the ways in which education and criminal justice policies at the federal and state levels are related and have led to a barrio-ization of urban Latinas/os since the Los Angeles Riots. The article concludes with a discussion of implications for policy and practice aimed at improving of the Latina/o condition from its present “undereducated” and “overcriminalized” state.

At 40.4 million (14% of the U.S. population; U.S. Bureau of the Census 2005), Latinas/os¹ are the largest and fastest growing U.S. ethnic minority. In the last 15 years, since the Los Angeles riots of 1992, Anglo perceptions that the Latina/o population is too large, growing too fast, and too illegal have advanced policies detrimental to Latinas/os in the criminal justice and the education systems