22nd Annual AERA *Brown* Lecture in Education Research

Rethinking *Brown* When Diversity and Equity Are Imperiled and Democracy Is Fragile

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I reflect on the impact of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision through the lens of my experience growing up in a racially segregated community in the Arkansas Delta. I trace how *Brown* and events following during the past 71 years created—albeit unevenly—greater equity and justice for racially marginalized Americans. I then turn to the present, examining the resurgence of White racism and nationalism that threatens efforts to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion. I argue that these attacks imperil the nation's fragile democracy and American Creed values, such as justice and equality. I call on educators to resist the organized and well-funded movement to erase diversity and equity from schools, colleges, and universities by implementing a transformative civic education curriculum—an approach that equips students with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to become cosmopolitan and engaged citizens. Such citizens, with reflective cultural, national, and global identifications, can help sustain and advance diversity, equity, and democracy in their communities, the nation, and the world.

Keywords: cultural, national, and global identifications; democracy; diversity, equity, and inclusion; multicultural education; silences; transformative civic education; White racism and nationalism

In a landmark decision that would evoke silence, loss, rage, and hope, the Supreme Court described the harmful consequences that would result for African American students who were forced to attend racially segregated schools. The Court stated, "To separate them from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely to ever be undone" (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954). Looking back when this decision was made 71 years ago, we can vividly describe its achievements but also its shortcomings, as several previous *Brown* lecturers have done (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 2004; Siddle Walker, 2013). These shortcomings included the closing of Black schools that were significant community centers, the firing of many Black teachers and principals, and the racial anguish, pain, and suffering experienced by the first Black students who attended predominantly White schools in the South, such as Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, that were hostile to African American students (Bates, 1987; Beals, 1994). Some of these students had to face angry White parents and students who shouted racial slurs as they were protected by police and the National Guard.

However, I would like to describe the complex responses to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that occurred in my community when it was handed down on May 17, 1954. I was in the seventh grade at the Newton Training School in Aubrey, Arkansas. My most powerful memory of the *Brown* decision is that I have no memory of it being rendered or mentioned by my parents, teachers, or preachers. In my rural Southern community, there was a conspiracy of silence about Brown. It was completely invisible to me as a child.

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The Conspiracy of Silence About *Brown*

I can only speculate about the meaning of the silence about *Brown* in my Arkansas Delta community in which racial segregation was codified in both law and custom in every aspect of our lives. The only public library in Lee County was 9 miles from our family farm in Marianna, the county seat that had a population of 4,550. Although I was an avid reader, I could not use the public library. It was for Whites only. The only time I saw the inside of the public library was when the choir from my all-Black high school entertained a White civic group in the library. We had to see second-run movies at the all-Black Blue Haven Theatre. To see first-run movies, we had to go to the White Imperial Theatre and enter the "Colored entrance," which led upstairs, where the projection room was also located. We could hear the rattle of the movie projector as we tried to concentrate on the movie.

Marianna and Lee County, Arkansas, epitomized the institutionalized discrimination, fear, and racism that existed throughout the Deep South in the mid-1950s. The conspiracy of silence about *Brown* in Lee County among Whites was probably caused by fear that news of *Brown* might disrupt the institutionalized racist system of segregation that had been established in Lee County in the years after Reconstruction. That system was never publicly challenged or questioned by Whites or Blacks. Black resistance to racism in Lee County was deep but covert. Blacks wore a mask as they feigned contentment around Whites as their anger seethed below the surface—ready to explode. The statue of Robert E. Lee that towered above the park in the Town Square symbolized the racial oppression that gripped the community in which I—and many other Southern Blacks—came of age in the 1950s and 1960s.

My teachers and preachers surely knew about the *Brown* decision and must have been quietly joyous about it. However, it must have evoked fear in them as well—about losing their jobs and their schools. They must have quietly discussed *Brown* among themselves, out of the earshot of the children and certainly out of the earshot of Whites. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) took the five cases that constituted the *Brown* decision to the Supreme Court. The White establishment throughout the Deep South regarded the NAACP as a subversive and dangerous organization. It was viewed with as much suspicion and animosity as was the Communist Party in the North. Black teachers were sometime fired by school boards in the South when it was learned that they were active members of the NAACP (Fairclough, 2007). The White school boards controlled both Black and White schools. Consequently, for Black teachers to spread the word about the *Brown* decision, especially among students, would probably have been considered a subversive and dangerous act.

Education for Black Uplift

The silence about *Brown* that haunted Lee County and the lack of actions related to it continued throughout my elementary (Grades 1–8) and high school years (Grades 9–12). I attended Newton Training School until I graduated and then entered all-Black Robert Russa Moton High School in Marianna. Moton, a protégé of Booker T. Washington, became principal of Tuskegee Institute when Washington died. Many Black schools throughout the Deep South were named for Moton. Throughout my elementary and high school years and without any focus on *Brown* or school desegregation, our Black teachers taught us to be citizens of both the Black community and American society. Each day in morning exercise, we said the Pledge of Allegiance and sang both the Negro national anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing," and the American national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner." The lives and triumphs of Black leaders—Booker T. Washington, Mary McLeod Bethune, Robert Russa Moton, George Washington Carver, and Marian Anderson—were interspersed throughout our curriculum. Our teachers tried hard to make us productive citizens of U.S. society and to instill in us a commitment to the uplift of the Black community. Yet, I can remember no explicit efforts to prepare us to function within a desegregated society—a society whose possibility my teachers may have hoped for but had not fully imagined or grasped. When I graduated from Moton High School in 1960—which was 6 years after *Brown*—the schools in Marianna and throughout Lee County were tightly segregated, and there was not even a whisper about desegregating them. School desegregation in Marianna began with a trickle in 1964 (*Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, n.d.).

Brown Gave Us Hope

Brown was an expression of those aspects of American civic culture that articulate democratic values such as those embedded in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. By ruling that de jure segregation was illegal because it damaged the hearts and minds of Black students, the Supreme Court gave credence to the values stated in the nation's founding documents and consequently gave Blacks hope. There has always been—and there remains—a wide gap between America's democratic ideals and its practices (Myrdal, 1944).

Although the spirit of *Brown* reflected the democratic values in the nation's founding documents, the efforts that were made to impede its implementation and the White rage that it evoked were also deeply American. Even the ruling itself reflected the ambivalence of the court. Chief Justice Warren had a difficult time getting the court to make a unanimous decision on *Brown* (Irons, 2002; Kluger, 1975). Rather than set a definite timetable for Southern schools to desegregate, the court set forth the ambiguous phase, "with all deliberate speed," which gave Southern school districts the freedom to stall and procrastinate. The rage that *Brown* evoked among White Southern lawmakers in Congress and among their White constituencies epitomized the deep racial legacy in the United States that had existed since slavery. Racial progress in the United States throughout its history has always been attained through struggle. As Frederick Douglass stated in 1857:

> If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one, or it

> may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be struggle. (As cited in Mullane,1995, pp. 118–119)

For all of its shortcomings—and there were many both in the decision and its consequences—*Brown* brought the United States closer to its democratic ideals. Gunnar Myrdal (1944) maintained that most Americans experience "an American dilemma" because of the gap between the American Creed values they internalize, such as equality and democracy, and the institutionalized racism that exists in U.S. society. In declaring that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954), the Supreme Court empowered Blacks in tightly segregated communities, such as Aubrey and Marianna, to challenge a system of institutionalized racism that had been entrenched since the post-Reconstruction period.

Presidents' Positions on Racial Equality

Brown and the developments prior to and immediately after it brought hope to Blacks and other marginalized communities of color in cities and towns that were racially segregated. Yet today, we are experiencing the reemergence of White nationalism and blatant institutionalized racism at the federal level that is unprecedented since the presidential administration of Woodrow Wilson. Wilson screened the racist movie *Birth of the Nation* in the White House on February 18, 1915, and introduced racial segregation into the federal government during his presidency (Varel, 2018).

Presidents over the last 70 years have, to varying degrees, supported racial justice policies. Harry Truman, who was not a strong advocate of racial justice, issued Executive Order 9981 on July 26, 1948, which desegregated the military. Dwight D. Eisenhower sent troops to Little Rock, Arkansas, to protect the Black students who desegregated Central High School in September 1957. In a televised address to the nation on June 11, 1963, President John F. Kennedy issued a moral challenge to Americans and announced that he would send legislation to Congress outlawing discrimination in all public facilities (which would become the Civil Rights Act of 1964). He said:

> When Americans are sent to Vietnam or West Berlin, we do not ask for whites only. It ought to be possible, therefore, for students of any color to attend any public institution they select without having to be backed up by troops. (Kennedy, 2003, p. 315)

President Lyndon B. Johnson, a Southerner from Texas who had been a high school teacher, worked hard for the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Caro, 2002). He also initiated many reforms that became known as the Great Society that benefited African Americans, other people of color, and low-income groups. On March 15, 1965, a few days after the nation had witnessed the brutal beating by police of unarmed civil rights marchers in Selma, Alabama, Johnson delivered a speech to Congress shown on primetime television in which he said:

> The real hero of this struggle is the American Negro. His actions and protests, his courage to risk safety and even to risk his life, have awakened the conscience of this nation. His demonstrations have been designed to call attention to injustice, designed to provoke change, designed to stir reform. He has called upon us to make good the promise of America. And who among us can say that we would have made the same progress were it not for his persistent bravery, and his faith in American democracy? (Johnson, 1965)

The Reemergence of White Nationalism and Blatant Institutional Racism

During the decades from the presidencies of Woodrow Wilson to Donald Trump's second term, most U.S. presidents have either expressed support for racial equality for African Americans and other groups of color or remained silent on racial issues. Unlike his predecessors, President Donald Trump and his acolytes have, in both subtle and overt ways, openly expressed and supported institutional racism, White nationalism, fascism, and authoritarianism (Banks, in press). Trump has issued cruel and poignant executive orders designed to erase diversity content and issues from schools, colleges, and universities and U.S. society writ large.

His executive order demanding an end to "radical indoctrination in K–12 schooling" has slowed the development of teaching about diversity in the schools and presented serious challenges for teachers who want to integrate their curricula with multicultural content and perspectives. This executive order requires "patriotic education" that celebrates "America's greatness." Among the most egregious of Trump's executive orders that is causing anguish, confusion, and inaction by practicing educators in schools, colleges, and universities is "Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferences" (Johnson & Harper, 2024). Schools, colleges, and universities are eliminating programs and their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in response to the resurgence of White nationalism and the executive orders issued by President Trump. Au states (in press), "we are seeing . . . the institutional retrenchment of the politics of white supremacy, manifest in curriculum erasure, program dissolution, and funding cuts."

The question we need to wrestle with, deeply examine, and illuminate is why, after 71 years of racial progress—which has been cyclical (Schlesinger, 1986)—since *Brown*, are we experiencing organized, well-funded, and successful attacks on DEI, multicultural education, and democracy? These are values that are implicit in *Brown* and in the nation's fundamental documents, such as the U.S. Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the Bill of Rights. Why are these regressive policies and tactics being openly supported by President Trump and members of his cabinet and at least tacitly supported by other political leaders—by their silence about Trump's action, which can be interpreted as agreement? In the following sections, I describe three possible explanations for the emergence of White nationalism and racism at this troubled, poignant, and turbulent time in the nation's history: (a) the persistence of institutional racism, (b) the rising population of people of color, and (c) Whites' sense of victimization because of the rise of the Black middle class.

The Persistence of Institutional Racism: A Legacy From Slavery

When federal troops withdrew from the South as part of the compromise of 1877, Reconstruction effectively ended, and the South reestablished many elements of White supremacy that existed during slavery, such as the Black codes (Foner, 2005). These codes, which varied in different states, were designed to keep Blacks in an inferior position as second-class citizens (Davis et al., 1941/1965). Some of the codes required Blacks to be employed by a White person and prevented them from owning a gun or testifying against a White person. Rayford W. Logan (1954), the eminent African American historian, called this period (1877–1901) "the nadir." Slavery in the United States ended in 1865, which was 160 years ago. However, the racism that was established in the United States during slavery left a deep legacy that the nation has not overcome. Gloria Ladson-Billings (in press) maintained that the current era of powerful and blatant expression of White supremacy and racism is a "second nadir." Nikole Hanna-Jones (2025), author of The 1619 *Project: A New Origin Story*, also refers to the current period of U.S. history as "the second nadir."

Actions by presidential candidates and presidents that foreshadowed the rise of White nationalism and racism during Trump's second term included the visibility and influence that George Wallace of Alabama experienced as a presidential candidate in 1968. Wallace openly supported racial segregation. His mantra was that he would enforce "segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever" (Wallace, 2000, p. 732). On June 11, 1963, he "stood in the schoolhouse door" at the entrance of Foster Auditorium at the University of Alabama to prevent Vivian Malone and James Hood, the first African Americans to attend the university, from entering (Branch, 1988).

In his campaign for president in 1988, George H. W. Bush used ads that featured Willie Horton, an African American prisoner in Massachusetts serving a life sentence who committed a serious crime while on weekend prison furlough. Richard Nixon's "southern strategy" employed "thinly veiled racism to attract the votes of white Democrats alarmed by the social and political changes brought about by the civil rights revolution" (Foner, 2025, p. xxii). In 1994, Bill Clinton signed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, which included the provision "three strikes and you are out." Individuals who have been convicted of two prior serious felonies receive much longer sentences, often life imprisonment. This act has had a devastating impact on African Americans and other people of color because they make up a highly disproportionate part of the incarcerated population (Alexander, 2020; Stevenson, 2015). Clinton has said that he regrets that he supported the passage of this act.

The persistence of racism in the United States and in other nations in the Global North has been extensively documented in publications by scholars in various disciplines. Harvard law professor Derrick Bell (1980) maintained that racism is a foundational and enduring structure in U.S. society that is deeply embedded in law, policy, and national identity. He argued that advances in racial progress occur only when they align with the interests of White power elites. Bell called this concept interest convergence and the permanence of racism.

In his prize-winning book, *Stamped From the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*, historian Ibram X. Kendi (2016) chronicled the development of anti-Black racist ideas in the United States and the ways in which they have deeply influenced the development of American history and institutions. Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. (2017), the Princeton scholar who is a specialist in African American Studies and religion and writes insightfully about race in the United States, argued that there is a "value gap" in the United States because White lives are valued more than those of other racial groups.

The Rising Population of People of Color

The rising population of people of color in the United States is an important factor contributing to the rise and explicit expression of White nationalism and racism in recent years (Craig & Richeson, 2017). The continual flow of immigrants to the United States, which is related to the increasing diversity of the population, might also be contributing to fear and racial unease among many Whites. These population projections from the Pew Research Center indicate that the U.S. population is becoming increasingly diverse and non-White (Passel & Cohn, 2008):

> By 2050, the nation's racial and ethnic mix will look quite different than it does now. Non-Hispanic whites, who made up 67% of the population in 2005, will be 47% of the population in 2050. Blacks were 13% of the population of the population in 2005 and will be roughly the same proportion in 2050. Asians, who were 5% of the population in 2005, will be 9% in 2050. The Hispanic population is projected to grow from 14% of the population in 2005 to 29% in 2050.

In the United States and other nations, some politicians, conservative scholars, and popular writers claim that a flood of immigrants is disrupting the nation-state by changing its language and culture, putting tremendous demands on the welfare and health systems, and taking jobs that are making it difficult for native citizens to earn a living (Bawer, 2006; Huntington, 2004; Schlesinger, 1991). Research indicates that immigrants actually enrich nations in numerous ways (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2005). They accept jobs that many native citizens decline and improve the nation in other ways, including by starting new businesses, making scientific innovations, and increasing the variety and complexity of its foods, music, dance, and ways of understanding and viewing the world. Nonnaturalized immigrants contribute funds to social security that they do not receive (Roberts, 2019).

The resistance to immigrants and the increasing diversity within nation-states are often used by politicians as a divide and conquer strategy, which prevents immigrant and working-class populations from forming coalitions that can resist policies that disfavor low-income and working-class populations. According to Nancy Beadie (personal communication, July 26, 2025), "railroad and banking interests deliberately manipulated the politics of race in 1880s and 1890s Virginia to break cross-race populist alliances that had won substantial elective power in favor of state spending on public education (Dailey, 2000)."

James D. Anderson (1988) quoted William H. Baldwin, a Northern philanthropist, who stated why education for Black Americans should be industrial training,

> Properly directed he is the best possible laborer to meet the climate conditions of the South. He will willingly fill the more menial positions, and do the heavy work, at less wages, than the American white man or any foreign race which has yet to come to our shores. (p. 82)

Whites' Sense of Victimization Because of the Rise of the Black Middle Class

The historian Carol Anderson (2016) poignantly described how after every period in which African Americans made racial progress—such as during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s—White rage emerged to halt the gains Blacks had made. The election of Barack Obama as president of the United States in 2008 and 2012, the national reckoning about race that took place after the police killings of Blacks such as George Floyd and Breonna Taylor (Cobb, 2020), and the wide use of *The 1619 Project* (Hannah-Jones et al., 2021) on teaching about slavery—each a manifestation of racial progress—provoked attacks on teaching about race, including the unverified assertion that critical race theory is being taught in K–12 schools (Kendi, 2021).

As Blacks made progress and entered the middle class in increasing numbers (Feagin & Sikes, 1994), many Whites, especially those living in rural areas and regions with widespread poverty, such as Appalachia, experienced anger and disappointment. They felt that they had been left behind because they remained poor and held low-status jobs, such as coal mining and field work on farms, as Black experienced upper social class mobility. A number of sociological studies describe and illuminate the rage, fear, and disappointment that exist among many low-income Whites. Robert Wuthnow (2018), in *The Left Behind: Decline and Rage in Small-Town America*, examined why rural White Americans voted overwhelmingly for Donald Trump. He concluded that the rage and fury among working-class Whites result less from economic concerns and more from the perception that Washington is distant from and threatening to the social fabric of their small towns.

In *Poverty by America*, Matthew Desmond (2023) concluded that poverty exists in the United States primarily because people who are not poor benefit from it. Arlie Russell Hochschild (2019) examined the perspectives of conservative Whites in Louisiana in *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*. She reported that the people she studied feel they are left behind and resent people they think benefit from the policies they oppose. Jacqueline Jones (1992), in *The Dispossessed: America's Underclass from the Civil War to the Present*, described how families struggle on cotton plantations, in coal mining camps, and in factory towns to make a living. Nancy Isenberg (2017) depicted the negative views the upper and middle classes have of the White poor and the enduring class hierarchy in the United States in *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America.*

Transformative Civic Education and Breaking Silences

Educators should resist the attacks on diversity and equity in schools, colleges, and universities by implementing transformative civic education. The curriculum in most schools consists of mainstream civic education that is grounded in mainstream academic knowledge (Banks, 1993). It reinforces the dominant power relationships within society and perpetuates silences about the egregious parts of the nation's history, such as Indian Removal, slavery, and the internment of Japanese Americans (Banks, 2020). Transformative civic education is rooted in transformative academic knowledge that challenges institutionalized and established mainstream knowledge (Banks, 1993). It enables students to acquire the information, skills, and values needed to break silences about the shameful parts of the nation's history; challenge inequality within their communities, nation, and the world; and take civic action to help actualize equality and democracy.

Transformative civic education also helps students to acquire reflective cultural, national, and global identifications (see Figure 1), which are essential for effective civic action that will enhance diversity and democracy in communities, the nation, and the world. To successfully implement a civic education curriculum, teachers and professors need to be keenly aware and sensitive to the complex and fluid characteristics of the racial, ethnic, cultural, and gender identities of students. In the next two sections, I describe the fluidity of student racial identities and the nature of cultural, national, and global identifications.

The Fluidity of Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Culture

One of the salient characteristics of racial, ethnic, and cultural groups today is the extent to which their members have fluid, multiple, and intersectional identities (Crenshaw, 1991). During the 1960s, it was assumed that most Blacks would have a strong Black identity and support efforts to reform the curriculum to include Black history and culture. However, as we consider the fluidity of ethnic and cultural groups today and construct interventions for the present and future, we should anticipate and plan for the multiple ways in which racial and ethnic identity are changing and contextual (Cross, 1991). We cannot assume, for example, that all students with a Black phenotype will have a Black identity and support the teaching of Black studies in schools, colleges, and universities.

An increasing percentage of Black, Hispanic, and Asian American students have parents from different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups because the rate of interracial marriage and families is growing in the United States. There is a significant growth in the number of Americans who are reporting more than one race on the U.S. census. This population grew from 6.8 million in 2000 to 9 million in 2010 to 33.8 million in 2020 (N. A. Jones & Bullock, 2012; N. Jones et al., 2021). The U.S. census indicates that the multiracial population grew 276% between 2010 and 2020 and is now 10.2% of the population. Although the multicultural population is growing significantly, most of this increase is the result of changes in data processing enacted by the U.S. census in 2020 (Ventura & Flores, 2025).

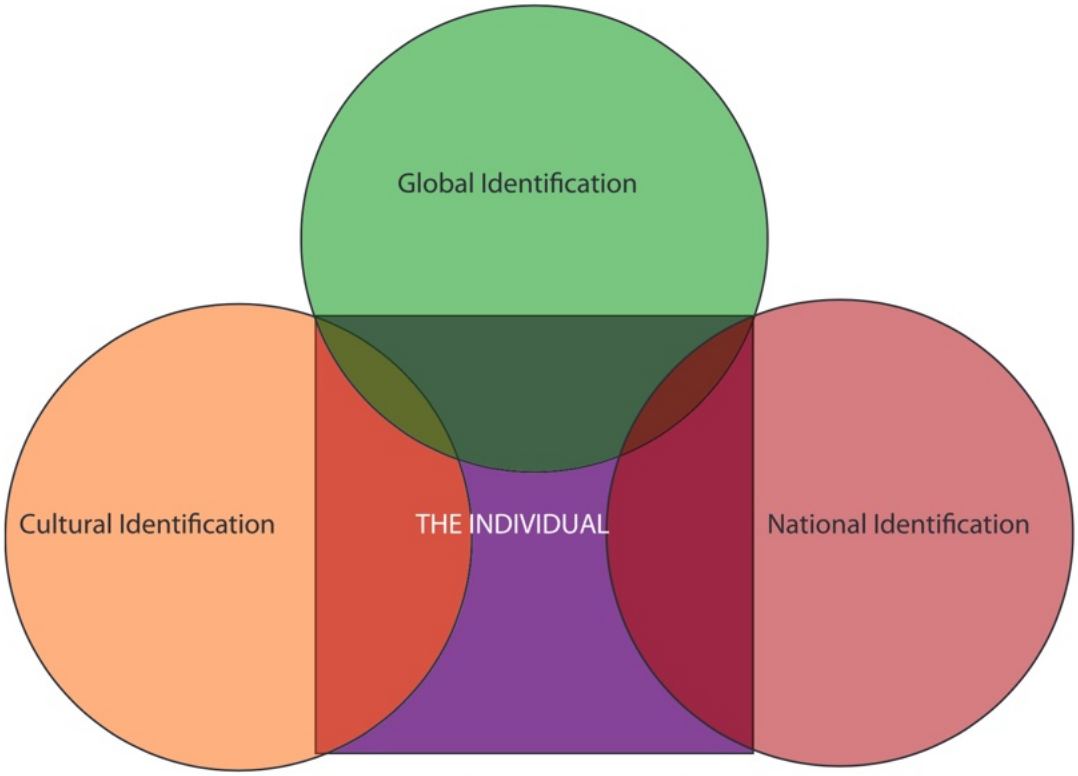

FIGURE 1. *Cultural, national, and global identifications.*

The number of school-age youth who identify as mixed race is also increasing (Joseph & Briscoe-Smith, 2021).

Culture and gender are also fluid and contextual. Some students in schools, colleges, and universities have parents of the same gender or who themselves are questioning their gender identity or are uncomfortable with the gender identification they were assigned at birth. Consequently, fluidity and context must be seriously considered as we conceptualize a curriculum that will be consistent with the needs of students in the future and facilitate ways in which students can function as effective citizens in a multicultural nation and global society. Political behavior and attitudes related to race and ethnicity are also shifting. In the 2024 election, Donald Trump won 46% of the Hispanic vote, which was "18 points more than the 28 percent he received in 2016 and 14 points more than his 32 percent in 2020" (Edsall, 2025). According to exit polling, Trump won the votes of one-fifth of Black men and nearly half of Latino men (Booker, 2024). Concerns about the economy and illegal immigration among this population may be reasons why they shifted to voting for Trump in significant numbers. The crisis that men are experiencing in U.S. society, including downward economic and educational mobility, and Trump's assertion of male dominance and masculinity might be other factors that contributed to the increase of votes for Trump by Black and Hispanic men (Miller-Idriss, 2025).

The fluidity of race and ethnicity today complicates teaching about race and ethnic identity in schools, colleges, and universities. Incorporating ethnic identity exploration and development into the school and university curricula is a task fraught with challenges but also includes opportunities. One of the challenges is that many people, including educators, equate racial and ethnic groups. These definitions and categories are complex and intricate because some groups, such as African Americans, are both an ethnic and a racial group. Jews are an ethnic and a religious group. People of various races can be Jewish (Gitelman, 2009). Ethiopian Jews are a Jewish diaspora community in Ethiopia that has existed for thousands of years (Ben-Peretz & Aderet-German, 2016). These categories are also complicated by youth who are biracial and multiracial (Joseph & Briscoe-Smith, 2021). Biracial and multiracial youth might identify with the ethnic group of each of their parents rather than one of them, or they might have a biracial or multiracial ethnic identity (Joseph & Briscoe-Smith, 2021; Mahiri, 2017).

Cultural, National, and Global Identifications

Cultural Identification

Strong, positive, and clarified cultural identifications and attachments are a prerequisite to cosmopolitan beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors and the internalization of human rights values. We must nurture, support, and affirm the identities of students from marginalized cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups if we expect them to endorse national values, become cosmopolitans, internalize human rights values, and work to make their local communities, nation, region, and the world more just and humane.

Research indicates that Black preschool youth often internalize the negative attitudes, dispositions, and stereotypes of Blacks that are institutionalized within society writ large. In a series of pioneering studies conducted between 1939 and 1950, Kenneth

B. Clark and Mamie P. Clark (1950) found that preschool African American children had internalized the negative attitudes toward Blacks that were institutionalized within American society. More recent research by scholars such as Spencer (1999) and Cross (1991) indicates that preschool African American youth also have negative racial attitudes toward Blacks. However, Spencer problematized this research. She described how Black preschool youth distinguish personal and group identity, which means that Black youth who have negative attitudes toward Blacks as a group may not internalize these attitudes or attribute them to themselves. Her research also indicates that Black youth develop increasingly positive attitudes toward Blacks as they grow older (Spencer, 1999). Banks (1988) found that Black adolescent youth who lived in predominantly White suburban communities had positive self-concepts and positive racial attitudes toward Blacks.

An important goal of transformative civic education is to help marginalized students to reject any negative views of their group that they may have internalized that are institutionalized within the nation-state and society writ large (Rogers et al., 2021;Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). These students need positive in-group racial attitudes and self-concepts in order to embrace outside racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. To attain this goal, these students need positive examples and descriptions of the historical and contemporary journeys of their people and their decisive role in the construction, prosperity, and development of their nation-state. They also need to understand how they have been victimized by structural oppression and marginalization (Baldwin, 1985). However, they should not experience a curriculum that depicts them only as victims. They should learn how their people and ancestors actualized efficacy and empowerment and how they contributed to the construction of the cultural, political, and economic institutions of their nation-state.

National Identification

In addition to helping students acquire the knowledge, skills, and values required to function within their home and cultural communities, a transformative civic education also helps students attain the knowledge, values, and skills essential for political efficacy and to function effectively in their national civic communities. Students must become efficacious and competent members of their nation-state in order to influence national policy. In the past, most nations have tried to instill national identity within students by teaching patriotic versions of history and civic lessons that depicted romanticized and idealized versions of the founding and development of the nation. This has included idealized and fictionalized depictions of founders and leaders in the United States, such as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, without mentioning that these men owned enslaved African Americans and sanctioned slavery, which contradicted values stated in the Declaration of Independence, such as "all men are created equal." Idealized and fictionalized versions of leaders and founders are also presented in Chinese textbooks about the founding and leaders of the Communist Party (Cong Lin, 2023) and in English textbooks that obscure the significant role of Britain in supporting and institutionalizing slavery (Olusoga, 2023; Tomlinson, 2019). President Trump's executive order demanding an end to "radical indoctrination in K–12 schooling" requires "patriotic education" that celebrates "America's greatness."

Most nations also try to instill national identity as a primary identity for students, which often leads to students becoming alienated from their home and community cultures. Nationalists and assimilationists assume, as Will Kymlicka (2004) stated, that "identities are essentially zero-sum, so that policies which affirm ethnic group identities necessarily undermine attempts to affirm large civic identities" (pp. xiii-xiv). Kymlicka pointed out that the theory and practice in multiculturalism rejects the zero-sum conception of identities. Multicultural theorists view identities as "multiple, nested, and overlapping" (Kymlicka, 2004, p. xiv) and as fluid and contextual (Banks, 2020). As Kymlicka wrote,

> Members of minority groups are likely to become more attached to their country, not less, when it affirms the legitimacy of their ethnic identity and the value of their cultural heritage. Pride in one's ethnic identity is often positively, not negatively, correlated with pride in one's citizenship in the larger state. (p. xiv)

A number of researchers have documented the ways in which schools in the United States tried to eradicate the cultures and languages of ethnic groups in order to assimilate them into the mainstream culture and eradicate their family and home cultures. Greenbaum (1974) described how schools taught Jewish and Polish immigrant students "shame and hope" in order to assimilate them into mainstream American culture. They were taught to be ashamed of their languages and cultures but given hope for inclusion into the U.S. mainstream culture in which they would experience its full benefits.

Global Identification

It is important for the transformative civic education curriculum to help students develop clarified and reflective cultural and national identities (Banks, 2020). However, because we live in a global world that is increasingly interconnected and interactive and in which most of the world's problems, such as global warming and food insecurity, cannot be solved without joint action by nations, students also need to develop thoughtful global identities and the knowledge and skills required for transformative civic action in a global context. National boundaries are being weakened increasingly because the problems the world faces require cooperative actions by many different nations. When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, a robust response to Russia required decisive joint action by the United States and the nations that comprise the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union (Cohen, 2022; European Council & Council of the European Union, 2022). The problems caused by global warming of the earth will require decisive and joint actions by myriad nations to reduce them.

Education for Human Rights and Cosmopolitan Citizenship

A transformative civic education curriculum also helps students to internalize human rights and cosmopolitan values. A number

of scholars who focus on education, such as Audrey Osler (2016), Hugh Starkey (2017), Martha Nussbaum (2002), and Walter Parker (2017), have written thoughtfully about education for human rights and cosmopolitanism. Starkey used the phrase "education for cosmopolitan citizenship" to describe his ideas about educating students for citizenship in a global world. His views about citizenship and citizenship education extend beyond the nation-state and focus on the global community. Nussbaum maintained that cosmopolitans view themselves as citizens of the world rather than of a nation-state. She stated that their "allegiance is to the worldwide community of human beings" (p. 4). Nussbaum contrasted cosmopolitan universalism and internationalism with parochial ethnocentrism and inward-looking patriotism. She pointed out, however, that "to be a citizen of the world one does not need to give up local identifications, which can be a source of great richness in life" (p. 9).

Human rights concerns are often regarded by school practitioners and other educators in the United States and in other nations in the Global North as issues that are related primarily to the violation of human rights in nations in the Global South—especially when despotic leaders victimize their own citizens or media workers and other citizens from nations in the Global North. Osler (2016) stated that educators in the Global North often view "human rights" concerns and issues as for "them" and not for us. In her study of human rights education in Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, Carole Hahn (2020) described empirical evidence that confirms Osler's observations. Osler maintained that human rights are not about the other in distant lands but are about all of us and the everyday lives of students and teachers.

Teaching Transformative Civic Education in Challenging Times

This is a challenging time for teachers and professors to implement a transformative civic education curriculum because of the organized and well-funded attacks on DEI and multicultural education and President Trump's executive orders that prohibit diversity initiatives. A number of states have passed bills limiting or prohibiting diversity initiatives in schools, colleges, and universities. In May 2025, there were more than 30 bills across states that targeted DEI in public higher education institutions (Bryant & Appleby, 2025). In May 2023, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis signed a bill that bans the state's public colleges and universities from spending money on DEI programs. Florida's Stop WOKE Act, enacted in 2022, limits how race-related concepts can be discussed in training and education.

Diversity courses and programs that have long been established are being challenged. The San Francisco School District established an ethnic studies course requirement in 2008. A study conducted at the Stanford Graduate School of Education found that low-achieving students who took the course were more likely than students who did not take it to attend school, be academically engaged, and go to college (DeBenedetti, 2025). However, the district is rethinking the course after criticism by some parents and will conduct an audit of the curriculum.

Teachers committed to teaching about diversity can find support by creating and participating in groups within their school or district that are made up of teachers with similar interests and commitments. These groups can be modeled on the SEED (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity) Project developed by Peggy McIntosh and her colleagues at the Wellesley Centers for Women at Wellesley College (McIntosh et al., 2012). The SEED project is a peer-led professional program that helps teachers and community members create year-long seminars that focus on dealing with diversity and provide support and encouragement.

Teachers may find encouragement and inspiration for teaching transformative civic education in difficult times by becoming acquainted with the histories of teachers who have faced these kinds of curriculum challenges and dilemmas in the past. Famous African Americans such as Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver, and Marian Anderson were not part of the official and approved curriculum in the Marianna, Arkansas, public schools where I attended high school. However, my teachers, by engaging in what Jarvis Givens (2021) called "fugitive pedagogy," were able to insert these African Americans into our curriculum in ways that did not directly confront or challenge the mainstream White social studies curriculum they were required to teach. Consequently, we learned both White and Negro history. Givens provided a vivid example of Ms. Tessie McGee, who taught history in 1933–1934 in Webster Parish, Louisiana. Ms. McGee often read parts of Carter G. Woodson's book on Negro history, which she kept out of sight in her lap. One of her students said, "She read to us from that book. . . . When the principal would come in, she would . . . simply lift her eyes to the outline that resided on the desk and teach us from the outline. When the principal disappeared, her eyes went back to the book in her lap" (Givens, 2021, pp. 1–2).

Breaking Silences by Implementing a Transformative Civic Education Curriculum

The silence about *Brown* in my Southern Black community was palpable. Silence is complicated and has both positive and negative aspects. It can be a powerful means for mental, physical, and social survival and a vehicle for controlling people and limiting their ability to engage in self-efficacy and effective civic action. The silence in my Southern Black community caused by the *Brown* decision exemplified both positive and negative consequences. Whites in my community limited information and communications about the *Brown* decision to maintain control of Black educators and schools. The silence about *Brown* enabled Black educators to maintain their cultural efficacy and safety.

As Nancy Beadie pointed outs (personal communication, July 26, 2025), silences are not limited to one group or a particular time in history. All of us have silences in our personal and family stories, in our communities, and in the nation. Many White families are silent about their African American lineage and ancestors either because they do not know about them or because of shame (Ball, 1998). Some Black individuals or families who have White phenotypes are silent about their Black lineage because of job mobility and their desire for cultural and structural inclusion (Broyard, 2007). Silence exists in some Jewish refugee families about certain aspects of their holocaust experience (Mendelsohn, 2006). The Issei, first-generation

Japanese Americans, are often silent about their experiences in the internment camps during World War II because of shame and embarrassment and their belief that focusing on the past might negatively influence future generations of their families (Takaki, 1989).

There are silences in school textbooks and the school curriculum about our nation's unsavory history (Lowen, 2018). School textbooks were silent for many decades about the brutalities of slavery, Indian removal, and the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. President Trump's executive orders that prohibit exhibits about race and African Americans and that erase the horrors of slavery in the various Smithsonian museums are attempts to silence egregious and shameful parts of the nation's history (Bowley et al., 2025).

Asking students to identify silences within their communities, the nation, and the world can be the initial phase of historical and social science investigations and inquiries that can lead to civic action. Identifying silences can provide a foundation for students to fully engage their efficacy as citizens and thoughtfully participate in efforts to expand the rights and opportunities for diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. Teachers can ask students to investigate these questions: (a) Why do silences exist in our communities, the nation, and the world? (b) Whose interests do these silences serve? (c) How can these silences be uncovered and made explicit? How does making them explicit enable us to identify ways in which our communities, nation, and the world can be made more just and equitable? Many silences perpetuate and enable stereotypes, racism, and inequality. By uncovering silences and making them explicit, students can formulate civic actions they can take to enhance justice and equality.

Removing DEI from the nation's schools, colleges, and universities is a vehicle to silence and erase brutal and egregious events in our nation's history that some powerful people and groups prefer to forget. To uncover these silences and successfully resist them, we must understand why the United States is now experiencing a resurgence of White racism and nationalism. Resistance must be grounded in a robust transformative civic education that can help students acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to effectively participate in actions that promote democracy and social justice in their communities, the nation, and the global community. Students will also need to develop clarified and reflective cultural, national, and global identifications; cosmopolitan attitudes and values; and the skills to become thoughtful and active citizens.

The silence, loss, anger, and hope that *Brown* evoked still simmer in communities throughout the United States. Schools throughout the nation are now resegregated (Orfield, 2014). Many Blacks feel that whenever they make progress in education, housing, health, jobs, and other areas, they will experience backlash. There is White anger about affirmative action and immigration and Black anger about their plight in America. White anger has resurfaced in the forms of executive orders that ban DEI from schools, colleges, and universities and society writ large. Black anger has resulted in renewed efforts to fully participate in American society through increased voter turnout in elections and protest efforts, such as the Black Life Matters movement, in which many White allies in the United States and other nations have participated.

The journey toward and after *Brown* has been long and difficult. However, *Brown* gave us hope that America might one day overcome its deep and entrenched racial legacy and indicated how difficult this journey was and still is.

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