



October 1, 2025

ISSN 1094-5296

Buras, K. (2025). *What we stand to lose: Black teachers, the culture they created, and the closure of a New Orleans high school.* Beacon Press.

288 pp.

ISBN-10: 0807019496

**Reviewed by Mercedes K. Schneider¹
St. Tammany Parish Public Schools (LA)
United States**

I was born in 1967 in Chalmette, Louisiana, St. Bernard Parish, a suburb of New Orleans so close to the city that it is the actual site of the 1815 Battle of New Orleans.

I did not know that my father moved to Chalmette in the mid-1950s as part of the “White flight” from New Orleans.

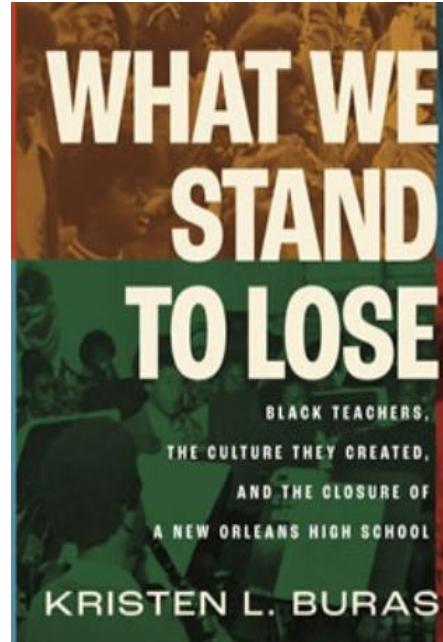
I did not know why the St. Bernard-Orleans Parish line was so starkly White on the St. Bernard side and Black on the Orleans side.

I did not know that the Black teachers at my all-White elementary and middle schools were part of an effort for local officials to dodge federal mandates to racially integrate the schools – as in integrating the student body.

I do remember seeing what I think was one Black student in the special education, self-contained classroom of my elementary school – such an unusual, remarkable event that it puzzled my young mind to see him as a student assistant in the cafeteria, and the moment remains clearly in my memory to this day.

I did not know that when I moved to a more rural section of St. Bernard Parish as I started high school that the African-American residents “down the road” knew full well of the dangers of trying to reside in certain sections of the parish, viz., Chalmette and Arabi.

I did not know that the school-superintendent uncle of one of my favorite teachers tried, circa 1961, to create an “annex school” near the Arabi-New Orleans city line in order to enable White parents in the city to avoid racial integration by using school vouchers from New Orleans to enroll their children in an all-White public school just across the parish line.



¹ This review is reprinted from the review author’s blog, *deutsch29: Mercedes Schneider's Blog*, <https://deutsch29.wordpress.com>.

Schneider, M. (2025, October 1). Review of *What we stand to lose: Black teachers, the culture they created, and the closure of a New Orleans high school*, by K. L. Buras. *Education Review*, 32. <https://doi.org/10.14507/er.v32.4297>

I did not know that the proliferation of parochial schools in New Orleans was fueled by White flight from the New Orleans public schools.

I did not know that the reason I attended an all-girls public middle- and high school was for local officials to try to sham-integrate the St. Bernard public schools but to keep “those Black boys away from our White girls.”

There’s a lot that I did not know and did not begin to learn until I was in my twenties and started asking questions. But there were a lot of lessons that many White adults in my life tried to instill in me, lessons that indeed needed some serious questioning:

“You know property values will drop if the Blacks start moving into a neighborhood.”

“It is better for a White woman to have a physically-abusive White boyfriend or husband than a Black one, even if he does treat her well.”

“Interracial marriage is cause for a family disowning a child.”

“The city is a wreck because Blacks are lazy and destroy everything.”

As I began reading about New Orleans officials’ cross-generational efforts to obliterate the Black middle class in New Orleans – for example, by destroying multiple Black owned businesses in order to build both the Desire housing project in 1956 and construct Interstate 10 in 1966 – I felt like I had been lied to for decades, and my views as a White child and young adult repeatedly manipulated in order to purposely cement in me a sense of White superiority that no amount of personal maturity would ever shake. Nevertheless, I am happy to say that such twisted, misplaced superiority is indeed and forever shaken in me and shown to be the mammoth lie that it is – the very lie that happens to fuel the White saviors who would impose themselves on Black communities – including the center of the community: The Community School.

The community should be the final word on its schools, and when it is, those schools are successful, even in the face of racially-imposed hardship and intentional, multi-generational deprivation of basic resources, including physical space, current textbooks, and even ready supplies of toilet paper.

Such is the story of George Washington Carver High School in New Orleans— a school created as part of a school complex and housing project and build in New Orleans, Louisiana, to intentionally be a segregated school despite its opening post-Brown vs. Board of Education.

In her book, *What We Stand to Lose*, Kristen Buras offers to readers a detailed history and daily life of G. W. Carver High School in New Orleans, from its inception to its White-savior closure in 2005, post-Katrina, when the state of Louisiana refused to grant the returning Carver community a charter to operate their own school. Buras details what no pro-charter, education reformer discussed at any length as regards traditionally-Black New Orleans public schools: the repeated, intentional, multi-generational, systematic fiscal neglect of both the schools and the Black community in New Orleans.

In contrast, Buras not only discusses these issues; she brings them to life through her numerous interviews with Carver faculty and staff, a life that begins even before Carver High School opened its doors in the 1958-59 school year.

Right out of the gate, the community served by Carver High School – families residing in the Desire Housing Project – had to face the reality that the project homes were poorly constructed and were starting to fall apart due to a lack of concrete foundations on swampland, no less.

Indeed, the location of what was known as the “Carver Complex” was originally a Maroon colony for escaped African slaves in a backswamp area that 1973 Carver graduate describes as “really not made for residential living.”

Separate was not equal, but to the Carver community, it was theirs, and in the midst of profound racism, the faculty and staff at Carver High devoted themselves to their students and the students’ families, who also happened to be their neighbors.

What speaks loudly to the teacher commitment to Carver High students, as Buras notes, is their multi-decade commitment. Despite being chronically underfunded and under-maintained across its almost-fifty years pre-Katrina, Carver High School had a very low teacher turnover.

In *What We Stand to Lose*, readers are introduced to the precise and disciplined teachings of music teacher Yvonne Busch, who was known for offering free music lessons during summer break. Former student Leonard Smith produced a documentary about Busch, who retired in 1983 after a 32-years at Carver. We learn of the 38-year career of social studies teacher, Lenora Condoll, who wanted so much for her students to experience the larger world that she organized fundraisers to take her students on Close-Up trips to Washington, DC, and who, on a practical note, showed students that they could make a dressy wardrobe out of a few basic items, including her “black, cashmere skirt.” We meet Enos Hicks, head coach of track and football and athletic director once Carver High opened. By that time, Hicks had been teaching for twenty years already. When Hicks’ students saw “his bag of medals” for track and field, they believed that they, too, could excel and receive their own medals.

These are real teachers whose legacy is undeniable among Carver alumni. They inspired their students to hold their heads high in self-respect despite the cultural pressures and dangers to be pressed into a Whites Only mold of “forever less-than.”

Carver High School was at most 30 minutes from my own high school. I had no idea such quality against the odds was so nearby.

In order to correct the record in my own mind, I need to read and reread histories like the one Buras skillfully offers in *What We Stand to Lose*; and so do any would-be, White saviors who pretend that the problems of New Orleans schools are somehow unrelated to decades of entrenched racism within the selfsame city.

In pretending that school and community quality can and should somehow be surgically separate, we all stand to lose so much.

About the Reviewer

Mercedes Schneider. I am first and foremost a teacher. I have been formally teaching in some capacity since 1991. I am a product of the St. Bernard Parish Public Schools (1972-85). I attended P.G.T. Beauregard High School, where I graduated salutatorian. I attended Louisiana State University from 1985 to 1991 and graduated with a B.S. in secondary education, English and German. I taught for two years in St. Bernard, my home, then, moved to Georgia and taught German (1993-94) and English (1994-98) for Rome City Schools. I earned my master's degree in guidance and counseling from the State University of West Georgia (1996-98). I was accepted to the counselor education program at the University of Northern Colorado in 1998, and they gave me money to attend. I began my Ph.D. in counselor education, but decided I liked all of those statistics courses well enough to transfer to the Department of Applied Statistics and Research Methods. I graduated with my Ph.D. in August 2002. In late 2002, I moved to Muncie, Indiana, to teach at Ball State University. I taught graduate-level statistics and research courses and one undergraduate course, Tests and Measurement. It was in this course that I taught students how bad an idea it was to attempt to measure teacher performance using student standardized test scores. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina destroyed my home, New Orleans. My mother chose not to evacuate and had to axe her way out of my sister's attic. She was missing for a week and ended up in Houston. It was a while before she knew that she would not have to have her right arm amputated. Even though there was no home to go to, I wanted to go home to New Orleans. In July 2007, I returned home and began a new job teaching high school English in St. Tammany Parish. I was told at the university that to "go back" to public school teaching was frowned upon and that I would not likely be able to resume a career teaching at the university. I had to reckon with that idea. But I love to teach. High school, I decided, would be fine with me. And it has been fine for the past nineteen years. I love my kids.



About the Book Author

Kristen Buras has been an anti-racist activist, teacher, and researcher for more than three decades. She is the cofounder and director of the New Orleans-based Urban South Grassroots Research Collective. She is the author of several books, including *Charter Schools, Race, and Urban Space: Where the Market Meets Grassroots Resistance*. A fellow of the National Education Policy Center, she was granted the Distinguished Scholar Activist Award by Critical Educators for Social Justice of the American Educational Research Association. She holds a doctorate in Education from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.




Education Review Reseñas Educativas
Resenhas Educativas



Education Review/ Reseñas Educativas/ Resenhas Educativas is supported by the Scholarly Communications Group at the Mary Lou Fulton College for Teaching and Learning

Innovation, Arizona State University. Copyright is retained by the first or sole author, who grants right of first publication to the *Education Review*. Readers are free to copy, display, distribute, and adapt this article, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and *Education Review*, the changes are identified, and the same license applies to the derivative work. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>.



Disclaimer: The views or opinions presented in book reviews are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of *Education Review*.