

# Reaction to: “Where They Draw the Line: School Secessions and the Resegregation of Public Schools in the United States”

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In *Where They Draw the Line: School Secessions and the Resegregation of Public Schools in the United States*, Ayana Brown illustrates the racially disparate impact of exclusionary education practices in the United States. Upon evaluating the recent successful school secession efforts in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and Memphis, Tennessee, Brown concludes that localism is an inadequate justification for school secessions. Ultimately, Brown urges courts to adopt the theory of destructive localism when deciding on the merits of school secession efforts, and further urges Congress to enact a statute, similar to Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act, as a tool to actively police school secessions. Although Brown’s propositions are intriguing, they ultimately fall short in three critical respects. First, Brown fails to effectively highlight the negative impact of school secessions on Black and Brown students, and consequently undermines her proposition that localism is an inadequate justification for school secessions. Second, Brown fails to provide any concrete data to support her assertion that school secessions perpetuate the existing racial divide in student achievement, and consequently undermines her proposition that courts should adopt the theory of destructive localism when deciding on the merits of school secession efforts. Third, Brown fails to provide any evidence to support the fundamental assumption on which the success of her propositions rely—that diverse and inclusive learning environments are beneficial to all students in public school districts.

First, Brown fails to effectively highlight the negative impact of school secessions on Black and Brown students, and consequently undermines her proposition that localism is an inadequate justification for school secessions. Specifically, Brown neglects to flesh out the negative impact of the recent successful school secession efforts on student outcomes in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. By including concrete data demonstrating the racially disparate impact of school secessions in Baton Rouge, Brown could have strengthened her argument that localism is an inadequate justification for school secessions. For example, Brown could have included data from a recent 2019 study, which found that more than half of all Black students enrolled in Baton Rouge Public Schools attended schools that had a “D” or “F” rating.<sup>1</sup> In addition, Brown could have included data from the same study, which further found that only 6.1 percent of Black students enrolled in Baton Rouge Public Schools earn a diploma with an advanced credential, whereas 36.7 percent of white students in these

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1. *Advancing Educational Equity for Public Schools in Baton Rouge Report*, URBAN LEAGUE OF LOUISIANA, 2019, at 44–45, <https://urbanleaguela.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/BR-Equity-Report-Online.pdf>.

schools earn a diploma with an advanced credential.<sup>2</sup> As a final example from this study, Brown could have included data, which demonstrated that less than 50 percent of all Latinx students in Baton Rouge Public Schools earn any kind of diploma or credential at all.<sup>3</sup> If Brown had included the foregoing data in her note, she could have better highlighted the ways in which localism disproportionately harms Black and Brown students.

Next, Brown fails to provide any concrete data to support her assertion that school secessions perpetuate the racial divide in student achievement, and consequently undermines her proposition that courts should adopt the theory of destructive localism when deciding on the merits of school secession efforts. By failing to provide any concrete data to demonstrate how school secessions perpetuate the racial divide in student outcomes that *Brown v. Board of Education* intended to correct, Brown misses an opportunity to provide sufficient evidence to urge courts to adopt the destructive localism framework. For example, Brown could have included evidence from a recent 2017 study, which found that school resegregation is generally followed by an immediate and persistent increase in dropout rates among Black and Brown students, whereas white students remain essentially unaffected.<sup>4</sup> Brown also could have included evidence from another recent study, which demonstrated that the elimination of the special district ban in Memphis, Tennessee led to fewer college preparatory classes, higher ninth-grade retention rates, and overall lower academic performance among Black students in comparison to their white peers.<sup>5</sup>

Last, Brown fails to provide any evidence to support the fundamental assumption on which the success of her propositions rely—that diverse and inclusive learning environments are beneficial to all students in public school districts. Specifically, Brown could have included evidence demonstrating the benefits of diverse and inclusive learning environments to all students. For example, Brown could have included evidence from a 2017 study, which found that middle school students from a range of racial and ethnic backgrounds felt safer, less lonely, and felt that they were bullied less when they attended schools that were more diverse.<sup>6</sup> In addition, Brown could have included evidence from a slew of other studies demonstrating that increased diversity in schools results in increased test scores, lower dropout rates, and higher college enrollment rates among students.<sup>7</sup> In view of the foregoing examples, Brown's failure to prove—or even address—the accuracy of her underlying assumption is

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2. *Id.* at 25-27.

3. *Id.*

4. David Liebowitz, *Ending to What End? The Impact of the Termination of Court-Desegregation Orders on Residential Segregation and School Dropout Rates*, EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION AND POLICY ANALYSIS (Aug. 25, 2017), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.3102/0162373717725804>.

5. Laura Kebede, *Memphis School Segregation Worse Than 50 Years Ago*, CHALKBEAT TENNESSEE (Mar. 29, 2018, 7:01 PM), <https://tn.chalkbeat.org/2018/3/29/21108492/memphis-school-segregation-worse-than-50-years-ago>.

6. Jaana Juvonen et al., *When and How Do Students Benefit From Ethnic Diversity in Middle School?*, CHILD DEV., (June 20, 2017), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6122604/>.

7. Jennifer Ayscue et al., *The Complementary Benefits of Racially and Socioeconomic Diversity in Schools*, THE NATIONAL COALITION ON SCHOOL DIVERSITY, (Mar. 2017), <https://school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo10.pdf>.

detrimental to the success of her proposition that localism is an inadequate justification for school secessions.

To conclude, although Brown presents intriguing propositions regarding the racially disparate impact of exclusionary education practices in the United States, Brown's failure to provide sufficient evidence to (1) effectively highlight the negative impact of school secessions on Black and Brown students, (2) support her assertion that school secessions perpetuate the existing racial divide in student achievement, and (3) support the underlying assumption on which the success of her propositions rely, ultimately misses critical opportunities to persuade the reader using concrete evidence and weakens her argument for court intervention.