The dynamics of race and education: A case study of South Boulevard Elementary

Heather K Olson Beal
Stephen F. Austin State University

Abstract: This article is part of a larger case study of South Boulevard Elementary—a foreign language immersion magnet school in Baton Rouge, Louisiana—a city with a dual school system: one public and 83 percent Black,[1] the other private and 85 percent non-Black. This article chronicles the relationship between race and education throughout the school history and explores the ways in which current parents' attitudes towards South Boulevard reflect historical themes regarding race and education.

Incomplete or inaccurate narratives regarding Southern educational history dominate mainstream thought. One common misconception is that because enslaved Africans were forbidden to learn to read, they remained illiterate, when in fact, many were literate. Another assumption is that all Reconstruction-era Black schools were inferior to White schools in terms of facilities and resources (Jones-Wilson 1981; Perry 2003; Siddle Walker 1996). Another narrative is that schools were integrated after the 1954 Supreme Court *Brown* decision, when many school districts actually desisted desegregation for years. Many Americans talk as if the struggle for educational equity began with *Brown*, whereas Black activists and intellectuals such as W. E. B. DuBois, Carter G. Woodson, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells, and Mary McLeod Bethune had long been pursuing these goals (Ambrose 1999; Culver 1954; Hendry and Edwards 2009; Tyack 1974). These narratives present a "historically incomplete picture" (Siddle Walker 1996, 13).

I grew up and attended Southern public schools during the 1970s and was never exposed to any of the complexities surrounding desegregation in school. I was in college before I first heard of the Little Rock Nine and in a doctoral program where I first read about the *Southern Manifesto* and learned about high-quality segregated Black schools that were a source of pride in their communities (Perry 2003). I never knew that some Black parents and teachers fought for the right to maintain segregated schools (Cecelski 1994; Kluger 1975/2004) or that some Black lawyers and activists opposed *Brown* (Bell 2004). How could I not have known that there was more to the history of race and education? I was a straight-A student who read everything I was asked to read and paid attention in class. The answer is simple: my teachers either didn't know that there was more to the story, or they chose not to share it with us.

The issues associated with race and education in the United States are complex and reflect historical and current tensions between the promise of democracy and the disappointment of unfulfilled promises. We romanticize schools as incubators of democracy wherein students of all races, creeds, religions, and tongues can attend school together, grow intellectually, and learn how to be active participants in a democratic society. In reality, however, schools have segregated, tracked, and differentiated between students and thus have

not delivered on either the promise of educational equity or the promise of racial and socioeconomic diversity.

This article is part of a larger case study of South Boulevard Elementary—a public magnet school in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, a city with a dual school system: one public and 83% Black and the other private and 85% non-Black (Olson Beal 2008). Although racial segregation and achievement gaps persist in Baton Rouge, as elsewhere around the United States, South Boulevard is a counterexample because it has achieved integration and academic achievement well above district and state averages on high stakes tests. Findings from the larger study suggest that the primary explanation for South Boulevard's success is the unique culture created by the foreign language immersion curriculum. South Boulevard is a partial immersion program, which means that students spend 60 percent of their instructional time in either French or Spanish. They are taught math, science, and social studies in French or Spanish by native French- or Spanish-speaking teachers, and have a daily 90-minute block of English Language Arts taught by native English-speaking teachers.

The immersion program helps create a culture of academic rigor in which teachers have high expectations of all students. South Boulevard has a culture of multiplicity that values diverse perspectives and includes a unique immersion subculture in which all students are equal participants. South Boulevard has a culture of community characterized by trusting relationships between members of the school community that emerge out of commitment to the immersion curriculum rather than geographical boundaries. While the larger case study focused on the factors that motivated a diverse set of parents to choose public over private education, this article explores the ways in which current parents' attitudes towards South Boulevard reflect historical themes regarding race and education.

Research Design

Because the research questions focus on *process* and experience rather than product or outcome, qualitative research methods were used to "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 3). Data collection consisted primarily of interviews and participant observation, but also included document analysis (e.g., newspaper and magazine articles, brochures, flyers, and maps, the Louisiana School Directory, and Louisiana State Department of Education demographic data). As the researcher, I occupied a unique vantage point as both parent of South Boulevard students and participant observer of daily life at South Boulevard. Parental involvement lasted six years—nearly two of which were spent as a researcher immersed in the school. I conducted on-site participant observation for one full academic semester, with follow-up fieldwork for two subsequent semesters. In addition to school hours, I attended open houses, recruiting events, monthly PTO and school board meetings, fundraisers, field trips, and carnivals. Acting as both insider and outsider (Spradley 1980) gave me automatic entrée with many study participants. My experience as a Spanish teacher facilitated interactions with teachers.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with 53 total participants. Table 1 displays pertinent information about the interview

participants. Although the primary source of data was a single, one-hour interview, some follow-up interviews were conducted. Using purposeful sampling, I selected participants who reflected the diversity of backgrounds and perspectives found in the school community. I also used a form of snowball sampling, asking school staff and parents to recommend people to interview. Teacher interview participants included Spanish and French immersion teachers, English Language Arts teachers, and school administrators.

Table 1: Interviewees

	Teachers	Parents	Students	School-level administrators	District-level administrators	School board members
Current	9	24	7	2	2	2
Former	4	1	2	1	1	0

Because the focus of the larger study was parents' rationale in choosing South Boulevard, the majority of interview participants were parents. Parent interviews covered parents' pre-school choices; types of schools they visited prior to choosing; resources used to gather information regarding available choices; rationale for choosing South Boulevard; and parents' retroactive evaluation of the decision. Table 2 illustrates the diversity of parents in the sample—including gender, race, professional background, and marital status—factors previously identified as significant in the school choice process (Bankston and Caldas 2002). Participants from diverse religious backgrounds were included because of Louisiana's history of parochial schooling. Pseudonyms are used throughout to maintain participants' anonymity.

Data analysis was an inductive process wherein themes, patterns, and categories emerged based on the raw data (interview transcripts and fieldnotes). Verbatim interview transcripts, meeting minutes, and fieldwork journal notes were analyzed line by line, breaking the data down into units of meaning that served as themes that were first subjected to a systematic content analysis and then the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Events, ideas, themes, processes, or happenings that shared common characteristics were placed into the same code. In the initial analysis of parent interview data, for instance, each unit of meaning was placed into one of the following broad themes: 1) comments about themselves, 2) comments about choosing South Boulevard, 3) comments about South Boulevard students, and 4) comments about magnet programs. These themes were then subdivided into ten emergent categories (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Unifying phrases and themes that emerged across categories were identified. These codes or categories serve as the basis of the data analysis.

The Study Context: Present-day South Boulevard

South Boulevard is one of the smallest public elementary schools in East Baton Rouge Parish (EBRP), with only 211 students enrolled in 2006-2007. Like many EBRP schools, the physical facility of South Boulevard is dilapidated and deteriorated due to years of neglect and failed property tax renewals.

Table 2: Current South Boulevard parents in the study sample

Pseudonym	Children at SB	Race	Gender	Origin (LA or other)	Education	Profession	Religion	Marital status
Alicia	2	B	F	Baton Rouge, LA	Ph.D.	professor	"Christian pluralist"	married
Andrea	2	W	F	New Orleans, LA	some college	self-employed	Catholic	married
Anthony	1	B	M	Baton Rouge, LA	BS	graduate student	Raised Catholic, not practicing	married
Brad	1	W	M	other	Ph.D.	engineer	none	married
Bridget	1	W	F	other	BA	stay-at-home-mom	none	married
Camille	3	B	F	Baton Rouge, LA	MA	State employee / on-line college instructor	Baptist	married
Christian	2	W	M	Baton Rouge, LA	BA	self-employed	none	married
David	1	W	M	Baton Rouge, LA	some college	bartender / LSU student	Raised Catholic, not practicing	single
Denise	2	W	F	Baton Rouge, LA	MA, Ed.S.	Nationally Board Certified Teacher	Raised Catholic, not practicing	married
Donald	1	B	M	Baton Rouge, LA	some college	firefighter	none	single
Felicia	2	B	F	Baton Rouge, LA	HS	bank teller	evangelical	single
Hong	2	A	F	Vietnam	BS	lab tech.	Catholic	married
Javier	1	H	M	other	Bible school	pastor	evangelical	married
Ken	3	B	M	New Orleans, LA	MA	estate planning	Methodist; wife is Catholic	married
Laura	1	H	F	other	Bible school	pastor	evangelical	married
Liz	1	W	F	other	MA	stay-at-home-mom	none	married
Mona	1	B	F	Baton Rouge, LA	BS	night police dispatcher	none	single
Richard	3	W	M	Baton Rouge, LA	some college	state employee	Muslim	married
Shannon	2	W	F	other	BS	engineer	Baptist	married
Susan	1	W	F	other	some college	legal assistant	Lutheran	single
Tanecia	3	B	F	Opelousas, LA	MA	librarian	Muslim	married
Terrence	2	B	M	Baton Rouge, LA	some college	firefighter / realtor	Raised Catholic, not practicing	married
Tracy	2	B	F	Baton Rouge, LA	MA	community college instructor	Baptist	married
Yolanda	1	B	F	Baton Rouge, LA	MA	state employee	Baptist	single

Originally built in 1949 by renowned local architect A. Hayes Town, South Boulevard is comprised of multiple buildings laid out on a sloping piece of property near downtown Baton Rouge. The exterior windows are covered with several layers of peeling paint. Huge rust and mildew stains streak down the bricks of the school exterior. Rusted barbed wire tops the fence around the perimeter of the building.

The interior of the building suffers similarly from decades of neglect, except for the entryway, which was updated in 2002. A large, colorful world map rug greets visitors as they enter the door and welcoming phrases, such as "Bonjour" and "Bienvenidos" are painted on the walls in multiple languages and colors. Beyond the entryway, the building remains in its original form. Inside the classrooms, walls of windows

are covered by broken Venetian blinds. Huge air conditioning units hang precariously from the ceilings. During one site visit, a teacher was re-arranging her classroom because she had grown tired of "black chunks falling out of the air conditioner" onto her desk.

The original school gym has never been updated and does not have air conditioning. Many gym floor tiles are broken, cracked, or missing. The gym is littered with old equipment, such as a broken pommel horse, that has not been used in years. Students regularly use the gym for P.E. as well as for daily morning assemblies. All school-wide meetings and programs are held in the gym, where parents sweat in the south Louisiana heat. The poor condition of the playground rivals that of the gym. Original playground equipment includes an old set of climbing equipment with peeling red paint, a set of six swings (several of which are broken), and a low balance beam.

The small cafeteria accommodates only 128 students. Two rusty wall-mount air conditioning units and two floor fans run continuously to try to keep the temperature down. The speech teacher's "office" (a teacher's desk and a student desk hidden behind a wall divider) is crammed into one corner. The library is something of a school hub despite its small size. Fourth- and fifth-grade girls gossip at stone patio tables outside the library during recess. The view from those tables is the expansive interstate (I-10) that extends from Texas to Florida. Noise from the interstate is resounding to newcomers, but students and teachers are accustomed to it.

The physical facility of South Boulevard stands as a monument of sorts to the consequences of lack of community support in terms of tax dollars allocated for education. Indeed, the EBRP community voted down every tax proposal between 1964 and 1998 that would have provided for construction of new public schools and maintenance of old ones (Jacobs 2008). In order to better understand the socio-political conditions present in order for South Boulevard to be in its current condition, I turn now to a brief history of education in Baton Rouge.

History of Education in Baton Rouge

Anderson (1988) identifies two contradictory traditions regarding education in the antebellum South: a campaign to repress and even criminalize literacy among Blacks and a campaign for free public education for Whites. Baton Rouge is somewhat unique, however, because of its long history of private and parochial education. Before the Civil War, in fact, there was no public education in Baton Rouge (Carleton 1981; Frazier 1937). Many believed that public schools were primarily for poor children (Stone 1992; Suarez 2004). Children of wealthy White planters and some free people of color attended parochial schools or had private tutors (Carleton 1981). Some slaves learned to read and write in informal settings, secret meetings, and churches—even though it was a felony to teach slaves to read and write (punishable by one to 12 months in prison) (Middleton 1984).

After Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox in 1865, Blacks exulted in the potential of their newly-acquired freedom. They first sought to reestablish relationships split by the slave auctions of the past, clamoring to county courthouses to register their marriages and record the names and birthdates of their children (Ripley 1976). Congress quickly passed the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth

Amendments to the Constitution and the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which entitled emancipated slaves to full civil liberties under the law. Former slaves also sought to attain educational opportunities. Northern churches and missionaries and the Freedmen's Bureau established schools for emancipated slaves. By 1865, the Freedmen's Bureau was operating four schools for Black children in EBRP, with a total of 902 students (Ripley 1976). Sixty Sunday schools and twenty night schools also operated in southern Louisiana (Crouch 2000). For Blacks in Louisiana, civil rights and equal educational opportunity had become synonymous.

In 1877, however, Union soldiers withdrew from Louisiana and the former White planter elite of the Democratic Party returned to power, chasing Blacks from the state legislature and imposing the "Jim Crow" system of segregated public facilities on Louisiana. In the infamous 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of racial segregation throughout the nation. A new state constitution in 1898 required that voters own property, pay a poll tax, and demonstrate literacy. These restrictions disfranchised thousands of former slaves who had been able to vote between 1868 and 1898.

Despite socio-political tensions, private and public education for Blacks in Baton Rouge grew tremendously during this period. In EBRP, two Black public schools were established by 1877 and were consolidated into the Hickory Street School in 1891. Black enrollment at the Hickory Street School grew from 176 students in 1907-08 to 1,045 students in 1912. Overcrowding was such a problem that some Black schools held half-day sessions in the lower elementary grades to accommodate increased enrollment. In 1914, the first modern school building for Blacks in Louisiana was built with $25,000 from a bond issue. According to Frazier, construction of this new building had an "electric effect upon the general attitude of Negroes in Baton Rouge in respect to public education" (Frazier 1937, 77). The city built the Reddy Street School in 1916 and the Scott Street School in 1920 to accommodate increased enrollment.

McKinley High School, the first Black EBRP public high school, was built in 1926. At the time, there were only three other Black public high schools in Louisiana. Black high school students from the greater Baton Rouge area flocked to McKinley, a "showplace for Negro schools in the state, and people from Louisiana and the surrounding states came to observe the new school" (Gaston 1971, 82). McKinley High School was a first-rate institution and the centerpiece of the Black community in Baton Rouge.

Despite the strides made in terms of public education for Blacks, Table 3 illustrates the inequities between the two systems (Frazier 1937). White parish school boards controlled public education and strove to limit education for Blacks.

Despite the inequities and obstacles they faced, the Black community in Baton Rouge fought tirelessly to educate their children and took pride in their progress.

A History of South Boulevard

This dual school system was in place when Beauregard (now South Boulevard) Elementary was originally built. In 1949, 158 White students enrolled at Beauregard Elementary while 1,091 Black students—many of whom lived in Beauregard Town (one of the oldest neighborhoods in Baton Rouge)—

Table 3: Comparison of Black and White schooling in EBRP, 1934-35

1934-35	Blacks	Whites
Average daily attendance	5,361	8,403
Teacher/Pupil ratio	1:61	1:27
Average elementary teacher salary	$479.62/year	$1,002.03/year
Average high school teacher salary	$824.34	$1,179.26
Per pupil expenditures	$10.01	$60.82
Percent of total enrollment	39%	61%
Percentage of total school budget	13%	87%

enrolled at Reddy Street Elementary, about a half mile away (Staff 1949). While overcrowding was a system-wide problem, it affected Black schools more than White schools. According to a January 1, 1949 *State Times* article, "The negro school system is very badly overcrowded, the facilities for negro high school students being sufficient for only 630 students while there should be accommodation for approximately 2,750" (Staff 1949). Table 4 illustrates some of the disparities between Black and White schools in EBRP during this time. The inequity between White and Black schooling in Baton Rouge demonstrates that attitudes regarding segregation and White supremacy were deeply entrenched in Baton Rouge. Education was a primary site in which those prevailing attitudes were enacted and reinforced (Anderson 1988; Reynolds and Schramm 2002).

Table 4. Comparison of Black and White schools in EBRP, 1949

1949	EBRP Black Schools	EBRP White Schools
Average daily attendance	6,393	10,860
Teacher/Pupil ratio	1:33	1:23
Per pupil expenditures (1945)	$44.87	$141.92

(Data obtained from the Louisiana Department of Education Annual and Statistical Report for 1945 and from the *Baton Rouge Advocate*)

Despite the landmark *Brown* ruling that declared segregated schools unconstitutional, Whites maintained segregated schools as they had always done (Brown 2004; Cremin 1988). EBRP schools were no exception. The EBRP Black community responded by demanding compliance with the court mandate. In 1956, thirty-seven North Baton Rouge Black parents (in conjunction with the NAACP) whose children were denied admission to White schools challenged the constitutionality of EBRP's de facto segregated school system (Davis, et al. 1961). The case, which remained opened and contested until 2007, became one of the nation's longest running desegregation lawsuits.

In 1959, Beauregard Elementary became a "Negro" school, its name was changed to South Boulevard Elementary, and enrollment soared from 195 White students in 1958 to 341 Black students in 1960. Enrollment reached its peak in 1966 with 539 Black students—a staggering number of students for a small building that currently houses approximately 250 students (including 2 portable buildings).

Louisiana schools were still completely segregated and unequally funded ten years after *Brown*. In 1964, out of 1,442 public schools in Louisiana, 510 were Black and 932 were White (Stone 1992). In 1966-67, the per pupil inventory value of school facilities was $1,303.74 for White schools and $1,090.95 for Black schools (Davis 1999). Rather than forcibly desegregate schools, the EBRP school board initiated a "freedom of choice" plan which theoretically allowed students to voluntarily integrate. In 1963, 28 Black high school seniors voluntarily integrated four selected EBRP White high schools. In 1968, in the *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County, Virginia* decision (Green), the Supreme Court ruled freedom of choice plans unconstitutional because they had not been successful in integrating single-race schools. The results of freedom of choice desegregation in EBRP were as follows: 70 out of 101 EBRP schools were less than one percent integrated in the 1968-69 school year (Davis 1999).

After freedom of choice integration failed, EBRP desegregated school personnel, buses, and extracurricular activities in 1970-71 in an event known as the "cross-over." In EBRP, sixty-five percent of Black and 35% of White teachers were reassigned by court order to schools in which students were predominantly of a different race (Davis 1999). Nationwide, staff integration had devastating consequences for Black teachers and administrators, many of whom had long served as role models in the Black community. While White principalships in Louisiana increased from 940 in 1969 to 1,043 in 1971, Black principalships decreased from 512 in 1966 to 363 (Butler 1974; Karpinski 2006).

Two White cross-over teachers from South Boulevard participated in this study. Ms. Weber, a novice White teacher who replaced a veteran Black teacher in 1971, confessed that when she first got to South Boulevard, "it was a total shock. I don't even know if I had ever spoken to a Black child before. And there I was in school with all Black children." Ms. Weber described it as a difficult transition: "We [the White cross over teachers] kind of tended to huddle together a little bit. And they didn't know what to do with us. And we didn't know exactly how to fit in with them." She described the Black teachers as "very guarded…here are these White teachers coming in and looking at us, watching what we're doing."

Ms. Weber described South Boulevard as a "neighborhood school where all the Black students and Black teachers knew each other. They were very close. It was pretty much a closed community just like the White schools in our neighborhoods." She described the students as "very poor. Almost all of them, if not every one of them, ate free lunch…whether they deserved it or not." She recounted the following story: "This one kid came back in the sixth grade and told us about his summer vacation. He had been to the Bahamas and came back and ate free lunch. So that's the kind of thing that went on. And if they didn't qualify, they found a way to qualify." She explained that "you couldn't smile, you had to be strict, and you had to have eyes all over your head because they were tricky. They just did things. You had to be so sharp and guarded all the time." She described the Black students as unmotivated and prone to "a lot of mischief and misbehavior" and the Black teachers as having "dubious qualifications from bogus or nonexistent schools." Ms. Weber taught at South Boulevard for five years before she obtained a teaching position at a majority-White suburban school.

The other White teacher in the study sample, Ms. Lincoln**,** served as a gifted resource teacher at South Boulevard from 1979-1998. Ms. Lincoln, who described herself as a "South Boulevardian," said, "I loved South Boulevard; I hated to leave it. South Boulevard got into my blood." Ms. Lincoln said the students were "all neighborhood children, so there was an awful lot of free lunches. A very, very, very high percentage." When asked to compare South Boulevard to other EBRP schools, Ms. Lincoln said: "We held our own. We prided ourselves in getting as much as we could out of the children. We did a *lot* for our children. We had a student council. We had crossing guards. We had Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts that serviced the school." These vastly different stories are examples of the powerful forces both for and against school desegregation in Baton Rouge.

In 1972, the federal government passed the Emergency School Aid Act, which called for the use of magnet programs to desegregate schools. EBRP opened its first magnet program at Baton Rouge High in 1976. The criteria for admission into the academic and arts magnet included the following: a minimum 2.5 grade average, ability to read on grade-level, interest in the program, and parental consent. A middle school magnet program was created at Glasgow Middle School in 1979 (Staff 1979). The school received nearly 1,900 applications—465 from Blacks and 1,421 from Whites—for only 750 seats in the program.

Because the schools were still racially segregated, Federal District Court Judge John Parker closed fifteen EBRP schools in 1981 to achieve more racially-balanced school populations. Judge Parker's plan paired formerly White and formerly Black schools and assigned students to schools based on racial quotas. Parents indicated their first, second, third, and fourth choice schools, but according to a 5 August 1981 article in the Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate*, approximately 30 percent did not get their first or second choice school (McClain August 5, 1981). Students were bussed to their newly-assigned school. That year, nineteen percent of the non-Black students (approximately 7,000) left the EBRP public school system.

In the context of these system-wide changes, South Boulevard became one of two dedicated[2] extended day magnet schools. Designed for working parents, the extended day

magnet programs were open from 7:00 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. and provided tutoring and enrichment activities for students. The school system bore all costs associated with the before- and after-school care. A 15 August 1981 article in the Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate* explains that Judge Parker set target student enrollments for these two programs at 60 percent White and 40 percent Black (McClain August 15, 1981).

Numerous people who worked at South Boulevard during this period participated in this study, including four teachers, one administrator, and one parent of a student who attended South Boulevard. Interview and test score data reveal a successful school that provided quality before- and after-school enrichment programs and a rigorous academic program. Linda, a South Boulevard parent, recalled that "there was always a waiting list to get into the school. So you had to apply and hope that you would be one of the ones that got in." Teachers agreed that the program was highly valued by the families it served. Ms. Brown, a White South Boulevard veteran teacher of thirty years, noted that the students "treated each other just like siblings because they came early in the morning at 7:00, and we kept them until 5:30. We did everything but bathe 'em and put 'em to bed, almost."

Because no bus transportation was provided, parents dropped off their children every morning and picked them up every afternoon. Ms. Lawson, a White teacher, recalled: "You met the parents face-to-face daily. So if there was a problem, you had that communication on a daily basis." Ms. Johnson, a Black teacher who taught at South Boulevard for 18 years, said that the greatest strength of South Boulevard during this time period was the "cohesiveness of the faculty and their willingness to put in the extra time for the benefit of the children." Ms. Johnson said that parents "wanted their children there because of the high academic achievement that the students experienced." Thus, South Boulevard has a long history of high expectations and student achievement.

None of the staff members recalled what the racial ratios were, although they did remember that they were required to fulfill a race-based quota. Ms. Lawson explained that "the purpose of the court order was to desegregate, and we did. It was effective. You had kids who came from all walks of life. We had kids who were neighborhood kids who walked to school, and we had kids from the Country Club of Louisiana." Although the South Boulevard magnet program was successful between 1981 and 1988 in terms of desegregation (as shown in Table 5) and in providing a quality program valued by students and parents, the percentage of non-Blacks began to decrease after 1988, which reflects the trend in the district student population during the same time period.

In 1996, a Consent Decree (1966) - a ruling by the court to which all parties in the desegregation litigation agreed - replaced busing with community-based attendance zones that allowed most students to attend schools near their homes and created 24 new magnet programs to attract White students to attend majority-Black schools in an effort to achieve racial balance. The Consent Decree states that magnet programs are "the primary tool for desegregating the predominantly Black schools in the inner city." One of the new magnet programs was a foreign language immersion program at South Boulevard, which began in the fall of 1996 with one Spanish immersion

Table 5: Student enrollment at South Boulevard, 1980-1995

Year	Total Enrollment	Black	% of Total	Non-Black	% of Total
1980	195	192	98%	3	2%
1981	219	144	66%	75	34%
1982	233	116	50%	117	50%
1983	254	122	48%	132	52%
1984	253	121	48%	132	52%
1985	244	118	48%	126	52%
1986	278	138	50%	140	50%
1987	296	144	49%	152	51%
1988	294	156	53%	138	47%
1989	288	163	57%	125	43%
1990	290	164	57%	126	43%
1991	299	162	54%	137	46%
1992	283	161	57%	122	43%
1993	277	168	61%	109	39%
1994	263	169	64%	94	36%
1995	279	191	68%	88	32%

kindergarten class. The non-immersion students were grandfathered in—that is, they were allowed to stay at the school through fifth grade even though they did not participate in the immersion program. Out of 277 total students in 1996, 187 were Black (68%) and 90 were non-Black (32%).

A French immersion program moved from Winbourne Elementary to South Boulevard in 2002, making it the only Louisiana public school offering French *and* Spanish immersion. In 2002, there were two kindergarten classes: one Spanish immersion and one French immersion. One French and one Spanish immersion class were added each year until the immersion program was K-5. Table 6 shows the school enrollment from 1996 to 2007.

The immersion program brought about notable shifts in the racial composition of the teaching staff. As the immersion program grew, regular classroom teachers (many of whom were Black) were replaced by native-speaking immersion teachers. In 1991, there were eight White and seven Black teachers. In 1995, there were 10 White teachers and 11 Black teachers. Of the current 18 teachers in levels K-5 (each grade level has one Spanish, one French, and one English Language Arts teachers), only two are Black, six are Hispanic, and ten are White (including six from France and Belgium). Thus, one consequence of the implementation of the immersion program has been a decrease in Black teachers (Karpinski 2006). In 2003, the parties involved in the desegregation suit agreed to a Final Settlement Agreement (FSA). The FSA pared down the number of magnet programs to thirteen, including six elementary programs. The prescribed enrollment target for the dedicated magnet schools—one of which was South Boulevard—was 55% Black, 45% non-Black. The FSA stated that during the first two school years of the four-year term of the

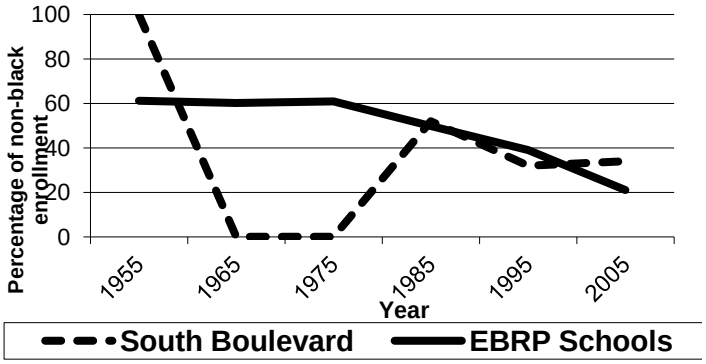
Table 6: South Boulevard student enrollment, 1996-2007

Year	Total K-5	Black	% of Total	Non-Black	% of Total	Free/Red Lunch
1996	268	194	72%	74	28%	59%
1997	277	187	68%	90	33%	64%
1998	243	175	72%	68	28%	49%
1999	240	177	74%	63	26%	53%
2000	226	178	79%	48	21%	65%
2001	225	181	80%	44	20%	69%
2002	242	190	79%	52	22%	65%
2003	249	200	80%	49	20%	71%
2004	225	167	74%	58	26%	62%
2005	231	153	66%	78	34%	65%
2006	208	138	66%	70	34%	53%
2007	204	119	58%	85	42%	59%

agreement, if there were insufficient applications from either Black or non-Black students to fulfill these quotas, "the magnet school shall be operated with empty seats *notwithstanding the existence of a waiting list*." Beginning with the third year, the Board would be allowed to admit students from the waiting list regardless of their race and the subsequent effect on the target ratio.

In 2003, South Boulevard's student population was 80% Black and 20% non-Black—a far cry from the 55% Black, 45% non-Black ratio targeted in the FSA. By 2007, enrollment was 59% Black, 41% non-Black. Figure 1 compares enrollment trends at South Boulevard with the EBRP district as a whole.

Figure 1: Percentage of non-Black enrollment at South Boulevard and in the EBRP district, 1945-2005



(Data obtained from Louisiana School Directories and Louisiana State Department of Education Annual Financial and Statistical Reports.)

This level of racial diversity is noteworthy considering that it has occurred in the same time period during which the overall student population of EBRP schools has become increasingly Black.

Contemporary Perspectives that Reflect Historical Themes

Current South Boulevard parents, students, and teachers shared experiences reflective of three themes pertaining to the relationship between race and the history of education: 1) pride in community schools, 2) the importance of a rigorous education, and 3) perseverance in obtaining quality education for their children.

Current South Boulevard parents in the sample are proud of their school and are highly involved in their children's education, in both formal and informal ways. Teachers and administrators described significant parental involvement at South Boulevard. Ms. Richard, one of only two Black South Boulevard teachers, similarly said: "All I have to do is make one phone call in my room and I get parents in there." Donald, a Black father and firefighter, visits his son's classroom frequently: "I like that you can come in any time you want and pop in the classroom. I stop by all the time and just sit in the classroom for one or two hours."

Parents have become increasingly involved since the creation of the PTO in fall 2005, when a group of five to seven mothers created an official parent-school organization to ensure the longevity of the program. The newly-created PTO successfully lobbied the EBRP central administrative personnel to continue the immersion program at the middle school level. In a parent survey drafted and conducted by the PTO in March 2006, 114 out of 166 parents that they were "interested" or "very interested" in a middle school immersion program. The PTO then encouraged parents to sign a petition and to write letters, send e-mails, and call district administrators and school board members to lobby for a middle school immersion program. In March 2007, the school board approved a proposal to continue the immersion program at a selected middle school. In addition to its advocacy role, the PTO has raised funds to buy additional library books, new equipment for a computer lab and the playground, and miscellaneous items for classroom teachers. These fundraising efforts, which included Black and White parents, are reminiscent of the ways in which Black Southerners financed early Black schools with private contributions despite paying taxes that were supposed to fund public schools (Anderson 1988).

South Boulevard parents are proud of their school; they make sacrifices to get their children to school; they raise money to support the school. During interviews, I asked parents what they tell other people about South Boulevard. Tracy, a Black mother of two South Boulevard students, said: "I tell people it's a *great*, great program. It's wonderful. We love it." When I asked Donald, a Black father, that question, he laughed and said: "I tell them that they're paying for something [private school tuition] that our kids get for free that's better." Although families live significant distances from the school, I argue that the sense of community surrounding the school acts as a surrogate for the sense of community present in former neighborhood schools and in all-Black schools prior to desegregation (Hendry and Edwards 2009; Jones-Wilson 1981; Siddle Walker 1996).

Despite the fact that all parent participants were similarly proud of South Boulevard, the school is perceived differently in Black and non-Black communities. South Boulevard, which was an all-Black school between 1959 and 1981, has a reputation in the Black community as being an excellent school. Former Black school board member Patricia Haynes-Smith confirmed this reputation when she said that South Boulevard "was a good school when it was a neighborhood school. People who live around there now want to know why they can't go to that school. It's a tradition." South Boulevard teachers concurred that academic rigor was particularly important to Black parents. School principal Ms. Miller, for instance, explained that "young Black families know about South Boulevard. And they know about the immersion program. And they want their kids in it." South Boulevard does not enjoy a similar reputation in the non-Black community. While many Blacks know South Boulevard is a good school, many non-Blacks remain unconvinced that an excellent education can be attained in an EBRP public school.

A second historical theme discussed by current South Boulevard parents is the importance of a rigorous education. Black and non-Black parents in the study sample stressed the importance of a rigorous curriculum in their decision to send their children to South Boulevard. According to Ken, a Black estate planner, "People get over the racial issue when the degree of excellence is way up there. When you create institutions of excellence, everybody wants to go to that watering hole. The only way you are going to desegregate, *today*, is…quality. Go for excellence at all levels. And people will get past their getups." Tracy explained, "Well, especially with foreign language. It's the only one of its kind around here. So that is a big plus. More academics. More challenging. More opportunities there." Yolanda, a Black mother, said that her son Sylvester, a South Boulevard student, has "probably gotten ten times the advantages" over her older son, who attends a non-magnet public school.

Parents in the sample valued the educational quality of the school more than its location or condition. When I asked Ken, who had been paying $30,000 per year in private school tuition before he moved his three children to South Boulevard, about South Boulevard's physical facility, he shrugged and said: "We can donate our time and some money. We can come paint the bathroom. If the principal says, 'We need to have a clean-up weekend,' we'll be there. With paintbrushes in hand." Like many poorly funded Black schools prior to *Brown*, South Boulevard provides a quality education despite its poor physical condition and continues to be a source of pride for its students, teachers, and parents.

A third theme that reflects the history of race and education is parents' perseverance in providing education for their children. Numerous Black parents in this study expressed frustration regarding the magnet admissions process. In EBRP, student race was a factor in magnet program admissions between 1981 and 2006, when the magnet programs were obligated to comply with the 55% Black, 45% non-Black quotas outlined in the FSA. Students fell into one of only two categories: Black and non-Black. Beginning in 2007, a socioeconomic status quota (55% full-pay lunch, 45% free-reduced lunch) replaced the racial quota.

Black parents in the sample complained about the unfairness of racial quotas and the lottery—used when a magnet program receives

more applications than it has available seats, which happens every year at every EBRP magnet program. Camille, a Black state employee, complained that the quota makes it harder for Black students to get in to the magnet programs because more Blacks apply than non-Blacks. She said, "Because of deseg, you now have this lottery pick to get into the schools. So if you don't have a sibling already in that school, you play hell trying to get in. My coworker here has applied for visual arts [magnet] three years in a row and has not been able to get her Black male son in. Because they don't have any openings for Black male children." Anthony felt it was unfair to use race as a means to exclude people: "I don't think that there should be schools that exclude anyone because of race."

Non-Black parents did not have similar complaints or misgivings about the way the application process works. This is not surprising since for years, non-Blacks have been allowed to occupy 45% of the spaces in magnet programs—which is significantly more than the 13% of the total school enrollment they currently represent. Magnet programs generally have many more Black applicants than non-Black applicants. At South Boulevard, for instance, 51 Black students and 0 non-Black students were on the waiting list for the 2006-2007 school year. Because the quotas privilege non-Black children, all the non-Black students who applied got in.

Liz, a White mother with a Master's degree in mathematics, agreed with Camille that the quotas favor non-Black students. She explained, "Because there are more Blacks in the public school system, they get shut out of better programs. There's only a certain number of slots in the magnet schools, so there's more competition among the Black people for those slots. White people have an easier chance of getting into a magnet school, which is unfair to Black people."

Andrea, a White bookkeeper, similarly explained that "if you want to go to South, your chances of going there are better if you're White. If you're White, it's almost like a step right on into the door."

Several Black parents also expressed confusion and even skepticism regarding the lottery for admission into EBRP magnet programs. Terrence, a Black firefighter and real estate agent, and Camille spoke extensively about the lottery. Terrence scoffed and said that the "supposed waiting list and a lottery" were "a bunch of bull." When I asked him how he thought his daughter got in, he said, in a somewhat humorous tone: "I don't know. I was real sweet to the lady at the East Baton Rouge School office." Camille lamented, "There's always a waiting list for the Black female or the Black male, but they always have a non-Black spot available. And I don't understand why. If you have that available, why couldn't it be made open to whomever that wants to get in?"

These frustrations are reminiscent of charges made by the Black community regarding the unequal distribution of resources in segregated schools. While all parents in the study sample agreed that diversity in schools is a good goal, some Black parents had a sense of unfairness and a distrust of the school system. Camille summarized their sentiments when she said: "You ought to be able to get into a public school because that's what the word means: 'public.' It should be open to everyone regardless of race."

Like members of the Black community since emancipation, however, Black parents in

the study exercised self-determination in getting their children into South Boulevard, where they were confident their children would receive a quality education, despite institutional practices (like the quotas and the lottery) that sought to exclude them. Because several Black South Boulevard families do not technically live in EBRP, they use a friend's or relative's address on official paperwork so that their children can continue to attend South Boulevard. The school librarian, who confessed that the school administration knows that they should not be allowed to attend South Boulevard, explained, "We know about that. But we just look the other way."

Tanecia's story of how she had to manipulate the system so that her son could get into South Boulevard illustrates the complexity of race when it collides with quotas and school policy. Tanecia is Black and her husband Richard is White. Tanecia recounted her experience when she applied for her oldest son to get into South Boulevard:

> When I first applied for Thomas to get in, I put that he was Black, because I'm the mom and I'm writing the application. He got denied and I was upset. So I called the school and said: 'Why can't he be in the program?,' and they said: 'We've reached our quota for Black students. And I said: Well, his father is White. Can I put *White*?' And they said: 'Sure.' So I put White and he was accepted. I got lucky because I'm married to a White guy. What if I wasn't married to a White guy?

Thus Tanecia sacrificed part of her own identity - on paper, at least - in order to get her son into South Boulevard.

This kind of perseverance and improvisation was not necessary among the non-Black parents in the study sample—none of whom mentioned frustration with the admissions process or shared stories of friends or family members unable to get their children in to magnet programs. Thus, Black and non-Black parents experience the magnet admissions process differently. Black parents feel that the system tries to cheat their children out of coveted spots in magnet programs, while non-Black parents almost take it for granted that their children will be able to get in to one of these programs. Like Black parents during the Jim Crow era who were determined to educate their children despite a legal system that was set against them, Black parents at South Boulevard are dedicated to getting their children into good schools despite a system they feel treats them unfairly.

Conclusion

South Boulevard has been at the intersection of race and education since it first opened its doors in 1949. The South Boulevard community has undergone numerous layers of change, including demographic changes, changes in teaching staff, and curricular changes.

The history of South Boulevard illustrates several themes central to the history of race and education. Although some differences emerged in the ways that Black and non-Black parents perceived South Boulevard and the magnet admissions process, all parents in the study sample exhibit behaviors and sentiments that have been important to parents throughout

history. First, Black and non-Black parents in the study sample take pride in their children's school and support it with their time, energy, and resources. Second, all parents in the study valued educational quality more than the location or condition of the physical facility. They want their children to experience the additional challenge of learning a second language and are satisfied that their children are pushed academically at South Boulevard. Third, Black and non-Black parents demonstrated perseverance and determination in making sure their children receive a quality education. All parents in the study sample were proactive in choosing what they determined to be the best school for their children and found ways to make the system work for them and for their children.

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[1] I use the terms "Black" and "non-Black" because these are the terms that were used throughout the era of court-ordered desegregation in Louisiana. I use "White" when other researchers or data sources use it.
[2] A dedicated magnet program is a school in which the entire student population participates in the magnet program.