

Towards a Developmental Model of Democratic Family Rights Policy Regimes

Tracing Federal Literacy Policy, 1968-1990

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Abstract

By excavating submerged dynamics underlying literacy accountability policy, this historical case study conceptualizes its institutional logic and political drivers. Bridging and extending theorization in American political development and racial political behavior, I contribute an original developmental model of *democratic* and *respectable family rights policy regimes* to address when, how, and why a “crisis” can shape meanings and understandings of racial equality. I use a process tracing method to collect and analyze 2,256 archival documents from 1968 to 1990, capturing change from partial federal support of culturally responsive literacy to singular promotion of White Mainstream English and heteronormative, middle-class family values. My analysis demonstrates how accountability entrepreneurs constructed and legitimized a literacy crisis via two, often linked, framing and networking mechanisms: (1) *deviance knots*, in-text associations between movements for Black interclass, intergenerational solidarity and threats to traditional family norms posed by gender, sexually, or economically marginalized classes; (2) *deputy webs*, appeals to White women and Black men as parental or paternal figures to support facially race-neutral policy carrying respectability norms. I show how these drivers of a racial double standard of family empowerment led to coalitional realignment, systematic exclusion of Black and Brown women, and narrowed ideas of equality and family. I discuss how this model deepens explanations of accountability and offers tools toward conceptualizing and evaluating democratic conditions of academic learning and family engagement.

Introduction

In explaining Florida's rejection of AP African American Studies in January 2023, Governor DeSantis said, "Now who would say that an important part of Black history is queer theory?" He framed queer theory as existing "on the wrong side of the line for Florida standards" (qtd. in Atterbury, 2023). Soon thereafter, the College Board removed intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), Black feminism, and Black queer studies as required concepts, and added Black conservatism as an optional topic, in the final curriculum (Hartocollis & Fawcett, 2023). This paper offers a novel policy model for understanding the political efficacy of DeSantis' appeal to heteronormative ideals of right and "wrong" to defend and reinforce racially conservative policy. Under a *respectable family rights policy regime*, a racial double standard of parental rights and family empowerment in civic life - which I conceptualize as a White racial institutional logic - guides policy goals, resource distribution, and evaluations. While often facially race-neutral, this racial respectability logic comprising policy frames, support networks, and designs normalizes racially asymmetrical access to public resources and decisionmaking, and racialized standards of value and achievement. In more *democratic family rights policy regimes*, policy goals, resources, and evaluations are routinely negotiated among marginalized communities and the government, with elites more responsive to the historical role of exclusionary family norms in structuring racial and social hierarchies. Emergent from my historical case study of literacy accountability, this policy model links the White racial institutional logic of family rights to political conditions and drivers whereby race, gender, sexuality, and class norms and hierarchies can become mutually reproduced. As such, I argue that tracing the development of federal literacy policy and uncovering its political and institutional dynamics analytically bridges the call of political development scholars Smith and King (2024) to conceptualize "the 'how and why' of the relationships among categories of difference and inequality" (p. 64), with the call of Black queer feminist scholars Snorton and Bost (2026) to examine "the gender and sexual norms that have upheld the color line" (p. 189).

Initiated at the federal level by the National Commission of Excellence in Education's landmark report *A Nation at Risk* (1983) and instantiated in Congress' passage of *No Child Left Behind* (2002),

accountability describes a dominant paradigm of education policy that relies on facially race- and gender-neutral content and performance standards to drive and evaluate student, teacher, and school performance (McDermott, 2011; McGuinn, 2006). This approach contrasts with culturally responsive models that include race- and gender-conscious curricula and invite teachers' and students' mutual participation and community knowledge exchange (Freire & Macedo, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Primary oversight for accountability was transferred from the federal government to states in the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015), where it structures academic learning conditions in many schools. Since 2013, 40 states have passed policies that include mandated standards-based literacy curricula, screening and diagnostic assessments, retention for students who fail high-stakes tests, and additional licensure test requirements for teachers (Aydarova, 2024; Thomas, 2022).

In this study, I conceptualize standards-based accountability, first, as a racial policy regime, or a paradigm of rules and norms that reinforces the White supremacist order (Smith & King, 2024). This conceptualization follows the work of education researchers who have identified mechanisms by which facially race-neutral content or performance standards can take on racialized meanings and result in field-level inequalities (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Leonardo, 2007). Namely, critics call attention to the role of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in institutionalizing literacy norms centered on White Mainstream English (Baker-Bell, 2016; Smitherman, 2006). By contrast, a legacy of literacy researchers have shown how African American Vernacular English, Spanish and Indigenous languages, and “translanguaging” (combining languages) are valid and valuable for cultural and cognitive development (Gutierrez, 2008; Lee, 2007). Substantial policy reliance on tests like the NAEP to inform and enforce fieldwide ideas of achievement has been found to lead schools and districts to craft academic and admissions policies that disproportionately constrain opportunities for racially, linguistically, and economically marginalized students and families (Au, 2022; Rosa & Flores, 2017).

Where this study departs from existing work is in my conceptualization of literacy accountability as a respectable family rights policy regime that is racially and intersectionally exclusive, and my conceptualization of culturally responsive literacy as a deviant social movement that can drive openings

for a democratic family rights policy regime. By respectable family rights policy, I refer to a mode of reproducing race, class, gender, and sexual norms and hierarchies in which elites defend the White supremacist order by legitimizing a White racial logic of family rights and respectability. In such a regime, some challengers of the White supremacist order accept and use exclusionary gender, sexual, and class norms. Already, education researchers have shown that literacy accountability can result in exclusionary school experiences for gender- and sexually marginalized subgroups of Black, Brown, and Indigenous students; that is, their voices and learning practices are treated in deficit- and damage-centered ways that overlook their cultural and intellectual resources, or are excluded altogether (Brockenbrough, 2024; Pritchard, 2016; Reid, 2022). In addition, research on teacher preparation curricula under accountability finds that these curricula often devalue and seek to “erase” the knowledge and literacy practices of Black women and mothers (Austin, 2024).

By *deviant social movement*, I refer to a policy alliance’s goals to unsettle exclusionary norms and hierarchies of race, gender, sexuality, and class by empowering Black and Brown people across age, class, gender, and sexuality. In outlining a research agenda for using deviance to study Black collective politics, Cohen (2004) suggests that deviant movements center those most vulnerable or marginalized and produce a “counter normative space [where there] exists the possibility of radical change, not only in the distribution of resources, but also definitional power, redefining the rules of normality that limit the dreams, emotions, and acts of most people” (p. 38). Spaces for Black and Brown collective self-understanding and self-expression can thus challenge and “redefine” White racial logics, including logics of family respectability. For example, goals for teaching and learning about intersectionality in an AP African American Studies course can incite deviance by strengthening Black and Brown girls’ and women’s sense of solidarity and self-determination across economic positions. While “deviant” in relation to traditional institutional orders, political scientists have shown how and why culturally responsive models of education matter for inclusive, democratic political socialization (Woodly, 2022). For example, these models of learning can support *all* students’ understanding of racial history and democracy, as well as their cultivation of civic skills such as “public voice” (Nelsen, 2023; Zukin et al., 2006). On the one

hand, the use of standards to strengthen students' learning and school improvement is seen as imperative across the education field. On the other hand, the often-coded racialization of academic standards in the accountability model and the dominance of rigid, top-down approaches can disproportionately shape and constrain students' long-term political participation based on existing race, gender, sexual, and class hierarchies (Bruch & Soss, 2018; Cohen, 2012).

These intersectional politics of literacy constitute an important, yet understudied, topic for research across education and social science. While evidence shows that literacy accountability can result in curricular and family exclusion based on race, gender, and sexuality (Willis, 2023), and that culturally responsive models can empower *all* students and teachers to learn about and challenge exclusionary norms and hierarchies (Stein et al., forthcoming), scholars do not yet have a conceptual framework accounting for upstream political and institutional dynamics shaping and driving these outcomes. Existing work on the role of education politics in racial hierarchies encourages studying shifts in literacy policy and standards to understand why and how racial orders evolve and transfigure over time (Ewing, 2025; Johnson, 2010). While sometimes overlooked, these dynamics shaping education also shape and are shaped by other racialized policy institutions (e.g., housing, immigration, criminal justice) (Nuamah & Mulroy, 2023; Steffes, 2024), calling for a political-historical analysis that can illuminate discursive or network linkages between policy domains (Perez-Brower, 2024).

In what follows, I provide historical background of federal education policy in the wake of the Great Society to clarify and contextualize my case selection. To reconcile prevailing conceptualizations of educational accountability in scholarship, I contribute a theoretical framework of *respectable family rights policy regimes*, in which a White racial institutional logic of family empowerment is legitimized and reinforced by a set of political drivers - or framing, networking, and policy design mechanisms. I apply a process tracing method (Collier, 2011; Mahoney, 2015) to collect and analyze archival data of federal literacy policy from 1968 to 1990. This approach captured a key policy change: from partial support of race- and gender-conscious culturally responsive literacy to singular promotion of White Mainstream English and Western cultural, middle-class literacy norms. To explain this change, I ask two research

questions: **(RQ1)** What political drivers linked race, class, gender, and sexuality in the development of literacy accountability? **(RQ2)** What were the policy outcomes of this process?

In my findings, I offer a political-developmental analysis that addresses these questions by tracking two shifts. First, I show how accountability entrepreneurs, leaders of the “Excellence in Education” movement, legitimized a national literacy crisis via two drivers: (1) *deviance knots*, in-text associations between movements for Black and Brown interclass, intergenerational solidarity (e.g., culturally responsive literacy) and threats to traditional family norms posed by gender, sexually, or economically marginalized classes; (2) *deputy webs*, appeals to White women and Black men as parental or paternal figures to support facially race-neutral policy carrying respectability norms. Second, I show how these framing and networking mechanisms enacting a racial double standard of family empowerment facilitated realignment across racial policy alliances; systematically excluded Black, Brown, and Asian women; and narrowed elites’ ideas of equality and family. I discuss how this model deepens explanations of accountability and offers tools toward conceptualizing, designing, and evaluating political and structural conditions of academic learning and family engagement.

Case and Context

As one lynchpin of the Great Society program, the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (1965) provided federal funding and protections to poor and racially minoritized students in schools and set the stage for three major developments in the federal education field. First, the federal government assumed an increased role vis-a-vis states and districts in education policy, especially by sponsoring research on educational effectiveness and implementing civil rights policies (McGuinn, 2006). The administration of the first NAEP assessment in 1969 and establishment of the National Institute of Education in 1972 signified initiatives of the federal government to understand, evaluate, and manage education nationwide. Second, fieldwide debates proliferated about the purpose and meaning of “equality of educational opportunity” under the Great Society. While inequality was understood by many leading civil rights advocates as a historical and structural problem, some federal policy elites defined it as a cultural and familial problem. While some socially progressive elected officials like congresswomen

Patsy Mink and Shirley Chisholm led efforts to pass race- and gender-conscious education reform and expand the social safety net, other prominent elites who were primarily White men wrote policy recommendations rooted in “culture of poverty” myths, or “negative stereotypes of the languages, minds, and morals of poor people” that emerged in and from scholarship about urban Black, Brown, and immigrant communities’ literacy practices in the 1960s (McDermott & Vossoughi, 2020, p. 61). Controversially, the year after the Moynihan Report (1965) attributed Black poverty to Black family life and the domestic authority of Black mothers, sociologist James Coleman’s report *The Equality of Educational Opportunity* (1966) promoted desegregation on the grounds that “disadvantaged” children would benefit academically and in the long-term from interacting with children of White, middle-class families. The Coleman Report found that despite racially segregated schools, school resources were not responsible for unequal outcomes between White and Black students. Instead, the Report concluded that “whatever may be the combination of non-school factors—poverty, community attitudes, low educational level of parents—which put minority children at a disadvantage in verbal and nonverbal skills when they enter first grade, the fact is the schools have not overcome it” (p. 21). Using the composite of individual students’ achievement tests to evaluate outcomes by racial group, Coleman argued that “equality” ought to be understood as equal outputs of education, a position not immediately popular but largely accepted by the 1990s (McDermott, 2011).

Third, the passage of race- and gender-conscious education reform drove the emergence of “culture wars” between civil rights advocates and social conservatives who formed the grassroots base of the Reagan administration. In literacy, Great Society policies included the *Bilingual Education Act* (1968), which defined bilingual education as the instruction of students in both English and their native language; Title IX of the *Education Amendment Act* (1972) and the *Women’s Educational Equity Act* (1974), which provided a foundation for developing race- and gender-conscious curricular materials; and the Supreme Court ruling in *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), which supported multilingual learning by requiring public schools to provide supplemental English instruction to children of immigrant families. These policies for culturally responsive literacy in schools contributed to what education scholars Garcia and

Sung (2018) have understood as a “partial” realization of educational activists’ “goal for a race radical bilingual education to confront racism and structural inequities” (p. 1). These race- and gender-conscious federal programs to transform curriculum led to conservative rhetoric that chastened “secular humanism” (Zimmerman, 2022). While education historians have shown that culture wars about reading brought together concerns about racial, gender, and sexual liberation, I leverage this case of literacy politics to trace how categories of race, gender, sexuality, and class intersected in the political formation and development of accountability.

Existing Explanations of Accountability in Education Scholarship

Broadly, scholarship in education politics offers two explanations for the formation and institutionalization of accountability: the first depicts accountability policy as a tool for “interest convergence” across racial groups (Bell, 1980), and the second illustrates how facially race- and class-neutral language (e.g., “science”) can embed inequalities in hard-to-detect forms. Together, these two sets of literature suggest a need to better understand the moral and intersectional dynamics of accountability. The first strand of education scholarship traces accountability to an emergent consensus around a “technocratic,” business-management approach to education governance in the 1980s, during which time economic and military imperatives led to a widely accepted “crisis of quality” in education and gave shape to *A Nation at Risk* by the Excellence Commission under the Reagan administration (Mehta, 2013). This literature views accountability policy growing out of *A Nation at Risk* as an outcome of political centrists and experts’ efforts to unify calls to ensure “equality” with calls to spur “excellence” (McGuinn, 2006). This effort included the support of many civil rights advocates, hinging on their interest in collecting and sharing data for evaluating parity in educational and socioeconomic achievement among subgroups (Rhodes, 2012). This account helps explain how, more recently, civil rights groups like the NAACP Legal Defense Fund (Quinton, 2015) and equity-minded actors like former Education Secretary Miguel Cardona (2023) have lauded the practice of disaggregating academic data by race and socioeconomic status and defended the use of standardized tests as a “flashlight” (qtd. in Stanford, 2023) to illuminate learning across contexts.

The second strand of accountability scholarship illustrates the co-optation of standards by inegalitarian actors and organizations, uncovering covert and seemingly benign processes by which facially race- and class-neutral policy can embed racial and economic ideologies and contribute to unequal outcomes (Lipman, 2004). This literature has shown how the purported “crisis of quality” in education activated appeals to a zero-sum logic between calls for “quality” and those for “equality”: inegalitarian elites shifted the terms of debate by positioning race-conscious moves toward institutional access as a threat to educational “excellence.” In the process, race-neutral “quality” control mechanisms (e.g., performance metrics) can take on racialized conditions and meanings, operating as levers that maintain racial hierarchies among students, schools, and communities (McCambly et al., 2024). This conceptualization helps to explain when and how some policy officials have used neutral terms like “science” to pass accountability reading policies and obscure research on policy biases (Aydarova, 2024). While important and illuminating in their own right, these accounts leave scholars with questions centered on morality: *when, how, and why can a “crisis” in education change meanings and understandings of “equality”?* Building on historical research on racial respectability politics, I argue that an intersectional lens is needed to uncover submerged historical-political dynamics and explain why and how gender, sexuality, and class norms can shape and drive White racial retrenchment.

Conceptual Framework

Reconciling these different explanations, I conceptualize literacy accountability as a respectable family rights policy regime. Under such a regime, a racial double standard of parental and family empowerment in civic life guides policy goals, resource distribution, and evaluations. While often facially race-neutral, this White racial institutional logic comprising policy frames, support networks, and designs normalizes racialized standards of achievement and access to public institutions and decisionmaking. I use a Black feminist lens to explain how the racial double standard of rights and authority has historically functioned as an institutional logic whereby traditional race, gender, sexuality, and class hierarchies become mutually reproduced. To theorize when federal elites develop and enact a racial logic of family rights, I use concepts of crisis and racialized behavior to suggest policy elites’ development of a

post-*Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) logic of family rights. According to this post-*Brown* logic, White men, White women, and middle-class Black and Brown men could embody moral and epistemic authority; however, White women and Black men's political legitimacy was conditional upon their adherence to heteropatriarchal, middle-class respectability norms. I suggest that White women and Black men policy advocates who called for women's empowerment or Black social and economic mobility by relying on family respectability norms served in roles I call "deputies."

The Racial Double Standard of Family Empowerment: A Logic of White Capitalist Heteropatriarchy

I conceptualize White capitalist heteropatriarchy as the constellation of "intersecting institutional orders" (Smith & King, 2024) that have been built to delimit boundaries of rights and authority in White racial nation-state building in the U.S. I locate the normative, respectable family as a symbolic and material structure where the traditional orders of race, gender, class, and sexuality interpenetrate one another. Building on the work of Black feminist scholars of law and education, my conceptualization suggests that this private family, including the gendered and economic roles ascribed to its members, has served as a framework for the state's designation of status and recognition of formal legal rights to a White national community (Collins, 1998; Harris 1993). Smith and King (2024) support this conceptualization when attributing the formation of racial and intersecting orders to the "values and interests of the governing coalition of propertied white Christian heterosexual men who led those endeavors came to structure most if not all of the institutional orders of the new nation" (pp. 64-65). A legacy of historical research lends credence to how race-based slavery drove and shaped the private family vis-a-vis capitalist political economy (Hartman, 1997). Enslaved Black people were systematically excluded from recognized family structures, via discriminatory marriage laws and ideals and family separation practices aimed at increasing economic profit for White families and the state (Hunter, 2017; Spillers, 1987). The emergence of a heteropatriarchal order from these economic and social processes (Snorton, 2017) meant that race-based slavery established the White, heteropatriarchal household as a key reproductive unit of the nation-state. Contemporary education research shows how White upper-middle class parents' interests are often prioritized via intergenerational wealth transfer, disparate access to

resources and institutions, and beliefs about family choice and caretakers' involvement (Ishimaru & Takahashi, 2017; Posey-Maddox, 2014; Sattin-Bajaj & Roda, 2020).

When applying institutional logics, Smith and King (2024) cite institutional theorists Friedland and Alford (1991), who define logics as “a set of material practices and symbolic constructions” (p. 248), which can self-reproduce and drive policy regimes by obtaining legitimacy and becoming taken-for-granted (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Mills, 2008; Jepperson, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Woulfin & Yurkofsky, 2025). To operationalize a White racial institutional logic of family empowerment in this case study, and understand when and how this logic can gain legitimacy within a policy domain, I bridge Friedland and Alford's definition with Hackett and King's (2019) analytic approach to racial policy alliances. This means that I use *framing* (rhetoric) to examine “symbolic constructions” of policy goals and targets, and *support networks* and *policy designs* to examine policy actors' “material practices.” What a respectable family rights policy regime model illuminates is *when and how* certain policy actors uphold White capitalist heteropatriarchy by appealing to a racial double standard of family empowerment while stigmatizing and surveilling deviance, or perceived racial threat.

Following this treatment, key to the role of a logic of family respectability in upholding White capitalist heteropatriarchy are two related processes. First is the co-optation of moral frames of “rights” and “equality” by those who Smith and King (2024) call “defenders” of White capitalist heteropatriarchy. By extending “rights” and “equality” to some members of the nation-state on the basis of adherence to family respectability norms, this co-optation of moral frames undermines those who Smith and King (2024) call “challengers” or “repairers,” including deviant social movements. Second is the construction and enlistment of racial, gender, and class “deputies” - a separate category from “defenders” - as support networks upholding White capitalist heteropatriarchy by advocating for facially race-neutral but anti-Black policy. Table 1 proposes how these elements of a White racial logic of family empowerment can characterize a respectable family rights policy regime. Critically, my analytic approach does not mean that actors' racial, gender, and class identities determine their ideas and behaviors. As my analysis shows, especially in political conditions before moral panic about deviance and racial threat, many White

women, Black and Brown men, and White men at the federal level challenged traditional institutions and hierarchies that elevated their relative status by co-designing or supporting inclusive, democratic policy.

Table 1: Elements of a White racial institutional logic in a respectable family rights policy regime

Element of Institutional Logic	Logic of Parental Respectability and Family Empowerment
Framing (rhetoric)	• Co-optation of moral frames of “rights” and “equality” to apply exclusively or disproportionately to normative, respectable parents • Undermines deviant social movements’ goals to unsettle norms and hierarchies upholding White capitalist heteropatriarchy
Support Network	• Construction and enlistment of racial, gender, class deputies • Deputies uphold White capitalist heteropatriarchy by embodying respectability norms in policymaking and/or advocating for facially race-neutral policy designs rooted in respectability norms
Policy Design	• Centers on norms for respectability and achievement, or the interests and values of defenders of White capitalist heteropatriarchy

Historical analysis bears out this racial double standard of parental respectability and empowerment in federal policy, including in education. Over the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the American state expanded political rights to working-class White men and later to White women with the goals of White nation-state building. During the development of industrial capitalism in the 19th Century, the “cult of domesticity” (or the “cult of true womanhood”) emerged as a White racial institutional logic of parental respectability based on a gendered separation of public and private spheres (Brown, 1995; Pateman, 2009). Under this cultural and economic model of family, White men across classes came to hold rights and authority in public life; White women came to hold authority in domestic and private life, but not formal rights in public life (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985). Although Black Americans drew upon this model (Cobb, 2015), systemic disenfranchisement meant they were excised from this official mode of belonging.

After the Reconstruction Amendments abolished slavery and provided voting rights and some civil liberties to formerly enslaved Black men, White racial backlash to Black male political and economic empowerment leveraged the “cult of domesticity” and “separate spheres” model to reinforce

White nation-state building (Feimster, 2009; Glenn, 2004). White male policy elites transposed White women's moral authority in the private sphere (as mothers) to maintain and enforce racial boundaries in and through the public sphere (Pisapia, 2010; Skocpol, 1996). In the Progressive era of social reform, White women were empowered by the right to vote in 1920, and even before then, deputized as educational administrators - for example, as superintendents of many public school systems (Blount, 1998). This partial expansion of civil authority to White women created a degree or semblance of progressive change, but their civil authority proved instrumental to White nation-state building initiatives rooted in cultural assimilation as well as scientific racism (Cahill, 2013). Literacy education was central to these projects. For example, standardized English was developed and taught in schools as a tool to Americanize European immigrants and American Indians under White cultural norms (Ewing, 2025), while some White women's educational and political activism against Black youth literacy and textbook access became a chief weapon for defending the racial order (McRae, 2018).

Simultaneously, the proliferation of Jim Crow laws meant that Black men "were being actively and violently pushed out of the public sphere in the post-Reconstruction period" (Cooper, 2017, p. 13). At the time, predominant discourses of respectability and mobility in Black public life had the effect of creating divisions not only among Black men intellectuals, but also between Black men and women intellectuals. For example, not only was the "manhood leader" model of racial politics exemplified in the debates between W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington, but Black men also came to serve as liaisons between White education officials representing the state and Black schools and communities, where Black women did much of the teaching and leading (Anderson, 1988; Givens, 2021; Charron, 2009). Under pretenses of "separate but equal" public spheres, the supremacy of a White racial public was reliant upon the conscription of White women as moral and civic leaders, while heteropatriarchy unevenly structured rights and authority for men and women across White and Black racial publics.

Figure 2 illustrates how intersecting orders organized social hierarchies and structured (but did not determine) roles and behavioral norms in public and private spheres before and after *Brown v. The Board of Education* (1954) formally ended Jim Crow. Boundary thickness represents the degree of

institutionalization. I use a relatively thin line between public and private spheres among Black communities during the Jim Crow era to show that, from the vantage of White federal policy elites, there was less of an official need to inscribe meanings and manage boundaries of Black family and community life; rather, segregation laws, economic institutions (e.g., sharecropping), and extralegal violence worked to maintain unequal access to public institutions and resources (Cohen, 1997). This degree of fugitivity led to the growth of deviant movements for Black interclass, intergenerational solidarity, including culturally responsive literacy in schools. For example, Givens' (2021) *Fugitive Pedagogy* explained how Black teachers passed down "Black educational heritage" (p. 5) within a segregated public school system and beyond the White gaze of educational administrators.

The Post-Brown Logic: A Classed, Gendered, and Racial Double Standard of Family Empowerment

Applying a political development lens to this historical research, I argue that just as in previous periods of perceived racial threat (e.g., Reconstruction), updating the logic of family respectability became a tool for defenders of White capitalist heteropatriarchy to partially expand civic authority to a new class (i.e. develop "equality" policy) while reinforcing gendered and racial boundaries of rights. Specifically, I suggest that, in response to the Civil Rights Movement, White racial backlash contributed to a post-*Brown* racial institutional logic of family respectability – one that mobilized intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality to create partial, conditional circles of belonging. Critically, in the *Brown* decision (1954), federal civil rights policies unsettled the state's interpretation of family alongside racial equality. The unconstitutionality of "separate but equal" racial publics in the *Brown* decision was based not on the evidence of Jim Crow's systemic inequalities (Goluboff, 2007; Guiner, 2004; Johnson, 2010), but rather on the harm and injustice of racial segregation to Black children and families. By granting access to traditionally White public institutions to Black families, the state partially expanded its model of family. Under this new racial logic, the conditional expansion and delimiting of civil rights mobilized the respectability of Black men and fathers; that is, rights were bestowed based on the adherence to heteropatriarchal, middle-class family life (Snorton & Bost, 2026). The main shift to a

post-*Brown* model of family at the federal level is represented in Figure 2 by the shift to two solid lines symbolizing gendered and classed division among Black families.

When and how did federal civil rights policies drive elites' use of intersecting institutional hierarchies in developing this logic? I argue that, after the *Brown* decision, the construction of a moral "crisis" about the perceived threat of deviance to family life and mobility facilitated the spread and legitimacy of a classed, gendered, and racial double standard of parental respectability. According to this updated logic, White men, White women, and middle-class Black and Brown men could embody domestic and civic responsibility. However, White elites' terms and conditions differentially shaped White women and Black men's spheres of civil authority. While White women could socialize and make decisions for either White or Black children and families, Black and Brown men could socialize and make decisions only for Black and Brown children and families.

In theorizing "crisis" construction by White privileged elites, Strolovitch (2023) employs the gendered racism of the Moynihan Report (1965) as a prime example of how racial and social conservatives appropriated progressive calls for social change. Strolovitch understands "crisis" as a discursive strategy for elite defenders of the White racial order to develop policy that mobilizes public and private life; their moral claims "justify both the use of state power and resources to protect privileged groups and also the withdrawal or privatization of resources when it [comes] to marginalized ones" (p. 110). In the case of the Moynihan Report, White elites projected a "crisis" around Black families to attribute relative Black family poverty not to the historical and structural mechanisms of the White racial order, but to excessive support and empowerment of Black mothers, children, and the poor, who did not and could not embody domestic and civic responsibility. Strolovitch's work suggests that crisis conditions can narrow the state's interpretation of equality from (re)distribution of public resources for historically disenfranchised groups, to relegation of responsibility for access and achievement to private families. Her theory of crisis suggests the value of studying White elites' construction and use of a family logic to reconcile explanations of accountability in education research.

I suggest that the development of a gendered racial double standard of moral and epistemic authority in literacy policy after the Moynihan Report suggested policy elites' goals to punish deviance engendered by the broader Civil Rights Movement, including culturally responsive literacy. Following work in Black feminisms, I propose that foremost "challengers" or "repairers" (King & Smith, 2024) of gender and racial orders have been Black women, youth, and queer people (Cohen, 2004, 2010; Hill Collins, 2009). Historical research on Black women public intellectuals shows the organizing power of "race women" and early Black feminist writers, educators, and political actors in unsettling the exclusionary logic underlying "separate but equal" policy (McHenry, 2002). Cooper (2017) explains that Black women have turned to literature and literary societies, in particular, as sites for "theorizing about racial and gender identity, in addition to providing space in which race women could set forth their public agenda for racial advancement, citizenship, the defense of Black humanity and personhood, and a historical knowledge of Black achievement" (p. 68). Moreover, she explains that a "Black women's literary renaissance" in the 1970s represented the "reemergence of the Black women literary intellectual as another iteration of the race women figure" (p. 138). Thus culturally responsive pedagogy, itself a term developed from Black feminist educational scholarship (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Riddick, 2025), can be understood as a tool to bring Black women's literature and literacy practices into public institutions (Savonick, 2024). Yet, a wealth of research on moral panics shows how White elites' fears about Black women's public intellectual activism can trigger initiatives to domesticate deviance. In the time period under study, White public and official discourses about Black women, youth, and queer people routinely devalued their minds and intellect by activating gendered racial stereotypes that hyper-visibility their bodies and reproductive behavior (e.g., "welfare queen") (Roberts, 1997). Moral panic about Black family life and women's sexuality as a threat to respectable families and the nation can activate White policy elites' and Black intracommunity calls for Black men's responsibility and leadership (Cohen, 1999; Nathanson, 1991). In my analysis, I identify the political mechanisms responsible for activating and linking the frames, networks, and policy designs of this racial institutional logic creating and reproducing a respectable family rights policy regime.

Building on work in racialized political behavior, I propose that the acceptance of a racial double standard of parental empowerment across racial policy alliances, including some Black and Brown male challengers of White supremacy, occurred through the spread of an “us” vs. “them” moral discourse to legitimize “secondary marginalization” (Cohen, 1999; Morone, 2003). This framing of respectability (or achievement) recruited racial, gender, and class deputies to “civilize” deviance. I suggest that White policy elites’ labeling of Black women and mothers, children, the working class, and non-normative families as deviants via crisis can fuel a political condition in which White women and middle-class Black and Brown men are made to choose to affiliate with “them” (deviants) or join “us” (defenders) to help fix and protect “them” under assimilative terms. I treat this racial double standard of rights and moral authority as a White racial institutional logic unifying Great Society racial assimilationists and Reaganites. That is, the shared interest of defenders in upholding White capitalist heteropatriarchy clarifies the ideological unity between Great Society elites (e.g., Coleman and Moynihan) and Far-Right conservatives (e.g. William Buckley, Jr.). Under the Great Society, then, surface agreement on racial desegregation among the assimilationist arm of the Great Society and civil rights advocates belied divergent assumptions about “equality of opportunity” and the role and purpose of schooling and socialization in family- and nation-state building. My analysis decodes and tracks (1) what intersectional dynamics enacted a classed, gendered, and racial double standard of parental rights; (2) how this White racial logic of respectable family shaped literacy accountability policy designs.

Figure 2: Social Roles and Norms in White Capitalist Heteropatriarchy according to Jim Crow and Post-Brown Logics of Family

Respectable family rights policy regime era	Social Roles in White Capitalist Heteropatriarchy	
Jim Crow (1896-1954)	Private sphere roles and norms	Public sphere roles and norms
	White fathers	Defenders of White capitalist heteropatriarchy (included some elite White men and women)
	White mothers (<i>Cult of domesticity</i> or “ <i>cult of true womanhood</i> ”) and children	Racial deputies (included some White women who challenged the gender order; e.g., as school

		administrators, voters)
	Black and Brown fathers	Gender and class deputies (included some elite Black men; <i>Manhood leadership model</i>)
	Black and Brown mothers, children, and extended kinship circles or non-normative families	Deviants (included many Black and Brown men, women, and students)

Post-Brown (1954-)	Private sphere	Public sphere
	White fathers	Defenders of White capitalist heteropatriarchy (some White men and women)
	White mothers and children	Racial, class deputies (some White men and women)
	Black and Brown fathers	Gender, class deputies (some middle-class Black and Brown men who challenged racial order)
	Black and Brown mothers and children and extended kinship circles or non-normative families	Deviants (many Black and Brown women, students, and the working class)

Data and Methods

I collected and analyzed archival data by using a historical, within-case process tracing approach (Collier, 2011; Mahoney, 2015). I began data collection at the Department of Education Records at the National Archives and Records Administration, looking at material from 1979 to 2005. There I identified a key outcome that called for historical explanation: the systematic exclusion and dismissal, or “policy erasure” (McQuillan et al., 2024), of Black, Brown, and Asian women and queer communities’ voices and literacy practices in major accountability policy discourses and texts (e.g., Secretary Bennett’s publication of the *James Madison Curriculum* in 1987; the establishment of National Reading Panel in 1997 and its publication “Teaching Children to Read” in 2001; *No Child Left Behind* in 2002). With this outcome in mind, I developed the scope of my collection and analysis iteratively. Using online key terms searches on the Education Resources Information Center and Library of Congress records, I found and followed

events in federal literacy policy development emerging from the Great Society. This search focused my attention on 1968 to 1990 as a distinct case, a timeframe bounded on one end by the *Bilingual Education Act*, and on the other, by 49 governors’ acceptance of cultural and family reform approach to literacy education, versus systemic or self-determinative approaches, in the *National Education Goals*.

Applying the process tracing method, I collected and analyzed data from a range of archival collections and sources to generate possible explanations of policy change from the coexistence of multiple logics of literacy achievement to a singular logic of accountability for White Mainstream English and Western cultural literacy. This involved reading, photocopying, and cataloging over 2,256 documents - a dataset that included government research reports, private correspondences, public speeches, meeting notes, research monographs, memoirs of influential policy actors, and media coverage highlighting popular educational policy debates and discourses. Table 2 provides an overview of the sites and size of my data corpora, which I collected between August 2022 and December 2025. In tracing discourses and debates across time, I used the technique of “archival snowball sampling” and located documents across in-person and online databases (Mulroy et al., under review).

Table 2: *Archival Data Collection Sites and Corpora*

Archival Site and Paper Collections	Documents
Department of Education Records, 1979-2005. <i>National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, MD</i>	916 documents
Papers of the Department of Education under the Reagan Administration, 1979-1989. <i>Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, CA</i>	151 documents
Chester E. Finn, Jr. Papers, 1966-2000. <i>Hoover Institution Library and Archives, Palo Alto, CA</i>	293 documents
Diane Ravitch Papers, 1956-2007. <i>Hoover Institution Library and Archives, Palo Alto, CA</i>	419 documents
Records of the National Organization for Women, 1966-1985, <i>Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA</i>	136 documents
Civil Rights Documentation Project, 1967-1973, <i>Moorland-Springarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C.</i>	41 documents
Reports by federal education policy researchers and advocates, 1966-2005; accessed	>200

online (e.g., through <i>Education Resources Information Center</i>)	documents
Monographs by federal education policy researchers and advocates, 1966-2015; accessed through the Northwestern University library system	>50 documents
Media articles published in the <i>New York Times</i> , <i>Washington Post</i> , <i>Chicago Tribune</i> , and <i>San Francisco Chronicle</i> , 1966-1990; accessed online	>50 documents
Total documents	>2,256

To evaluate possible explanations, I began by creating a roster of key actors and organizations who were responsible for writing or shaping key education and social policy texts. Then, I devised a timeline of these policy texts and surrounding events to map how ideological coalitions converged, diverged, and transfigured over time. Appendix Figure A1 provides a condensed version of this timeline. Primarily, I traced the ideas of three groups of actors: (1) *federal officials and lawmakers*; this group includes presidents, congressional legislators, U.S. Education Department members, and the National Commission on Excellence in Education, which published *A Nation at Risk*; and (2) *activist organizations*; this group includes scholars and educators who created and led advocacy organizations for “excellence” (e.g., Educational Excellence Network), civil rights (e.g., National Urban League) and professional groups (e.g., National Council of Teachers of English); (3) *policy researchers at national think tanks*; this group includes those who produced policy reports on behalf of national research institutions, such as Brookings, American Enterprise, Urban Institute, Heritage, and Ford Foundation.

While I visited the archival collections and read writings of influential women and Black feminist policy advocates (e.g., National Organization for Women, Feminist Party leaders), I focused my analysis in this study primarily on the coalition of reformers leading a movement of White racial backlash; their ideas were responsible for the national paradigm of literacy accountability, and can illuminate dynamics of respectable family rights policy regimes. In addition to reading from Reagan’s presidential archives and the files of Secretaries Bell and Bennett at the National Archives, I visited the collections of Chester Finn and Diane Ravitch at the Hoover Institution. In 1981, the same year that Secretary Bell established the Excellence Commission, Finn and Ravitch started the Excellence Network, which received funding from

the National Endowment for the Humanities (led by future Secretary Bennett). Finn and Ravitch both became assistant secretaries in the 1980s and 1990s. Reading from these actors' archives informed my choice of literacy as a case study, as they contained extensive notes and newspaper clippings tracking debates on culturally responsive literacy in the 1970s.

Findings

This section offers an historical analysis of the political development and institutionalization of literacy accountability. I divide this analysis into three timeframes: **1968-1981**: The period before the legitimization of accountability, in which alignment across civil rights advocates drove policy openings for culturally responsive literacy models, despite backlash critiques by defenders of White heteropatriarchy; **1981-1983**: Formation of accountability, in which a predominantly White male cadre of Excellence leaders harnessed moral panic about traditional family norms to construct and legitimize a literacy crisis and obtain political legitimacy under the Reagan Administration; **1983-1990**: Institutionalization of accountability, in which a new coalitional alignment across racial policy alliances normalized the policy erasure of culturally responsive literacy and narrowed fieldwide ideas of family and equality. Appendix Table B1 summarizes how key policy texts reflected the development of fieldwide ideas of family and equality across these timeframes.

Applying my framework to trace intersectional and institutional dynamics responsible for this process, I identify and track how entrepreneurs legitimized an educational "crisis" by using two mutually reinforcing, often discursively linked, political drivers: (1) *deviance knots*, in-text associations between a social movement for interclass, intergenerational Black and Brown solidarity (e.g., culturally responsive literacy) and threats posed to parental rights posed by gender, sexually, or economically marginalized classes. Excellence leaders used deviance knots not only to attach culturally responsive literacy to moral panic surrounding traditional family and economic norms, but also to co-opt moral discourses of "rights," "discrimination," "justice," and "equality" to shift victimhood to heteronormative, middle-class, monoracial families; (2) *deputy webs*, appeals to White women and Black men as parental or paternal figures to support facially race-neutral policy carrying respectability norms. These framing and

networking mechanisms drove realignment by unifying two segments of the former Great Society coalition with Reaganites: White women and men, who applied heteropatriarchal, racial, and capitalist discourses to goals for working-class families and mothers' uplift, and Black men, who applied heteropatriarchal, capitalist discourses to Black families' uplift. I show how entrepreneurs linked parental "rights" and "responsibilities" to enforcement of "basic skills," embedding facially race-neutral frames and obfuscating ties between family norms and White Mainstream English.

1968-1981: Culturally Responsive Literacy Drives Democratic Policy and Racial Backlash

The Partial Successes of Culturally Responsive Literacy

In the 1970s, the National Council of the Teachers of English (NCTE) helped transform culturally responsive literacy into a powerful nationwide social movement for interclass, intergenerational, multiracial solidarity. At a meeting of its constituent organization, the Conference of College Composition and Communication (CCCC), in November 1972, the Executive Committee of the CCCC adopted a resolution that codified culturally responsive literacy into organizational policy:

"We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language -- the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language." (*Committee on CCCC Language Statement, p. 2*)

This resolution of the NCTE defined culturally responsive literacy as teachers' commitment to professional learning experiences centered on valuing the dialects of students' home communities and self-expression. In adopting this policy of culturally responsive literacy, the NCTE challenged the use of a "standard American dialect" as a tool for "dominance," and used the language of "students' rights" to acknowledge how race and culture could uniquely shape young people's approaches to speaking, reading, and writing in the classroom. Importantly, not only would this specific NCTE resolution become the target of explicit criticism by accountability entrepreneurs in the following decade (*Ravitch, 1983, p. 311*). In addition, the NCTE's language of "students' rights" (and "student choice") as shorthand for culturally

responsive literacy would become the discourse *against* which accountability entrepreneurs and the National Commission on Excellence in Education developed parental “rights” and “responsibilities” (Gardner et al., 1983, p. 35).

This social movement for culturally responsive literacy included a multiracial coalition of scholars, teachers, and parents, with Black and Brown educators playing leading roles. To clarify and develop this policy, the Executive Committee appointed a Special Committee to craft a position statement rooted in empirical research on linguistics and cognitive development. This thirteen-person Special Committee was chaired by Melvin Butler, a Black man and the head of the English department at Southern University, a historically Black college in Louisiana, and included key Black and Brown contributors such as Richard A. Long of Atlanta University, Ninfa Flores of Harvard University, and Geneva Smitherman of Wayne State University. Upon Butler’s premature death in 1973, Smitherman and Jenefer Giannasi of Northern Illinois University led the preparation of the position statement adopted by the NCTE in 1974. The leadership and composition of the CCCC Committee contrasted with that of the predominantly White male network of accountability entrepreneurs. Appendix Table B2 provides an overview of the racial and gender identity composition of Excellence entrepreneurs, the Excellence Commission, scholars whose reports were commissioned for *A Nation at Risk*, and scholars whose work shaped the Excellence agenda linking racialized literacy standards with parental rights.

The NCTE-led movement for culturally responsive literacy was characterized both by its criticism of growing fieldwide reliance on standardized tests and by its advocacy of goals for racial, economic, gender, and even sexual liberation. In its 1974 position statement, the CCCC took a critical, but pragmatic approach to the prevalent use of standardized tests in education. The first national administration of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 1969 marked a shift toward the federal government’s use of standardized tests to gather information about students’ literacy achievement across the nation, including based on racial group and socioeconomic status. Noting that the NCTE developed resolutions against the uses of standardized tests as tools for “admitting, placing, and labeling” (Committee on CCCC Language Statement, p. 12) students as early as 1970 and 1971, the

CCCC position statement argued for the need to “employ caution in using and trusting test results, and seek positive ways to neutralize the negative effects” (p. 13). For example, the CCCC Committee advocated for developing tests that evaluated not “whether students can think, speak or write in the institutional dialect, but on whether they can think, speak, and write in their own dialects” (p. 13). The Committee warned that, because standardized tests were embedded features in education systems, administrators and policy elites “must recognize the biases built into the tests and be aware of the theory and purpose behind the tests. Used carelessly, standardized tests lead to erroneous inferences as to students’ linguistic abilities and create prejudgments in the minds of teachers, counselors, future employers, and the students themselves” (p. 12). Throughout the 1970s, this cautious approach to standardized testing was shared and leveraged by many leading policy elites in the federal government who worked to develop policy designs for racial and economic equality. Appendix Table B3 highlights how leading policy discourses during this more democratic regime linked race, gender, and class to support structural reforms for equitable access, inclusion, and self-determination in learning.

For example, at the National Institute of Education (NIE) Conference on Testing and Basic Skills in 1978, a multiracial group of policy elites criticized the racial and class biases underlying the facially race-neutral discourse of “basic skills” using a structural analysis. Keynote speaker and Vice President of Education Research Harold Howe II, a White man, said,

“I have to raise the difficult question of whether the national mood for improving basic skills performance has hidden within it overtones of racism... [W]e do black children a disservice not to hold them to the same expectations as we do white children. At the same time, we know that inequalities in the lives of children outside the school are reflected in school performance, and the black, Hispanic, and Native American children are peculiarly subject to handicaps from both poverty and discrimination.” (*Howe qtd. in Califano, 1979, pp. 2-3*)

Howe’s structural analysis of the intersections between race, class, and language demonstrated how federal policy elites worked to create political conditions in which culturally responsive literacy could be developed. Similarly, Maria Ramirez, assistant commissioner at the New York State Department of Education, argued in her conference presentation that many standardized literacy tests were constructed using White racial norms and cultural values of achievement. In particular, Ramirez drew attention to

English monolingualism and individualism often encoded in “basic skills” (*Ramirez qtd. in Califano, 1979, p. 8*). Bernard C. Watson, Temple University Vice President of Academic Administration, argued that test scores “represent judgments about values important in this society,” and that “it is not too great a leap in logic to suggest that test scores affect how much value interpreters of the scores place on the individual in question...in terms of potential growth, achievement, and access to the traditional symbols of success and status in our society” (*Watson qtd. in Califano, 1979, p. 7*). While accountability entrepreneurs would soon build consensus around individual performance evaluations (*Finn, 1981*), these criticisms of basic literacy in 1978 revealed a prevailing understanding that improving equality in education required challenging dominant ideas of respectability and status, as well as developing literacy education models beyond basic skills, or content and performance standards rooted in White Mainstream English. At the same time, accountability entrepreneur Diane Ravitch attended this conference and advocated for the importance of returning to the “basics” in improving “standards of excellence” (*Ravitch qtd. in Califano, 1979, p. 9*), while national language proponent Senator Hayakawa said, “I’m not so sure that cultural bias is all that serious a matter” (*Hayakawa qtd. in Califano, 1979, p. 18*). However, these positions would not yet become dominant until after Ravitch’s creation of the Educational Excellence Network with Chester Finn and Education Secretary T.H. Bell’s National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1981.

In a 1970s political environment where federal elites challenged a movement toward basic skills, policy openings for culturally responsive literacy led to some acceptance of movement goals for racial, economic, gender, and sexual liberation. Throughout the 1970s, educational professionals and Black and Brown community activists drove textbook and curricular policy reforms by courts, state and local education boards, and textbook publishers. The rationale behind some reforms was to empower students to use language and literacy as tools for political consciousness and transformation including through the affirmation of non-traditional, expansive family forms. For example, in the years after critical literacy scholar Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) was translated into English and he established an activist presence in the United States as a visiting lecturer at Harvard in the academic year 1969-1970,

textbook publishers drew on his work to explain editorial changes. In one manuscript found in Ravitch's archival collection, an editorial team at the publisher Scott, Foresman, and Company quoted from a foreword to Freire's translated book to explain the need to represent "a world beyond the white, patriarchal, middle-class suburban family" (*Council on Interracial Books for Children, n.d.*). In state and district policy discussions across the nation, advocates of culturally responsive literacy leveraged textbook and curricular reform as a pathway to question the conflation of family with marriage; highlight the role of slavery in racializing access to marriage and traditional family structure; and call for a recognition of the attempted genocide and epistemicide of Indigenous American communities by European colonial projects (*Antell, 1978; Lightfoot, 1978; Shaw, 1975*). As late as 1981, the California State Education Board - a state where many textbooks were published - came out with race- and gender-inclusive guidelines and stipulated that instructional materials in elementary school classrooms had to cast "various occupations and various lifestyles—marriage, remaining single, raising children or not doing so...in an affirmative light" (*Riles, 1981, p. 5*). These state and local reforms for culturally responsive literacy developed within the political environment created by federal policies for gender, racial, and ethnic inclusion such as the *Bilingual Education Act* (1968), *Title IX* (1972), *Equal Educational Opportunities Act* (1974), and *Lau v. Nichols* (1974).

One of the last federal policy wins for advocates of culturally responsive literacy occurred in *Martin Luther King, Jr. v. Ann Arbor School District* (1979). Federal Judge Charles W. Joiner ordered that teachers at the Martin Luther King Jr. elementary school must receive professional education centering on the appreciation of African American Vernacular English. In his decision, Joiner wrote that teachers' ignorance of the language constituted an obstacle to equal education: "A language barrier develops when teachers, in helping the child switch from the home (black English) language to standard English, refuse to admit the existence of a language that is the acceptable way of talking in his local community" (*qtd. in Stuart, 1979*). Joiner's recognition of a "home language" in the *King* decision was based on a sequence of federal policies earlier that decade, two of which he cited in his ruling: President Nixon's 1972 address to Congress, which encouraged policy toward an "educational bill of rights" for Black, Brown, and Native

students; and the *Equal Educational Opportunities Act* (1974), which named “linguistic barriers” as a potential impediment to “equal participation by students” in schools (*Joiner, 1979*). Joiner’s decision in the *King* case to affirm Black English was popularized in a *New York Times* essay by writer James Baldwin (*Baldwin, 1979*) and set a precedent for another federal judge’s ruling in Texas that a bilingual education program required transformation (*Fiske, 1981*). Notably, it was largely a group of Black mothers who were responsible for initiating this effort, alongside the influential expert testimony of CCCC Committee member Geneva Smitherman (*Labov, 1982; Smitherman, 1987*). Yet, in addition to “students’ rights” and “student choice,” the location of Ann Arbor would become a shorthand in accountability entrepreneurs’ writings for the power of culturally responsive literacy to represent “the liberationist regime” in education (*Adelson, 1982, p. 20*).

Deviance Knots and Deputy Webs Shape and Drive Gendered Racial Backlash

Before the Excellence in Education movement turned culturally responsive literacy into a target of attack and foundation for building a “New Consensus” (*Finn, 1981*), some policy actors used deviance knots and deputy webs to defend White heteropatriarchy. While the movement toward basic skills gained traction among some federal officials after NCTE’s resolution of “Students’ Rights to Their Own Language,” these officials such as NIE Director of Essential Skills Mike Smith did *not* yet connect basic skills with traditional family values (*Smith, 1974*). Rather, it was socially conservative advocates promoting a “Family Choice” education agenda who first associated culturally responsive literacy with threats to respectable families. For example, in the late 1970s, educational consultant and conservative activist Onalee McGraw, future Reagan appointee to the National Council of Education Research, took special aim at culturally responsive literacy and school desegregation in a pair of Heritage Foundation reports: “Secular Humanism and the Schools: The Issue Whose Time Has Come” (1976), and “Family Choice in Education: A New Imperative” (1978). Through deviance knots and deputy webs, McGraw’s reports offered a playbook for unifying middle-class Black fathers and White women. Appendix Table B4 compiles examples of how deviance knots linked race, class, gender, and sexuality to develop respectable family rights policy texts.

In “Family Choice in Education,” McGraw framed culturally responsive literacy as a threat to fathers, children, and “family rights” (p. 9), advocating for traditional authority figures to regain control of the family and education. After framing the rise of illiteracy as a cause and consequence of the “moral breakdown among our young people” (p. 2), McGraw argued that the movement for culturally responsive literacy was largely to blame; she called attention to the traction of a “problem-oriented curriculum” (Freireian language) centered on “war, peace, race, the economy, population, and the environment” among the National Education Association (p. 6). In explaining how this approach led to moral breakdown, McGraw drew on an analysis by conservative scholars Bill Bennett and Edwin Delattre to suggest that culturally responsive curriculum led learners to focus exclusively on a mother’s “rights, desires, and rights to her desires,” and cause fathers and children to “lose their rights,” and thereby “ignore justice, reciprocity, and the equality and equal rights of all persons involved” (pp. 18-19). Since McGraw, Bennett, and Delattre misrepresented culturally responsive literacy, which did not “ignore” men and children’s wellbeing, this appeal to “equal rights” undercut civil rights expansions in literacy, and linked basic skills with “family rights” rooted in traditional heteropatriarchy.

In using a deviance knot to associate culturally responsive literacy with threats to the “equal rights” and “justice” of respectable fathers and children, McGraw harnessed a moral panic about single Black mothers and Black female sexuality to appeal to Black fathers and male public figures. At this time, Black male leaders like Reverend Jesse Jackson were represented in popular media as “the kind of authority figure” that American society “lost” and that Black children “needed” (*Comer qtd. in Fiske, 1979*). In her “Family Choice” report, McGraw discursively linked deputy webs to deviance knots in order to call on Black men to model and enforce respectability norms. For example, she tied illiteracy with “violence, vandalism, delinquency, illegitimacy, and abortion” (p. 2) as social ills that particularly afflicted “inner city families, many of them single-parent households” (p. 32). These Reaganite stereotypes of single Black mothers projected an opposition between single Black mothers on the one hand, and striving Black fathers on the other hand; according to McGraw, it was the latter who “care about their education and who exercise authority to send them to school [and] suffer a grave injustice”

under desegregation policy (p. 32). McGraw cited a report on the “tragic plight of a black father in New York City” who, “consumed with anger and despair,” witnessed “his once alert and curious kindergartener falling further behind with each passing year” (p. 44) due to the state’s overreach in education policy. While McGraw cited Black male *Washington Post* columnist William Raspberry in demonstrating middle-class Black men’s desire for greater “parental involvement” in schools (p. 3), Black women and mothers’ educational goals were not represented in their own words.

This uneven, class-based treatment of middle-class Black men as deputies, and Black women, children, and the working class as deviants, became a systematic pattern in policy texts and bodies. A close look at the private correspondences between Harvard sociologist David Riesman and Ravitch, including one from 1980, exemplified a deputy web and revealed how deviance knots positioned basic literacy as mutually exclusive of culturally responsive literacy and desegregation policy:

“[W]hat is true of the lower-class blacks is now becoming true of lower-middle-class whites as well. I interpret the test score results...with a focus on the far sharper drop in women’s verbal scores without any rise of their quantitative scores. This seems to me to reflect the fact that, while it was always difficult for a girl in school to be a ‘brain,’ it is impossible to be a ‘brain’ when one’s lover is not and when one is engaging in pharmacological experiments with him.” (Riesman, 1980)

Riesman framed Black boys’ immorality as a threat to achievement and respectability of white girls. At the same time, Riesman cited the work of Thomas Sowell, a Black male economist, who had criticized what Riesman called the “black takeover of Cornell” in *Black Education: Myths and Tragedies* (1972). In the same letter, Riesman also took issue with “community”-based models of education, including outdoor education, which he argued was part of “environmentalist crusades” that sparked “class warfare” (Riesman, 1980, p. 2). In other letters, Riesman criticized “feminists and civil rights activists [as] engaged in symbolic crusades” like the Equal Rights Amendment and “children’s rights” (Riesman, 1983, pp. 1-2) and lamented the career choices of “able Blacks” who went into law, medicine, and Black studies rather than “economists, natural scientists, and demographers” (Riesman, 1979, p. 1). Throughout their correspondence, Riesman and Ravitch relied on class and gender norms and capitalist values to differentiate between respectable Black people and educational goals. Riesman and Ravitch also shared

the use of “crusade” to describe deviant movements. Ravitch titled her seminal historical account of literacy decline *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945-1980* (1983).

As an Excellence movement leader, Ravitch’s development of accountability policy relied on pulling in middle-class Black fathers via deviance knots and deputy webs. In *Troubled Crusade* (1983), Ravitch associated national literacy decline with purportedly harmful changes in Black family life resulting from the Great Migration. Ravitch made the case that, when Black and Brown communities moved away from the South to pursue greater political and economic freedom in the 1940s and 1950s, they became “bereft of the sense of family and community that had sustained their counterparts in rural areas,” leading to the reliance of mothers on welfare (p. 325). According to Ravitch, just as federal welfare policy enabled acceptance of “dependent” relationships between families and the government, federal policy support for culturally responsive literacy and women’s rights movements enabled acceptance of “warm mush” and “gobbledygook” (p. 311). Ravitch took aim at the resolution passed in 1974 by the NCTE that “affirm[ed] the students’ right to their own language.” In linking the NCTE resolution with welfare policy, Ravitch associated literacy goals for racial and gender liberation and student empowerment with threats to respectable families (pp. 302-11).

To counteract this “troubled crusade” for culturally responsive literacy, desegregation, and welfare policy, Ravitch advocated for schools to resume their role as carriers of traditional family and educational values. Leveraging a deputy web, Ravitch ended *The Troubled Crusade* with the anecdote of one Black father, a U.S. veteran named Rowan Torrey from Mississippi, who “took up the family tradition of commitment to public education and agitated for better schools” focused on basic skills and increased discipline for Black students; this led to a model where “there is a black public school system and a white private academy [in which] schools are not building a new social order but [where] new employment opportunities have opened up for educated blacks” (p. 329). In other words, Ravitch called on striving Black fathers like Torrey to model and enforce accountability policy, as a contrast to both culturally responsive literacy and desegregation policy. This elevation of Black men was mirrored in Ravitch and Finn’s courting of Black male educational leaders who advocated for basic skills reform as a policy tool

toward Black socioeconomic mobility. For example, Ravitch and Finn recruited Benjamin Alexander, President of the University of D.C., to speak at an NEH-sponsored Excellence Network in a 1983 conference on how high school humanities curricula should require “minority, or inner city” students to “speak the same language...as other students” on the basis that they knew “no one who could say this with greater power, eloquence, and influence...” (*Finn, 1982a, p. 1; Finn, 1982b*). In this formative period of institution-building, just as an anti-feminist discourse of “family rights” gained legitimacy through White women advocates like McGraw and Schlafly, calls for “basic skills” and White Mainstream English gained legitimacy through Black men advocates like Alexander and Sowell.

These framing and networking strategies to fracture multiracial, multigender, and interclass solidarity were developed in a field where there were already growing fissures among Black political leaders, who took divergent approaches to educational equality. Taking a moral, character-based approach, Reverend Jesse Jackson of the former Southern Christian Leadership Conference founded the “Push for Excellence” program in 1975. Having received funding from the NIE to speak at schools around the nation, Jackson criticized a “politics of decadence” and the “diversionary” ills of alcohol, drugs, and lack of discipline as obstacles to racial equality (*qtd. in Cole, 1977, p. 378*). One of Jackson’s comments to his audiences in speeches across the country was that Black girls “have fully developed bottoms and half developed brains” (*qtd. in Cole, 1977, p. 380*). By contrast, other Black political leaders focused on structural reforms. In 1978, Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm led a charge to obstruct the proposed federal Department of Education on the basis of the proposed Department’s “inadequate mechanisms to guarantee compliance with the Federal Law [the *Brown* decision]” (*Chisholm, qtd. in New York Times, 1978*). Countering Jackson’s testimony supporting the creation of an Education Department (*Fiske, 1979*), Chisholm supported a proposal for a strengthened Office of Civil Rights and worked with the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund and American Federation of Labor/Congress of Industrial Organizations. These public fissures among Black political leaders centered on a difference in emphasis on private, moral responsibility versus government responsibility for ensuring educational access.

1981-1983: Accountability Entrepreneurs Construct Literacy Crisis and Center Agenda on Basic Skills and Parental Rights and Responsibilities

In 1981, after the election of Reagan, accountability entrepreneurs established a network of governmental and non-governmental groups, forming an Excellence movement that would become the foundation of a new coalition. In their popular writings, speeches, and reports, entrepreneurs constructed a literacy crisis to disrupt alignments undergirding culturally responsive literacy and develop policy centered on White Mainstream English and heteronormative, capitalist family values. In order to construct this crisis and legitimize the link between respectable linguistic and family norms, entrepreneurs used deviance knots: in-text tangles between culturally responsive literacy and threats to family rights posed by gender, sexually, or economically marginalized classes. Deviance knots served to absorb culturally responsive literacy into broader moral panic about respectable families and the national economy. This meant accountability entrepreneurs co-opted moral civil rights discourses around “rights,” “discrimination,” and “justice” to shift educational jurisprudence from the state to private families and condition this jurisprudence on adherence to respectable norms.

In tandem with deviance knots, Excellence leaders relied on deputy webs to shape a new coalition unifying some segments of the Great Society coalition with the Reagan base: White men and women who applied heteropatriarchal, racial, and capitalist discourses to goals for working-class families and mothers’ uplift, and Black men who applied heteropatriarchal, capitalist discourses to advocate for Black families’ uplift. Representing this gendered racial makeup of this new coalition, Appendix Table B2 captures deputy webs by providing an overview of the racial and gender identity composition of the accountability entrepreneurs. A small number of White women and Black men were involved in this network, but there was *not a single* identified Black or Asian woman policy actor behind federal literacy accountability. This was despite the advocacy of Black women educator organizations in appealing directly to Reagan for a voice in national education reform (*Hill, 1981*).

Harnessing Moral Panic about Family Norms to Legitimize a Literacy Crisis

In early 1981, President Reagan initially dismissed Secretary Bell's proposal for the Excellence Commission. In fact, PK-12 education did not occupy a focus of the administration's attention until after the Excellence movement gained legitimacy from the Commission's 1983 report *A Nation at Risk*. Reagan officials' persistent plans to dismantle the new Department of Education until at least the publication of *A Nation at Risk* highlighted a potential rift among assimilationists and resegregationists among defenders of the racial order (Carleson, 1983). Upon his appointment, Bell received criticism from many Reagan supporters for his belief in public education rather than support for school vouchers. However, Bell's appointment to Secretary and leadership of the Department were aided by fellow Utahn Republican Senator Orrin Hatch, Chair of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions and leader of policy initiatives such as abstinence-only sexuality education. With the support of Hatch and colleagues, Bell secured funds for the Commission in the summer of 1981 and charged this group of scholars and advocates with key evaluative tasks (Bell, 1988). Chief among these tasks were "to assess the quality of our nation's schools and colleges," "to study how college and university admissions requirements have affected the high school curriculum and how the latter has influenced the former," and "to study how major social changes in the last quarter century affected student achievement and the schools" (Gardner, 1982, p. 41).

Implicit in this periodization of 1956 to 1981 was the Commission's interest in evaluating the impacts of federal enforcement of desegregation policy after *Brown* (1954) and civil rights movements on higher and PK-12 education. The viewpoint of Commission Chairman, Utahn David Pierrepont Gardner, emphasized how calls for expanding educational access under the Great Society drove the Commission's construction of a moral crisis of authority. Gardner's administrative experiences in the University of California system in the 1960s led him to decry student activism for laying the "the groundwork for the troubles that were to follow, especially bearing on the older generation then governing and managing the universities" (Gardner, 2005, p. 37). Leaders of the Excellence movement came to understand their goals as reasserting the traditional "in loco parentis" (Ravitch, 1983, p. 327) role of schools and government in

the aftermath of deviant movements, typified by calls for youth empowerment and university campus agitation for racial and ethnic studies.

The moral crisis of literacy, in particular, was central to Bell's establishment of the Commission (*Bell, 1981a*). In Bell's drafted statement announcing the Commission in August 1981, his argument for basic and functional literacy skills rested on a deviance knot; he attributed literacy decline to changes in educational standards in the 1970s while positioning the "functional illiteracy" of Black and Brown youth as a threat to the equal opportunity of respectable families and children:

"[N]o one can deny that the past decade has seen a diminution of standards. We know that far too many of our students are not measuring up to their potential or levels of excellence. The high level of functional illiterates among our young, particularly among minorities, is a perverse form of discrimination against those who, without a good basic education, may never succeed as productive citizens in the competitive world of work." (*Bell, 1981b*)

In direct opposition to empirical research and the NCTE's position to exercise caution in using standardized tests to "label" students, Secretary Bell drew on a classed and racial framing of "functional illiteracy" to create a zero-sum contrast between culturally responsive literacy and basic skills. Specifically, his discussion of functional illiteracy as a "perverse form of discrimination" co-opted moral discourses of civil rights policy to position respectable students and families as the victims of culturally responsive literacy policies.

While Bell's purported victims were vaguely defined, Bell's speaking tours on behalf of the Excellence movement from the summer of 1981 to the spring of 1983 demonstrated his goal of appealing to deputy webs, tailoring speeches to Black men and White women's respective goals for family uplift. In July 1981, the month prior to the Commission's official announcement, Bell spoke at the predominantly male-led National Urban League and took aim at Great Society policy support of "students' rights" and instead offered an agenda centered on "upward mobility":

"The rights of students and the demands for equality of students and the demands for equality of educational opportunity turned around the priorities of our schools. These changes have caused cries of outrage and threats of rebellion, and [federal policy] has been, I am certain, the object of many angry utterances from many of you. It has grown out of dreams for an ideal society — of a commitment to equal opportunity — of rights to upward mobility for many who have lived in deprivation and poverty." (*Bell, 1981c, p. 3*)

Focusing on capitalist rather than collective routes to Black economic uplift, Bell ended his speech to the National Urban League with a quotation by Progressive Era educator and literary scholar Felix Schelling: “True education makes for inequality: the inequality of individuality; the inequality of success; the glorious inequality of talent, of genius. For inequality, not mediocrity, individual superiority...is the measure of the progress of the world” (*qtd. in Bell, 1981c, p. 7*). Bell’s justification for “inequality,” centered on the threat posed by “mediocrity,” framed success through the lens of competition among individuals and families. “Mediocrity” would become the primary language of threat used by the Excellence Commission in *A Nation at Risk* (*Gardner et al., 1983, p. 5*).

In appealing to networks of White women, Bell reaffirmed Reagan’s priority to base education reform on the value that school systems ought to embody an extension of White, heteronormative home life. When Reagan welcomed the members of the Excellence Commission to the White House for their first meeting in October 1981, he advocated for a traditional family-first approach to education reform (*Bell, 1988*). In his remarks, Reagan emphasized that “the first and most important of [his] principles is that...education begins in the home, where it is the right and *responsibility* of every parent. Our educational institutions...exist to assist families in the instruction of their children” (*Reagan qtd. in Gardner, 2005, p. 115*; emphasis in the original). Later that month, Secretary Bell gave the keynote address at a conference on the “Schools in Support of the Family,” co-sponsored by the Center for Family Studies (where Heritage consultant Onalee McGraw served on the Executive Committee), the Utah Association of Women, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the United Families of Utah. Bell’s speech echoed Reagan’s: “The school is supportive of the home, the family, and the community when it...develops strong academic standards that ensure that a youngster leaves the school setting well grounded in the basic skills [and] appropriately drilled in his or her responsibilities as a participating and law-abiding citizen” (*Bell, 1981d, p. 5*). Altogether, Excellence entrepreneurs obtained legitimacy within the Reagan administration by positioning education’s purpose as upholding and shoring up traditional

gender, class, and racial orders via the family, economy, and government rather than entertaining questions, exploration, and discussion of the logics behind these institutions.

Simultaneously, Excellence movement initiatives inside the federal government gained support through the development and advocacy of the Educational Excellence Network. The Excellence Network was co-founded in 1981 by Vanderbilt education policy scholar Chester E. Finn, Jr. (then legislative director for Senator Moynihan) and Columbia education historian Diane Ravitch, and it received financial support from the National Endowment of the Humanities, then led by Bill Bennett (Bell's successor as Secretary). In an article titled "Toward a New Consensus" published in *Change* magazine in September 1981, one month after the announcement of the Excellence Commission, Finn discussed the call for excellence as an opportunity for the "Reagan Revolution" to overturn the "Liberal Consensus." Finn pulled Reaganites into the Excellence agenda by invoking the "family rights" and "family choice" rhetoric advocated for by McGraw (1978) and Bennett nearly verbatim:

"That government often does more lasting harm than good is an insight—some would say bias—that the Reagan revolutionaries bring to many realms of domestic social policy. But nowhere has its application been easier or less ambiguous than in education, because the liberal consensus had done so much to prepare the way. Its own excesses had finally become—well, excessive: obliging children to travel to schools their parents not want them to attend...steadfastly opposing aid to families that preferred to send their children to nongovernmental schools; paying for, and thereby seeming to sanction, innovations in such volatile and contentious aspects of education as sex, morals, values, and ethics..." (Finn, 1981a, p. 19)

Finn then doubled down on culturally responsive literacy and desegregation policy as threats to family rights by directly re-quoting Excellence Network affiliate and University of Michigan psychologist Joseph Adelson, who later shared a list of possible potential Network affiliates with Finn (Adelson, 1982a). In a March 1981 article in *Commentary* magazine, Adelson called for the rejection of a "modernist ethos that 'scorns the pursuit of success; is egalitarian and redistributive in emphasis; tolerates or encourages sensual gratification; values self-expression against self-restraint; accepts alternative or deviant forms of the family; and emphasizes ethical relativism'" (Adelson qtd. in Finn, 1981a, p. 60).

Using deviance knots, Finn and Adelson targeted social movements for interclass Black and Brown solidarity as examples of the Great Society's "harm" to families. The underlying logic of

heteropatriarchal, capitalist family values paralleled Bell's own logic of success via competition between individuals and families. To Finn, the Reagan government was well-suited for leading educational reform in support of families by virtue of its "restraint" (p. 21), as a contrast to the previous "educational activism of the national government" (p. 18). For example, Finn and Adelson's juxtaposition of "self-expression against self-restraint" positioned culturally responsive literacy practices as indicators of how school systems were becoming decoupled from the traditional authority of the home and nuclear family. Finn and Adelson's language of "restraint" proposed a shift in public resources and attention: away from the "excessive" concern and empowerment of deviants (i.e., students and challengers of traditional intersecting institutional orders), toward respectable parents and families. For example, Finn and Adelson also embedded deputy webs into their discourse when they framed this "modernist ethos" as a binary against "the traditional values that most American parents wish imparted to their children- values such as 'merit, accomplishment, competition, and success; self-restraint, self-discipline, and the postponement of gratification; the stability of the family'" (*Adelson qtd. in Finn, 1981, p. 60*). Finn and Adelson's appeal to "most American parents" implied an outsider status for those who held expansive definitions of family and alternative goals for education.

In appealing to a majority of the public, Finn and Adelson like Bell aimed to create continuity with *some* proponents of "equality of opportunity." He wrote, "...if construed too narrowly, [Excellence] cannot sustain the broad base of support that is a necessary precondition for reform-through-consensus in American education—in this case, for a *new* consensus, rooted in both the original principles of the old liberal consensus and the educational convictions of traditional conservatives" (p. 21). Finn's description of how some members of the Great Society coalition became "greedy and strident" (p. 19) was consistent with Riesman, Gardner, and Bell's causal narratives, especially Bell's discussion of how a "great scramble to provide equal opportunity" led to "a general decline in literacy" in his August 1981 speech to the Education Commission of the States, the organization that administered the NAEP (*Bell, 1981a*). According to Finn, in order to disentangle the federal government from deviant social movements, this new consensus needed to develop education policy connecting "traditional academic values" with local

and parental authority (p. 60). Finn concluded his article by identifying “precepts for a new consensus,” the first several of which proposed accountability and control mechanisms for individual achievement, including content and performance standards for basic skills and oversight from the “watchful eyes” of parents and families (p. 62). These precepts, which were publicly supported by Utah Senator Hatch in the following issue of *Change*, became a blueprint for the Commission and largely came to fruition over the next few decades, from the state level in Tennessee (Finn, 1983) to the federal level (e.g., *No Child Left Behind*, 2002).

White women policy advocates, from researchers to Congresswomen, were central to the spread of the Excellence agenda that advocated for basic skills via traditional family norms. Embroiled in deputy webs, many White women centered the monoracial nuclear family in policy discussions of social and educational reform. In a statement to Congress on Father’s Day in 1982, Colorado Democrat Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder attributed working-class mothers’ and families’ economic struggles to “fathers who abandoned the responsibility of their families” (Schroeder *qtd. in Congressional Record*, 1982, p. 7). Schroeder, a former teacher in Denver Public Schools and employee of Planned Parenthood, had been a women’s rights activist who helped lead the passage of the 1978 Pregnancy Discrimination Act (which made it illegal to not hire or fire someone on the basis of their pregnancy or childbirth status) and served on the Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families. In her Father’s Day statement, Schroeder shared a *Washington Post* article titled, “The Kids They Leave Behind” by Julius Duscha (published on June 20, 1982). In the article, Duscha cited statistics that whereas in 1979,

“...nearly 10 percent of all children born to white women were born out of wedlock [f]or Black women the figure was an astonishing 55 percent.” Duscha wrote that children in one-parent households were more likely to become involved in crime, and that “all studies of education [he] had ever seen show conclusively that a stable and normal home environment—which generally means the presence of both father and mother—is the most important prerequisite to good performance in the classroom.” (Duscha *qtd. in Congressional Record*, 1982, p. 7)

Schroeder’s use of Duscha’s editorial highlighted how visible leaders of women’s rights, not only socially conservative women like Onalee McGraw and Phyllis Schlafly, adopted heteronormative, racial discourses to charge Black men to take greater domestic and civic “responsibility” on behalf of Black

mothers and children. In this time period between the announcement of the Excellence Commission and its publication of *A Nation at Risk*, the federal policy environment became characterized by a moral panic about family life and productivity. In this moral panic, deviance knots and deputy webs served to make Black family reform a key tool and objective of education policy.

Excellence Commission Links Parental Rights and Responsibilities to Enforcement of Basic Skills

In its preparation of *A Nation at Risk*, the Excellence Commission drew from reports from a select group of scholars it had commissioned. Appendix B2 highlights how these reports were developed almost exclusively by White men and women scholars, including affiliates of the Excellence Network. Amidst moral panic about changes in family and educational norms, multiple reports focused on changes in family patterns, and on the relationship between diversifying demographics and school curriculum, over the past quarter century (*Blake, 1982; Cusick, 1982; Rudolph, 1982*). This included Neumann's (1982) extensive discussion of his research partner Riesman's critique of growing "curricular freedom and autonomy" for college students (*p. 5*). In one report, titled "The Changing American Child" (1982), Bank Street College research director Herbert Zimiles concluded that children's literacy decline could be explained by social movements for women's and youth liberation:

"[I]n the interests of gaining a still greater measure of freedom and equality in our society, there is a spirit of emancipating and disclosing, of removing curtains and barriers... These trends are expressed in the overthrow of tradition, formality, and religion... Thus, all of society is joined in what is sometimes a freeing of the selves and sometimes 'a killing of the father.' In all of this, there is an investment in neutralizing power, in erasing distinctions between boss and worker, and also, between adult and child." (*Zimiles, 1982, p. 29*)

According to Zimiles, national literacy decline was linked to emancipatory calls for women to abdicate their responsibility as wives and mothers. Movements for students' rights and "freedom and equality," such as culturally responsive literacy, threatened respectable families since they enabled youths' tendencies toward "sexual and aggressive impulses" (*p. 10*); enervated children's sense of motivation, obedience, and discipline (*p. 12*); and permitted women's absence from traditional domestic roles. He asserted that "new modes of family functioning and organization [were] being called forth by divorce and/or mother working" (*p. 21*). As Zimiles' study was based exclusively on White families and children,

he centered White heteronormative, middle-class norms for achievement and suggested White women's authority was necessary for children's intellectual and moral development. This approach would be echoed by Bell and Reagan after *A Nation at Risk*, such as when Bell referenced a *Washington Post* article (1983) written by White woman Mary Bourgoïn titled "You Can't Be a Mother and Have It All" when he encouraged Reagan to emphasize, in his address to the National Forum of Excellence in Education, that "parents and local school boards must make the system work. When they allow standards to decline, local control is in peril" (Bell, 1983b, p. 2).

At the same time, Adelson's report to the Excellence Commission, titled "Twenty Five Years of Education" (1982b), portrayed Black mothers' reproductive patterns as a threat to national educational achievement (see also, Bunzel, 1985). His report highlighted the relationship between the "thuggishness of the students" and the "loss of authority" experienced by secondary school principals (p. 10). Similar to Ravitch's narrative of literacy decline (1983), Adelson's narrative drew attention to Black and Brown communities' migration and reproductive patterns after 1950 as causes of educational decline and "social pathology" (p. 10): "There were also larger families, which meant a decrease in the number of intellectually able youngsters... Hence, in the post-war era, the schools confronted a horde of youngsters, a large percentage of whom were academically weak and/or anti-social" (p. 10-11). Explaining how the "liberationist writing" or culturally responsive pedagogy of the 1970s came "dominate elite attitudes and then the media and then ultimately educational practice" (p. 36) Adelson argued that its purported failure in Ann Arbor - his home town and the site of the federal case for Black English in 1979 - meant a new approach needed to be grounded in middle-class, heteronormative parents' goals for their children (p. 37). Throughout, Adelson used deviance knots to frame culturally responsive literacy, comprehensive sexuality education, and affirmative action as threats to respectable parents' goals for their children (p. 29). Ignoring the NCTE's arguments about how cultural biases in literacy tests undermined the access and empowerment of marginalized youth and families, Adelson called for "objective and universalistic means" (p. 30) to place and label students.

In the single identified report to the Excellence Commission penned by a Black man, Herman Blake supported the value of a “core” curriculum rooted in White Mainstream English over culturally responsive models. A sociology professor and college provost at University of California Santa Cruz, Blake wrote “Demographic Change and Curriculum: ‘New’ Students in Higher Education” for a special hearing of the Commission in the Fall of 1982. Drawing on his experience as a leader of educational programs targeted to racial and ethnic minorities to “show how an institution can effectively respond” to demographic changes, specifically a growing number of racially and ethnically minoritized students (*p.* 1), Blake made clear that these students entered the university with “some basic strengths” and that as they “gain greater confidence in their ability, their marginality becomes a strength” (*p.* 19). Blake also used intersectionally inclusive discourses to mark the importance of hiring and supporting gender and racially minoritized faculty and staff (*p.* 26). Blake’s gender- and race-conscious approach to education policy was framed within the context of a demographic study that highlighted two key sets of statistics: the first was that there was a “larger proportion of minority youth in elementary and secondary schools” (*p.* 5), with a particular rise in Hispanic students (*p.* 6); and the second was that there was increasing “gender and ethnic...homogeneity in academic interests” (*p.* 6). Specifically, Blake pointed out that while in the 1960s, Black and female students were most likely to major in education, by 1978, these groups of students were most likely to major in business (*p.* 6). These statistics substantiated Blake’s appeal to academic curriculum that elevated “basic skills” and “liberal education” *over* the study of “ethnic and minority concerns” on the basis that the latter was “not sufficiently liberating for students” (*p.* 2). Blake did not deny the value of race- and gender-conscious curriculum, and indeed, he argued for expanded access for Black and Brown students to public education. Yet, his role as the lone Black or Brown male representative of racially liberatory ideas contributed to the legitimacy of effacing culturally responsive pedagogy. In so doing Blake acted as a deputy, shaping accountability as a paradigm that excluded Black women’s and interclass voices. This mattered because, even when some Black and Brown women adopted narratives about changing family structure in regional hearings of the Commission and supported

standards-based policies, they often maintained the importance of civil rights policies for federal funding for Black and Brown students and culturally responsive literacy (Zamora, 1982).

In *A Nation at Risk* (1983) the Excellence Commission tied White Mainstream English to heteronormative, middle-class family values as the building blocks of this new policy regime. Framed as an “open letter to the American people” (Gardner et al., 1983, p. 6), *A Nation at Risk* echoed Bell’s framing of illiteracy as a moral and racialized problem. According to the report, “23 million American adults [were] functionally illiterate,” and “functional illiteracy among minority youth may run as high as 40 percent” (p. 8). At stake for the Commission was not only national well-being and productivity, but also intergenerational mobility. The report used the language of “equality” to highlight these stakes: “Each generation of Americans has outstripped its parents in education, in literacy, and in economic attainment. For the first time in the history of our country, the educational skills of our generation will not surpass, will not *equal*, will not even approach, those of their parents” (Copperman qtd. in Gardner et al., p. 11; emphasis added). This “equality” frame suggested that Great Society education policies constituted an injustice to families and their children. In explaining this decline, the Commission echoed Excellence entrepreneurs’ denigration of culturally responsive literacy models. They wrote that the “curricular smorgasbord, combined with extensive student choice, explains a great deal about where we find ourselves today” (p. 18). This explanation echoed Network leaders like Ravitch and White conservative parent groups, who, inspiring Bell’s creation of the Excellence Commission (Bell, 1988), had contested “secular humanities” as an “anticompetitive” and “socialistic” model (Kleiman, 1981).

To replace culturally responsive literacy, the Commission recommended using White Mainstream English standards and Western cultural values including capitalist productivity as primary tools for nationwide reform. Echoing Bell, Hatch, and Finn, the Commission called for an increase in standardized tests to sort students into higher education and professional work settings, without questioning the bias of existing standardized tests like the NAEP toward White Mainstream English (Gardner et al., p. 28). The Commission also recommended cultural literacy to supplement basic literacy: “The teaching of English in high school should equip graduates to...know our literary heritage...and how it relates to the customs,

ideas, and values of today's life and culture" (p. 25). By creating a boundary around the "New Basics" (English, math, science, social studies, computer science), and positioning foreign languages and cultural values outside of these basics, the Commission embedded White, middle-class norms of academic achievement into curricular reform.

In formalizing a shift in educational authority to families who adhered to respectability norms, the Commission charged parents with the pedagogical and disciplinary responsibility of holding children accountable to standards for basic and cultural literacy. For example, one recommendation was to increase the amount of homework, instructing parents to support students with this school work (*Gardner et al.*, p. 29). In its final pages, the Commission directly addressed American parents:

"Your right to a proper education for your children carries a double responsibility. As surely you are your child's first and most influential teacher, your child's ideas about education and its significance begin with you. You must be a *living* example of what you expect your children to honor and to emulate. Moreover, you bear a responsibility to participate actively in your child's education. You should encourage more diligent study and discourage satisfaction with mediocrity and the attitude that says 'let it slide'; monitor your child's study; encourage good study habits...and be an active participant in the work of the schools." (*Gardner et al.*, 1983, p. 43)

The Commission's dual language of "rights" and "responsibilities" echoed Reagan's welcome speech to the Commission in 1981, and Coleman and Bell's argument that public schools would improve if they followed religious private schools' model of parental involvement (*Coleman, 1981; Bell, 1983a*). This dual language formalized a double standard of parent empowerment based on adherence to classed norms for education, language, and employment. Simultaneously, however, Reagan's domestic policies were contracting the social safety net for Black parents while increasing the policing and surveillance of their and their children's behavior (*Reagan, 1982*; for further explanation, see Hinton, 2016). Thus, just as federal education reform began promoting double standards for parent empowerment based on family structure and linguistic norms, broader social policy initiatives made it systematically more difficult for working-class Black and Brown families to meet this standard for equal rights.

1983-1990: Accountability via National Coalitional Realignment and Racialized Policy Designs

In offering a catalog of evaluation tools and standards for policymakers to reference, *A Nation at Risk* became a key organizing text for institutionalizing literacy accountability at the federal and state level (Anderson et al., 1985; National Governors' Association, 1986). Between *A Nation at Risk* and the Charlottesville Summit, where 49 governors collaborated with President Bush to develop the *National Education Goals* (1989), Excellence leaders cited *A Nation at Risk* as they crafted a dual empowerment/punishment approach to accountability policy based on linguistic and family norms: "parental choice" for parents who had time and resources to be "First Teachers" of basic skills, but school and state intervention for parents who did not or raised children in "changing family structures" (Smith, 1987, p. 2). Appendix Table B5 offers examples of how facially race- and gender-neutral frames of functional, basic, moral, cultural, and family literacy carried singular and exclusionary meanings of achievement and respectability, in contrast to culturally responsive approaches. While accountability designs were sometimes locally contested, and curricular implementation varied by state and local district (e.g., Brumley, 1987), coalitional realignment and systematic exclusion of Black and Brown women from leading policy bodies normalized a White racial logic of family empowerment across contexts: rights conditional on adherence to elites' norms for literacy and parenting, and equality as parity in educational and economic skills and outcomes, versus inclusion and self-determination.

Nationwide Coalitional Realignment

The Civil Rights Commission under the Reagan Administration adopted the goals and classed, gendered, and racial double standard of parent empowerment of the "Excellence" movement. Chaired by Excellence Network affiliate Clarence Pendleton, a Black man, the Civil Rights Commission positioned education reform toward women's employment as a key mechanism for racial equality. One month after *A Nation at Risk*, the Commission published *A Growing Crisis: Disadvantaged Women and their Children*, which addressed the drastic rise in the "number of blacks in poor female-headed families" in the 1960s and 1970s (Pendleton et al., 1983, p. 2). Through a deputy web, the Civil Rights Commission cited and echoed the findings of White women economists Heather Ross and Isabel Sawhill, who in the 1970s had written a watershed report on single Black mothers that quoted and partially substantiated Moynihan's

“up-down” model tying Black women’s economic struggles to the prevalence of working-class Black men unable to take responsibility for their families (*Ross & Sawhill, 1975, p. 136*). Studying single mothers as a public problem of racialized culture, the Civil Rights Commission focused its first chapter on the link between marriage and motherhood. Echoing accountability entrepreneurs, the Civil Rights Commission positioned single mothers as victims of hypersexuality and deviants of society who siphoned public funds:

“The phenomenal growth of female house-holder families, stemming in part from increasing marital disruption and out-of-wedlock births, has forced many women to be both chief parent and child provider. The continuing trend in teenage childbearing out of wedlock is cause for concern. Teenage mothers often must interrupt or discontinue their education thereby making the acquisition of marketable employment skills more difficult. If unable to find adequate and affordable child care, the teenage mother and those who experience marital disruption may be forced to rely upon public assistance for basic needs.” (*Pendleton et al., 1983, p. 14*)

The Commission positioned single Black and Brown mothers, in particular, as a source of harm for children and the nation, and as such, they needed to break out of intergenerational cycles of poverty (*p. 46*). For the Commission, an important goal of policy reform became nuclear family “self-sufficiency” and increasing rates of marriage (*p. 26*). In their discussion of education, the Commission adopted policy designs rooted in basic and functional literacy. While the Civil Rights Commission identified the importance of instructional materials that were not sexist, their focus was exclusively on how these materials would impact gender-neutral parity in educational and labor outcomes (*pp. 36-37*). Whereas earlier federal policy reports for family support included school-based health centers and comprehensive sexuality education (*Ross & Sawhill, 1975*), the Civil Rights Commission after *A Nation at Risk* aimed to address a crisis in family life by incentivizing the school and job market performance of young women and Black and Brown boys. Civil rights policy approaches pivoted from combating structural disadvantages to monitoring students’ individual choices and character.

At the state level, governors mobilized during and after the Excellence Commission’s work to campaign for accountability mechanisms and greater private investment in public schools. Tennessee governor Lamar Alexander was an early and consistent collaborator with Excellence Network co-founders; Finn worked at Vanderbilt and played a “major role” (*Alexander, 1984, p. 1*) in many of

Alexander's initiatives since the summer of 1981, and Ravitch would become Alexander's Assistant Secretary in the 1990s. Alexander led the Southern Regional Education Board's 1981 report *The Need for Quality* and ECS Task Force on Education and Economic Growth's 1983 report *Action for Excellence*. During and after the work of the National Excellence Commission, Tennessee became a laboratory and model for states in embodying the Excellence agenda's program. For instance, Alexander pioneered the use of a "Basic Skills First" program as the pathway to a "happy, productive, and self-sufficient life" (Finn, 1982a). Having found success passing state legislation for teacher merit pay in Tennessee in 1983, Alexander spearheaded policy designs in concert with other state governors, many from southern states. Alongside Governors Clinton and Riley, later President and Education Secretary, respectively, Alexander led the National Governors' Association's publication of *Time for Results* in 1986. This report disavowed what Finn called "'input' or 'process' measures" (Finn, 1982a), advocated for strengthening the use of the NAEP as a key evaluative tool, and reinforced a dual approach to empowerment/punishment of parents and communities based on literacy achievement norms (Alexander, 1986). By the end of 1987, several states required parent involvement for school accreditation; 21 states provided training in "sound parenting practices most often for parents of preschool, handicapped, migrant, or at-risk children"; and Tennessee and Kentucky offered programs that "combine[d] parenting with basic skills instructions" (Project Education Reform, 1987, p. 15). Many states also developed matching fund programs, which supported what Finn understood as a needed shift in funding from the federal government to corporate contributions based on goals for driving human capital (Finn, 1982b). As facially race-neutral and economic frames like "basic," "functional," and "essential" solidified a new coalition of White male governors, business elites, some Black male officials and civil rights leaders (e.g., Pendleton, W.J. Wilson), and some White women officials and civil rights leaders (e.g., Kati Haycock, Eleanor Farrar), policy designs targeting the cultural and economic uplift of an "underclass" (Auletta, 1982) foreclosed literacy deemed outside the basics or non-essential.

Policy Erasure of Black Women Intellectuals and Culturally Responsive Literacy

Accountability entrepreneurs cited *A Nation at Risk* in initiatives to increase testing, policy reliance on testing, and facially race- and gender-neutral curricula that silenced or disciplined Black and Brown women and communities' literacy goals and practices (Bennett, 1987a, 1988; Bunzel, 1985; Senese, 1983). Close examination of Secretary Bennett's model curriculum, *James Madison High School: A Curriculum for American Studies* (1987b) alongside Black linguistics scholar Geneva Smitherman's "Toward a National Public Policy on Language" (1987) illuminates how Bennett used his position to override sustained efforts toward culturally responsive literacy in nationwide curricula.

In January 1987, Smitherman - one of the leading expert witnesses in the federal case for Black English in Ann Arbor in 1979 - wrote an article in *College English* that called on scholars and educational professionals to develop a "national public policy on language" (p. 30). Smitherman drew readers' attention to the campaign by Senator Hayakawa to amend Constitution to make English the official national language, observing that it "has succeeded in creating a burgeoning, highly effective mass movement, a linguistic corollary to the reactionary mood of conservatism reemerging across America" (p. 31). In explaining why this linguistic conservatism undermined educational equality, Smitherman cited her own research on the NAEP (Smitherman & Wright, 1984), which "found significant correlations between the frequency of Black English and the rater's scores, that is, the more Black English, the lower the score" (p. 31). To show how the strict enforcement of White Mainstream English could also backfire on defenders of the White heteropatriarchy, Smitherman wryly noted how President Reagan's own 1985 Inauguration speech had become the subject of linguistic critique from elite intellectuals. In criticizing this shift toward English monolingualism spanning immigration and education policy, Smitherman's piece stressed the value of the 1974 NCTE resolution "Students' Right to Their Own Language" and Judge Joiner's decision in the Ann Arbor case (1979) as resources on which civil rights advocates could draw in developing policies and guidelines to support the learning and well-being of all communities, especially racially and linguistically minoritized ones.

Smitherman's proposal for a national public policy did *not* reject the concept of standards for literacy learning, nor did she reject English, or U.S. officials' desire for Americans to become leaders in

global politics. Rather, she argued for a reimagination of these standards to better reflect the aliveness and pluralism of languages used daily by Americans. Three touchstones grounded her advocacy of a more democratic national policy:

“(1) reinforce the language of wider communication; (2) promote and extend the legitimacy of mother tongue languages and dialects, and (3) promote the acquisition of one or more foreign languages, preferably those spoken in the Third World. Such a policy is not only concomitant with the emerging pedagogy that language is the foundation stone of education, this kind of policy is also a basis for participation and leadership in world affairs.” (*Smitherman, 1987, p. 35*)

These touchstones highlight culturally responsive literacy advocates’ reimagination of the White, heteronormative middle class standards embedded in accountability entrepreneurs’ policy designs. Whereas the Excellence Commission had acknowledged foreign languages as some students’ native languages but *outside* the “New Basics,” Smitherman’s call for the “legitimacy of mother tongue languages” added non-standardized English and Third World languages back into the basic equation. Additionally, whereas the Excellence Commission and Network leaders demarcated a geographic boundary centered around Western cultural knowledge in elevating “our literary heritage” (*p. 25*), Smitherman flipped this idea of American history and power on its head by expanding this boundary and asserting that culturally responsive policy was critical to a transnational politics of worldbuilding. She challenged Excellence leaders’ appeals to a narrow, fixed intellectual tradition that tied literacy standards to U.S. exceptionalism and racially paternalistic models of school policy and instruction.

Despite the outspoken educational activism of Smitherman and colleagues and publication of influential works in Black and Chicana feminist literature and theory in 1987 (e.g., Morrison’s *Beloved*, Spillers’ “An American Grammar Book,” and Anzaldua’s *Borderlands*), Secretary Bill Bennett willfully ignored race and gender-conscious frames of literacy and equality when he published a national curricular model for school district and communities’ use in December 1987. In addition to Bennett’s speaking tours promoting Western cultural literacy at U.S. universities and educational institutions, his official dissemination of *James Madison High School* drew on select-schools to explicate the “core” curricular

content standards laid out by the Excellence Commission in *A Nation at Risk*. A facially race- and gender-neutral frame of equality provided the basis of these standards:

“Today, still, every American child has an equal claim to a common future under common laws, enjoying common rights and charged with common responsibilities. There follows the need for common education. In the past, American schools have proved that all children can learn and that scholastic excellence can transcend differences of race, religion, gender, and income.” (*Bennett, 1987a*)

Bennett’s reference to a history of educational equality prior to Great Society policy undercut ideas of equality premised on structural transformation toward access, inclusion and self-determination. While Bennett acknowledged that his proposed “common” curriculum was a model, rather than a mandate, his curriculum was motivated by the desire to clarify the Excellence Commission’s “central corrective recommendation” (*p. 7*). Re-quoting the Commission’s deviance knot targeting educational decline under Great Society reform, Bennett linked the “true purpose of American secondary education” to a “traditionally liberal and nonspecialized” academic curriculum (*p. 7*). Bennett used literacy policy to fortify boundaries of citizenship based on traditional norms of respectability and achievement.

In particular, by providing a “curricular excellence profile” of Xavier Prep, a school of all Black girls, Bennett constructed an educational standard for Black girls in U.S. high schools using White, heteronormative, middle class norms for literacy and family:

“Many of Xavier Prep’s 495 students — all black girls — come from disadvantaged homes. More than a third of them live with only one parent and almost that many are on public assistance. But the little school on the river side of Magazine Street in New Orleans knows what to do... The school’s president, Sister Eileen Sullivan, has a simple message for her students: “You need an education.’ They get one at Xavier. It’s done with a carefully planned and unashamedly traditional core curriculum.” (*Bennett, 1987, p. 43*)

Bennett’s description of a school curriculum for Black girls carried forth Moynihanian and Reaganite stereotypes of Black families and made a deputy out of Sister Eileen Sullivan. His profile of Xavier reinforced the Excellence and Civil Rights Commissions’ goals to use literacy standards as tools for individual and family achievement and solutions to structural disadvantage. The “unashamedly traditional core” curriculum at Xavier and in Bennett’s model was dominated by white male writers. While it included a few White women writers, as well as Black writer Ralph Ellison (*p. 13*), it did not include a

single Black, Brown, or Asian woman writer. The implication: Black and Brown mothers and women had little literacy skills or knowledge to help Black girls achieve in school and society.

Narrowed Meanings of Equality and Family

Excellence leaders also proposed policy designs that also distorted and undermined Black civil rights' advocates' meanings of "equality" (Bennett, 1987c). One government-supported curriculum under the Reagan and Bush administrations was E.D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (1988), published in the months before Bennett's official recommendation. Hirsch advocated for curricular content standards rooted in Western history and literary tradition by leveraging the debate over the science of reading to frame "cultural literacy" as a tool for breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty. He rooted his argument in the work of White woman literacy researcher Dr. Jeanne Chall, whose book *Learning to Read* (1966) had become widely accepted among scholars: "[D]isadvantaged [children's]...reading skills begin to diverge according to socioeconomic status, chiefly because low-income pupils lack elementary cultural knowledge" (p. III). This application of scientific research legitimized and displaced "Excellence" leaders' moralistic reforms. Hirsch and collaborators de-fanged the Black literary tradition by severing the link between Black Americans' expansive literacy pedagogies and goals for political and economic liberation; they offered the Black Panther newspaper as an example of literacy that was "conservative in language and assumed knowledge" (p. 22). Thus, while Hirsch's proposed national humanities curriculum included canonical Black men's voices (Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, MLK, Jr., Malcolm X, and Booker T. Washington), he tokenized and subsumed Black male public intellectuals and moral figures into a cohesive narrative of national linguistic and epistemic unity. Like Bennett, Hirsch excluded the voices of Black or Brown women. These strategies leveraged fissures within and between gender and racial equality advocates, appealing to the moral and intellectual authority of elite White women and Black men and ignoring the ideas and practices of Black women, youth, and the working class.

As the policy erasure of Smitherman's decades-long advocacy showed, literacy accountability served to narrow official ideas about family and kinship. Proposed by Republican Congressman William

Goodling in 1986 and enacted under the bipartisan *Hawkins-Stafford Amendments* (1988), the Even Start Literacy Program created a federal grant structure to promote basic literacy curricula in the homes of economically disadvantaged families (H.R. 5). This grant structure enabled local education agencies to use their discretion in awarding family literacy programs that best served the goals of the policy, which foregrounded basic and functional literacy (e.g., equipping parents to help their children complete homework). These program goals were motivated by the Excellence Commission's call for greater parental involvement in children's schools to break intergenerational cycles of functional illiteracy (*Ellison qtd. in Congress, p. 107*). As such, Even Start turned public education and the private homes of racially and linguistically marginalized families into an extension of White, heteronormative, middle-class family life. The discretionary, strings-attached structure of grants conditioned federal support of disadvantaged families on adherence to class and language norms. Even Start Family Literacy carried forth the vision in the Moynihan and Coleman Reports two decades earlier: it redirected funds and protections toward correctives for marginalized communities' forms of literacy, family, and educational governance. Once encoded in leading policy texts, deviance knots and deputy webs provided accountability policymakers with a set of taken-for-granted tools for maintaining epistemic and social hierarchies, all while appealing exclusively to capitalist, culturally homogenous approaches to racial and gender equality. In 1989, President George H.W. Bush's announcement of the *National Education Goals* alongside 49 governors put a fine point on how exclusionary literacy and family norms rooted in Whiteness and Western culture served as the foundation for accountability. Bush asked the audience, "And come the next century - just 10 years away - what will we be? Will we be children of the Enlightenment or its orphans?" (*Bush qtd. in Weinraub, 1989*).

Discussion

This discussion draws on my empirical analysis to illustrate a developmental model of *democratic* and *respectable family rights policy regimes* that bridges and extends theorization in political development and racialized political behavior on how and why can a moral "crisis" in gender, sexual, and class norms can shape and change meanings and understandings of racial and social equality. I discuss

how this model not only helps researchers account for drivers and outcomes of educational accountability, but also offers analytical traction for political and social scientific research across subfields and policy domains. After outlining limitations to this study, I argue that concepts of deviance and democratic family rights offer tools for conceptualizing, designing, and evaluating political and structural conditions of learning and family engagement.

Literacy Accountability as a Respectable Family Rights Policy Regime

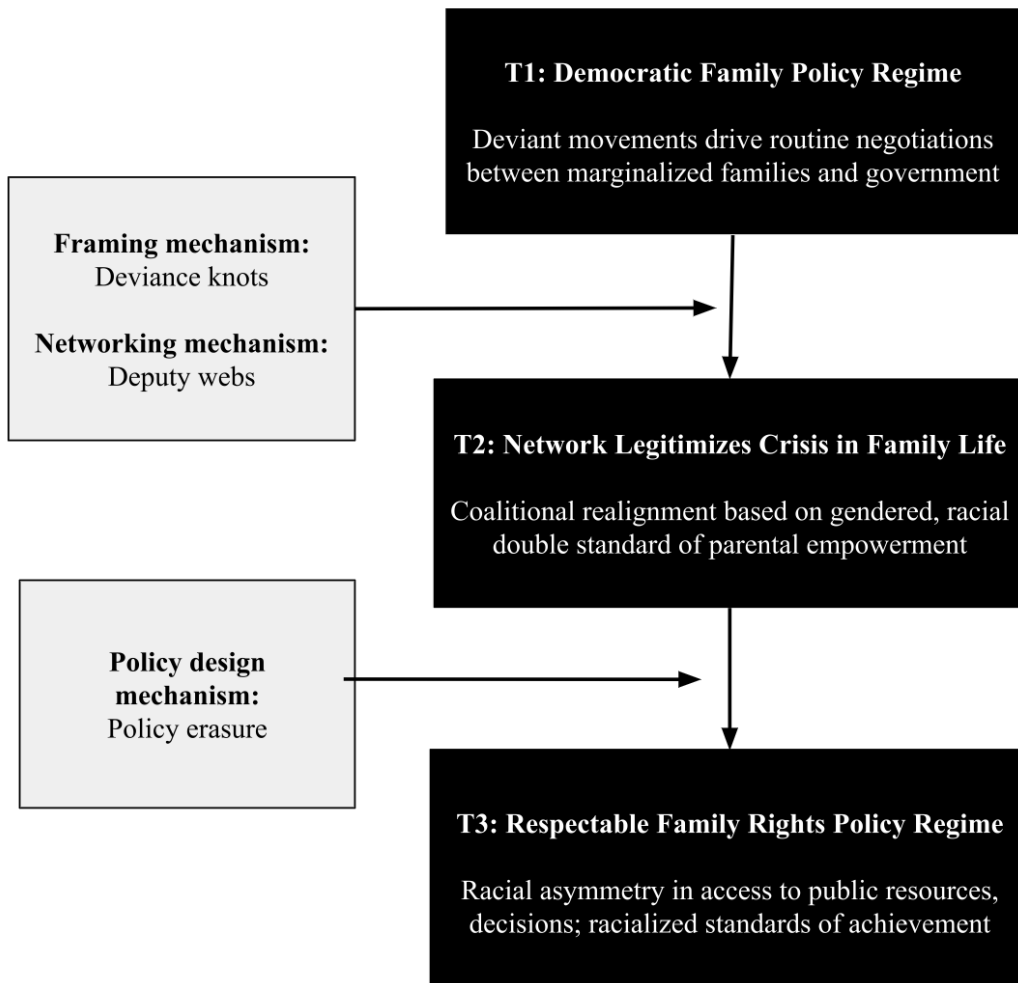
In my analysis, I found that a key asymmetry resulting from federal literacy accountability policy was that White elites and families were systematically positioned to make decisions for Black families and children, while Black elites and families were not similarly positioned to make decisions for White families and children. Furthermore, while Black male elites and middle-class fathers were systematically positioned to make decisions for Black families and children, Black women and mothers were systematically excluded. In tracing this intersectional outcome, I decoded the framing, networking, and policy design mechanisms responsible for creating this racialized arrangement. Table 3 identifies the components of a respectable family rights policy regime in the case of accountability, while Figure 3 illustrates my conceptualization of this developmental process. In sum, deviance knots and deputy webs shape, drive, and legitimize a White racial logic of parental respectability and family empowerment, which can be reinforced by the policy erasure of alternative policy designs. While often facially race-neutral, this logic comprising policy frames, support networks, and designs in turn normalizes racialized standards of achievement and access to public resources and decisionmaking.

Table 3: The Respectable Family Rights Policy Regime in the Case of Literacy Accountability

Element of Logic	Mechanism of Legitimacy	Logic of Respectable Family	Case of Literacy Accountability
Framing	Deviance knots	• Co-optation of moral frames of “rights” and “equality” to apply exclusively or disproportionately to normative, respectable parents • Undermines deviant social movements’ goals to unsettle	• Excellence movement co-opted civil rights discourses to create focus on “family rights” and “parental rights and responsibilities”

		norms and hierarchies upholding White capitalist heteropatriarchy	• “Equality” understood as parity in educational, family, and economic skills and outcomes
Support Network	Deputy webs	• Construction and enlistment of racial, gender, class deputies • Deputies uphold White capitalist heteropatriarchy by advocating for facially race-neutral policy designs rooted in respectability norms	• Gendered, classed, and racial double standard of moral and epistemic authority • Some White women officials and civil rights leaders and some Black and Brown men officials and civil rights leaders served as deputies
Policy Design	Policy erasure of alternatives	• Centers on norms for respectability and achievement and the interests, values of defenders of White capitalist heteropatriarchy	• White Mainstream English; Western, middle-class cultural and family norms • Individual and school/district performance evaluations • Policy erasure of culturally responsive literacy

Figure 3: Developmental Model of Democratic and Respectable Family Rights Policy Regimes



In developing accountability, entrepreneurs relied on deviance knots to harness a moral crisis in family norms to frame movements for interclass, intergenerational Black and Brown solidarity as a threat to heteronormative, middle-class families. In a post-*Brown* civil rights context, deviance knots obtained legitimacy and enacted a racial double standard of family empowerment largely through facially race-neutral frames. Accountability entrepreneurs inside and outside the government co-opted the moral frames of “rights” and “equality” to undermine culturally responsive literacy - specifically, the resolution (1972) and position statement (1974) passed by the NCTE affirming “Students’ Right to Their Own Language.” For example, in a Heritage Foundation report (1978), consultant and future Reagan-appointee Onalee McGraw cited future Secretary Bennett’s positioning of culturally responsive literacy, and its exploration of women’s rights, as a threat to “children’s rights,” “father’s rights,” and “family rights.” In

devising the Excellence Commission in 1981, Secretary Bell referred to policy openings for culturally responsive literacy as a “perverse form of discrimination” against achieving and respectable children, families, and citizens (*Bell, 1981*). Excellence Network co-founders and future Assistant Secretaries Finn and Ravitch used deviance knots to construct culturally responsive literacy as a moral “crisis” impacting respectable families (*Finn, 1981*), calling directly for some civil rights advocates to join a new coalition focused on reinstating the “in loco parentis” role that schools lost after the *Brown* decision (*Ravitch, 1983*). In 1983, the Excellence Commission’s watershed report *A Nation at Risk* mobilized deviance knots targeting “student choice” policy to formalize parents’ “responsibility” to instill White Mainstream English and heteronormative, capitalist family values. Through facially race-neutral frames like “basic literacy” and “parental rights” encoding designs for cultural and family reform, rather than structural support for marginalized communities’ educational goals, deviance knots legitimized an “us” vs. “them” moral crisis discourse (Morone, 2003). Amidst moral panic, White women and middle-class Black and Brown men invested in civil rights were made to choose to affiliate with “them” (deviants) or join “us” (defenders) to help fix and protect “them” under traditional terms of family respectability and educational achievement.

In identifying and conceptualizing deputy webs, I showed not only that some accountability leaders appealed consistently to White women and mothers as racial and class deputies (*Riesman, 1980; Zimiles, 1982*) and middle-class Black and Brown men and fathers as gender and class deputies (*Ravitch, 1983*), but also that the governmental and nongovernmental coalition of entrepreneurs were comprised of White men (primarily), some White women, and some Black and Brown men. While Black and Brown women as parents and scholars were instrumental to the development of culturally responsive literacy policy in the 1970s (*Labov, 1982; Smitherman, 1977*), not a single Black or Asian woman was identified as a member of the Excellence Commission or among the scholars whose research was used by the Commission to develop *A Nation at Risk*. In other words, deputy webs helped to enact a gendered racial double standard of moral and epistemic authority in which only White men, White women, and Black men were positioned to contribute to accountability designs. When included in Excellence networks,

deputies often advocated for policy designs for White Mainstream English and heteronormative, middle-class values. For example, Herman Blake (the only identified Black man whose research was commissioned by the Excellence Commission) argued for the importance “basic” literacy education over race- and culturally conscious curriculum (*Blake, 1982*). Democratic Congresswomen and women’s rights activist Patricia Schroeder advocated for policy reforms that would increase Black fathers’ “responsibility” in domestic and civic life (*Schroeder, 1982*). My analysis demonstrates that nationwide coalitional realignment hinged largely upon the recruitment of racial, class, and gender deputies during conditions of moral panic about families’ economic productivity and reproductive patterns; some high-profile challengers of the White supremacist order (e.g. Reverend Jesse Jackson; Civil Rights Commission chairman Clarence Pendleton) accepted and used traditional gender, sexual, and class norms in politics and policymaking. Based on archival evidence, one of the earliest expression of the “excellence” frame occurred in 1975 with Jackson’s founding of the “Push for Excellence” program, meaning it is possible that this language aimed at Black moral uplift via education was co-opted by federal officials and accountability entrepreneurs in efforts for coalitional realignment (*Murray, 1982*). Upon national coalitional realignment after *A Nation at Risk*, facially race-neutral frames and literacy policy designs obscured the exclusion of culturally responsive pedagogy and narrowed fieldwide ideas of equality and family. Black and Brown women writers were left out of model curricula proposed by elites (*Bennett, 1987*), and the moral and epistemic hierarchy created by a gendered racial double standard of authority resulted in entrepreneurs’ distortion and silencing of pluralistic ideas about equality put forth by Black civil rights leaders (*Hirsch, 1987*).

A respectable family rights policy regime model of accountability connects upstream drivers to long-term policy outcomes in several ways. For one, it highlights how the ongoing policy erasure and uneven representation of Black and Brown women, queer and trans people, and working class communities in literacy accountability models and materials (Austin, 2024; McQuillan et al., 2024) emerged from a long-term historical and political process whereby these marginalized communities were formally excluded in field-shaping political institutions. Second, in doing so, it highlights the importance

of attending to how, and by whom, educational “crises” become constructed and the need to use historical and intersectional methodologies to understand and evaluate racial equality in education. For example, while DeSantis’ rejection of AP African American Studies in 2023 did not rely on overtly racist rhetoric, its political efficacy lay in its mobilization of a crisis around deviant gender and sexuality. Scholarship on current literacy and educational politics illuminates how such “crises” enable socially conservative actors to appropriate moral discourses around “care” and “civility” (Stein et al., 2025, forthcoming) as well as scientific discourses such as “science” (Aydarova, 2023, 2024) as instruments for legitimizing intervention or privatization toward exclusion and marginalization. The democratic/respectable family rights policy model thus joins and extends a new line of critical historical development research in education emphasizing the need to treat time “as a variable” (Mulroy et al., under review) to explain how and why racialized policies have been accepted and defended via class, gender, and sexual norms so as to obscure their racialized origins and evolution.

Through this intersectional lens, my conceptualization of literacy accountability as respectable family rights policy deepens empirical understanding of the political development of accountability. Two strands of educational politics research foreground how “crisis” drove educational accountability; the traditional strand examines how calls for “equality” and “excellence” were bridged by politicians and experts, while the second examines how race-neutral calls for “excellence” and “quality” subsumed designs for “equality.” My analysis uncovers how White elites’ legitimization of a family respectability logic mobilizing class, gender, and sexual norms and hierarchies co-opted “equality” discourse and created a “new consensus” (*Finn, 1981*). This logic of family empowerment enabled novel observation of specific articulations of racial threat: deviant, or non-normative, family types and movements that advocated for expanding fieldwide ideas of family, equality, and literacy. My findings showed how, before literacy accountability, racial and social equality was conceptualized and evaluated by many civil rights policy advocates not only as parity in access or outcomes, but also as community self-determination in learning; epistemic pluralism; and the capacity to expand ideas of learning, kinship, and gender via education (e.g., *Riles, 1981; Smitherman, 1977, 1987*). As such, the recent calls by civil rights leaders to

use standardized testing as a “flashlight” (Cardona qtd. in Stanford, 2023) to illuminate learning conditions can be seen as a common yet diluted point of unity across an otherwise disparate racial policy alliance under a respectable family rights policy regime.

Analytical Traction of Democratic and Respectable Family Rights Policy Model

The democratic/respectable family rights policy regime framework expands how social scientists can examine “intersecting institutional orders” (Smith & King, 2024) and investigate crisis, racial, and intersectional politics. While existing theories of racial and moral politics in institutional scholarship largely rely on binary constructions of challengers (or deviants or repairers) and defenders (or protectors), my framework theorizes a third category - “deputies” whose positions and choices in crisis conditions can help drive reproduction or transformation. Scholars of political science and Black queer feminism have long called for expansive frameworks beyond group identity and political party to account for racialized and gendered political behavior, advocating for the need to situate such behavior in relation to racialized and economic contexts and conditions (Cohen, 1999; Dawson, 1994, 2001; Nash, 2019). In a respectable family rights policy regime model, “deputies” and emphasis on the historically- and intersectionally-structured determinants of family norms offers a fresh lens. These factors shed light on institutionalizing processes whereby networks of privileged actors co-opt civil rights discourses to construct and legitimize “crisis” through a zero-sum frame between individual and family well-being on one hand, and interclass, intergenerational bonds on the other hand. Networks’ development of policy texts and bodies centered on this zero-sum frame offers conditionally accepted members of the nation-state the fantasy of belonging, or “psychological wages of whiteness” (Du Bois, 1998). While White women and Black and Brown men’s public acceptance of facially race- and gender-neutral policy can create a ruse of total equality or the so-called “end of racism,” acceptance and advocacy of traditional family norms often belies and obfuscates racialized systems and unequal terms and conditions of political legitimacy and capital (Yosso, 2005). A respectable family rights policy regime model focuses attention on governing and nongoverning elites’ responsiveness to changes in family and reproductive norms as a catalyst of racialized state intervention and privatization.

My archival analysis surfaced how the mechanisms of deputy webs and deviance knots operated within education (e.g., sexuality education, school choice) and across education and other domains (e.g., welfare, immigration policy). As social scientists have called for research that conceptualizes linkages between policy domains (Perez Brower, 2024; Steffes, 2024), scholars can use the family rights policy regimes model to investigate conceptual and empirical linkages between political development, social movements, and socialization. Given increases in multiracial families and shifts toward homonormativity and homonationalism in the twenty-first century (Duggan, 2002; Puar, 2007), when and how do logics of family rights transform or become reproduced? Moreover, as Cohen (2004) is careful to distinguish between individual acts of deviance and collective mobilization, she also highlights that “intervening mechanisms” (p. 40) can transform deviance into social movements. What drivers, then, shaped linguistic deviance into a movement for culturally responsive literacy? For education research, this invites exploration of the pedagogies and socialization practices that predict or drive participation in social movements. By shedding light on questions regarding sources and mechanisms of formation, transformation, reproduction, and institutionalization, a family rights policy model contributes tools for scholars and advocates to denaturalize the White racial institutional logic of family empowerment and identify deviant movements and goals for more inclusive, democratic policy.

Limitations

By focusing on elite actors at the federal level, my study is limited in accounting for the roles of teachers, students, and local communities and organizations in the process of national literacy policy enactment and implementation. While I used popular media sources to evaluate the visibility and legitimacy of federal reformers’ ideas and discourses, future studies can pay closer attention to the relationship that unfolded over time between media, policy actors, and grassroots organizations. Additionally, since my analytical scope was limited to race, class, gender, sexuality, my analysis did not attend substantively to some group experiences and identity-based systems (e.g., religion) that surfaced in the archival materials. For example, I did not collect data in non-English languages, such as Spanish or Indigenous languages, meaning future research can explore how education advocates from some

linguistically marginalized and immigrant communities were generating educational approaches and policy goals in the time period under study. Additionally, my analysis suggested that literacy discourses were linked to the category of (dis)ability (*Riesman, 1979*); however, since I did not focus on the domain of special education, my analysis may have overlooked some useful information about the making of special education policy or role of (dis)ability in the co-construction of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Finally, while my analysis did highlight entrepreneurs' denigration of "deviant" (*Adelson, 1981; Finn, 1981*) forms of sexuality and family life, it did not focus on how they understood and discussed forms of transgender identity. However, evidence did surface that federal education elites were aware of and actively silenced young people's gender transition processes as early as 1968.¹

Conclusion

The March 2025 Executive Order that designated English as the "official" and "only" language of the U.S., based on goals for family cultural assimilation and an "efficient society" (The White House, 2025), echoes the calls by socially conservative policymakers and literacy accountability entrepreneurs in the 1980s. In tracing this earlier, formative period of contestation, this case study identified culturally responsive literacy models of federal policy that are not yet, but could again become, politically legitimate (*Joiner, 1979*). I have shown how research at the intersection of education, politics, and language can and has played a role in alerting policy elites to the need to respond to the role of exclusionary family norms in structuring racial and social hierarchies (*Labov, 1982; Smitherman, 1977*). While ignored by federal officials at the time, Smitherman's (1987) proposal for a national public policy on language that included standards and emphasized how all learners and American communities would gain from a policy "affirming the mother tongue and dialect of *ALL*" (p. 30). Smitherman's advocacy of a mother tongue policy, read anew, and more recent reaffirmations of the NCTE's "Students' Right to Language" (Scott et al., 2009) challenge dominant conceptualizations of family and democracy. By unsettling geographic and

¹ For example, in 1968, Coleman reviewed a study by Harold Garfinkel in *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (1967) in which Garfinkel describes his interview with the seventeen-year-old Agnes, whom Garfinkel recognized as a trans woman. In reviewing Garfinkel's piece, Coleman dismissed the study nearly entirely, in large part because he claimed that Garfinkel was "fooled" by this teenager. Coleman (1968) wrote, "A male needs a female to fulfill his sexual interests and to act as a spouse in everyday life; a female needs a male for the very same purposes" (p. 128).

epistemic boundaries of political and educational belonging, these policy models embed pathways for proactive negotiation of learning goals, resources, and evaluations among students, families, communities, teachers, and educational leaders. That such globally and culturally responsive approaches to federal policy require recovery in the context of mainstream policy research provokes a call for more transdisciplinary scholarship: what frames, networks, and designs comprise deviant logics across policy domains, and what conditions and drivers activate and sustain democratic family rights policy regimes?

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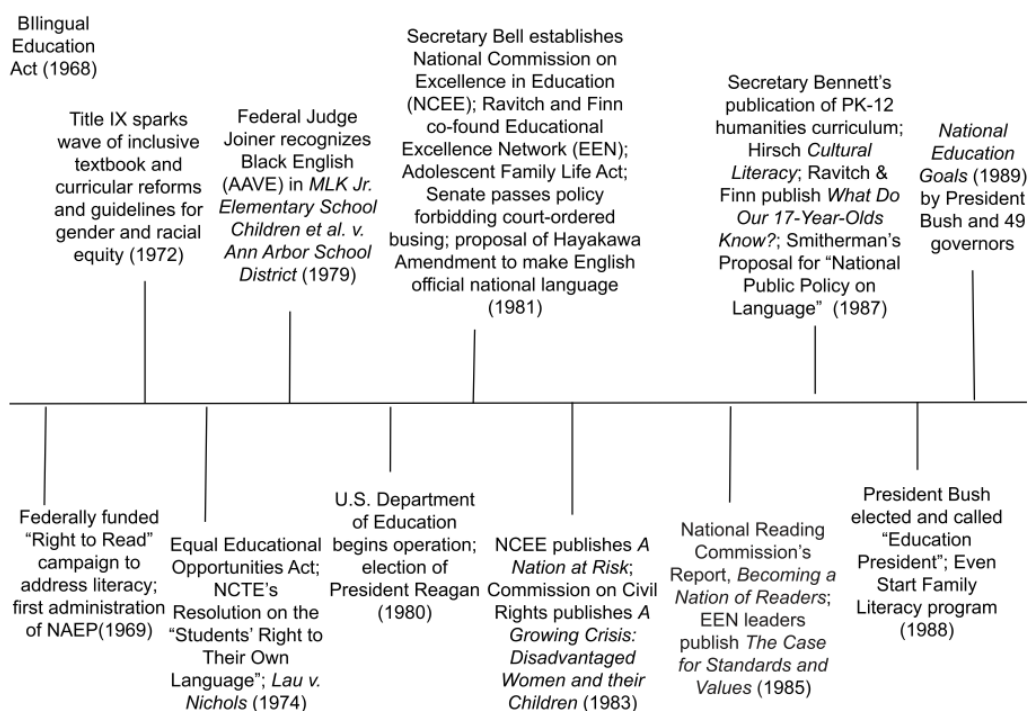
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Appendix A: Figures

A1: Timeline of key literacy policy texts and events (1968-1990)



Appendix B: Tables

B1: Representation of Findings: How governing coalitions, key literacy policy texts, and ideas of educational equality and family shifted across three timeframes

Time	Coalitional alignment	Literacy policy texts	Ideas of equality	Ideas of family
Openings for democratic policy in culturally responsive literacy 1968-1981	Fragile alignment of Civil Rights leaders and advocates and White federal policy elites advocating for desegregation on the basis of cultural assimilation	• <i>Bilingual Education Act</i> (1968) Title IX (1972) • Nixon’ “Educational Bill of Rights” speech (1972) • <i>Equal Educational Opportunities Act</i> (1974) • <i>Lau v. Nichols</i> (1974) • NCTE’s “Students’ Right to their Own Language” (1974) • NIE funding of Rev. Jackson’s “Push for Excellence” (1978) • <i>Martin Luther King, Jr. v. Ann Arbor School District</i> (1979)	“Equality of opportunity” included a range of meanings: resource redistribution; equitable access; inclusive experiences; self-determination; parity in outcomes	State literacy policies included affirmation of alternative forms of family
“Crisis” construction 1981-1983	Entrepreneurs under “Excellence” worked to unify Great Society racial assimilationists and Reaganite resegregationists Recruitment of White women scholars and political officials and Black men intellectual and moral leaders	• Excellence Commission regional hearings (1981-83) • Finn’s “Toward a New Consensus” (1981) • Southern Regional Education Board, <i>Need for Quality</i> (1981) • Excellence Commission’s <i>A Nation at Risk</i> (1983) • Diane Ravitch’s <i>Troubled Crusade</i> (1983)	“Civil rights” and anti-discrimination frames used to reaffirm rights of respectable families to obtain control over educational decision-making	Respectable families defined as two-parent heteronormative, middle-class, assumed monoracial households
Accountability policy 1983-1989	“New Consensus” unified Great Society assimilationists, Reaganites, some White women officials and elites, some Black male officials and elites	• <i>ECS Action for Excellence</i> (1983) • Civil Rights Commission <i>A Growing Crisis</i> (1983) • NAE, <i>Becoming a Nation of Readers</i> (1985) • NGA <i>Time for Results</i> (1986) • Ravitch and Finn’s <i>What Do Our 17 Year Olds Know? A Report on the First National Assessment of History and Literature</i> (1987) • Secretary Bennett’s <i>James Madison High School</i> (1987) • Even Start Family Literacy (1988) • <i>National Education Goals</i> (1989)	Race- and gender-neutral parity in educational, family, and economic skills and outcomes	Official educational reform of families who do not meet this standard of two-parent heteronormative, middle-class, assumed monoracial household

Table B2: Racial and gender composition of “Excellence” leaders

Type of Actor	Actor and Title(s)	Identities
Key Policy Entrepreneurs Excellence movement leaders	T.H. Bell: Education Secretary; established Excellence Commission	White man
	Chester E. Finn, Jr.: Co-founder of Excellence Network; Assistant Secretary of Education	White man
	Diane Ravitch: Co-founder of Excellence Network; Assistant Secretary of Education	White woman
	William Bennett: National Endowment for the Humanities Chair (funded Excellence Network); Education Secretary	White man
	David P. Gardner: Chair of the Excellence Commission	White man
	Orrin Hatch: Chair of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions	White man
	Lamar Alexander: Governor of TN; Education	White man
	Richard Riley: Governor of SC; Education Secretary	White man
	Bill Clinton: Governor of AR; U.S. President	White man
	George H.W. Bush: U.S. President	White man
National Commission on Excellence in Education Published <i>A Nation at Risk</i> (1981)	18 Commission members	White men: 56% (10/18)
		White women: 28% (5/18)
		Black men: 11% (2/18)
		Latino or Hispanic men: 5% (1/18)
		<i>*No identified Black, Latina, Asian, or Native women (0%)</i>
	54 scholars who wrote research reports for Commission	White men: 63% (34/54)
		White women: 20% (11/54)
		Black men: 2% (1/54)
		Latina or Hispanic women: 2% (1/54)
		Could not verify: 13% (7/54)

		*No identified Black, Asian, or Native woman (0%)
		*No identified Latino, Asian, or Native man (0%)
Major Contributors Scholars or public figures whose ideas and/or rhetoric were taken up by Excellence movement leaders	James S. Coleman: Author, <i>Equality of Educational Opportunity</i> (1965); “Public and Private Schools” (1981)	White man
	Daniel P. Moynihan: Author of “Moynihan Report” (1965); co-author, <i>On Equality of Educational Opportunity</i> (1972); author, <i>Family and Nation</i> (1986)	White man
	Joseph Adelson: University of Michigan psychologist; author of report to Excellence Commission	White man
	E.D. Hirsch: Author of <i>Cultural Literacy</i> (1987)	White man
	Onalee McGraw: National Council of Educational Research (1985); Heritage Foundation reports (1976, 1978)	White woman
	David Riesman: Harvard sociologist of education; frequent correspondences with Diane Ravitch	White man
	Samuel Hayakawa: CA Senator; proposed constitutional amendment for English-only language	Asian man

Table B3: Examples of intersectional discourses for culturally responsive literacy policy

Author	Discourse (date)	Quotation	Proposed policy design
U.S. Congress	Legislation, <i>Equal Educational Opportunities</i> (1974)	Named “linguistic barriers” as a potential impediment to “equal participation by students” in school	Public support for equitable access to educational opportunity in literacy policy
U.S. Supreme Court	Court ruling, <i>Lau v. Nichols</i> (1974)	"Where inability to speak and understand the English language excludes national origin minority group children from effective participation in the educational program offered by a school district, the district must take affirmative steps to rectify the language deficiency in order to open its instructional program to these students."	District implementation of bilingual education programs
National Council of Teachers of English	“Students’ Right to Own Language” (1974)	Students’ “right to their own patterns and varieties of	Promotion of culturally responsive models of literacy

		language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style.”	pedagogy and policy, centered on youth empowerment
Patricia Graham Director of the National Institute of Education (NIE)	Remarks, NIE Conference on Testing and Basic Skills (1978)	Emphasis on “reducing obstacles to academic achievement that result simply from a student’s being nonwhite, female, or poor.”	Public support for equitable access to educational opportunity in literacy policy
Charles W. Joiner Federal judge	Court ruling, <i>Martin Luther King Jr. School v. Ann Arbor case</i> (1979)	“A language barrier develops when teachers, in helping the child switch from the home (black English) language to standard English, refuse to admit the existence of a language that is the acceptable way of talking in his local community.”	Affirmation of Black English as a culturally responsive mode of literacy education; teacher professional learning of Black English
Geneva Smitherman African American linguistics scholar	“Toward a National Public Policy on Language” in <i>College English</i> journal (1987)	Three stated goals for literacy policy: “(1) reinforce the language of wider communication; (2) promote and extend the legitimacy of mother tongue languages and dialects, and (3) promote the acquisition of one or more foreign languages, preferably those spoken in the Third World. Such a policy is not only concomitant with the emerging pedagogy that language is the foundation stone of education, this kind of policy is also a basis for participation and leadership in world affairs.”	

Table B4: Deviance Knots: Examples in literacy policy discourses

Author & Text	Deviance Knot		Deputy Web <i>Appeals to White women and Black men as parental or paternal figures</i>	Proposed Policy Design
	<i>Culturally responsive literacy (movement for Black interclass, intergenerational solidarity)</i>	<i>Gender, sexual, economically marginalized classes as threat to parental rights</i>		
Onalee McGraw Heritage Foundation Policy report: “Family Choice in Education: A New Imperative” (1978)	[Former NEA president] “Barrett’s definition of what is truly fundamental and basic is the ‘problem oriented curriculum’ focusing on ‘war, peace, race, the economy, population, and the environment.’”	“But in the narrative, and the questions, the emphasis is entirely on Ms. Johnson’s rights, desires, and rights to her desires. It is as if Mr. Johnson and the children lost their rights, including their right to consideration. . .” (Bennett & Delattre qtd. in McGraw)	“Nat Hentoff reports the tragic plight of a black father in New York City as he watches his once alert and curious kindergartener falling further behind with each passing year.”	Basic literacy standards = White Mainstream English, traditional family values Rights reserved for respectable parents

Chester Finn, Jr. <i>Change</i> magazine “Toward a New Consensus” (1981)	The Great Society “[paid] for, and thereby seeming to sanction, innovations in such volatile and contentious aspects of education as sex, morals, values, and ethics...”	The Great Society “oblig[ed] children to travel to schools their parents did not want them to attend...steadfastly opposing aid to families that preferred to send their children to nongovernmental schools.”	“Of course it was to be anger over attempts by Washington to modify the behavior of people who themselves had never participated in discriminatory acts—anger over compulsory busing at the elementary/secondary level, reverse discrimination masquerading as ‘affirmative action’ at the college level—that would catalyze a popular reaction to the liberal consensus.”	Individual performance evaluations for basic literacy Rights reserved for respectable parents
Joseph Adelson <i>Commentary</i> article: “What Happened to the Schools?” (1981)	“A modernist ethos that...is egalitarian and redistributive in emphasis...values self-expression against self-restraint.”	“A modernist ethos that ‘accepts alternative or deviant forms of the family.’”	“[There is a] conflict within the schools between the traditional values that most American parents wish imparted to their children—values such as the stability of the family; and a belief in certain moral universals.”	Basic literacy standards meant white mainstream English, traditional family values Rights reserved for respectable parents
Secretary T.H. Bell Address to National Urban League (1981)	“The rights of students and the demands for equality of students and the demands for equality of educational opportunity turned around the priorities of our schools... We must strive to bring back a disciplined curriculum with less freedom to choose the easy way through our public school system.”	“These changes...have caused cries of outrage and threats of rebellion, and [federal education policy] has been, I am certain, the object of many angry utterances from many of you... It has grown out of dreams for an ideal society — of a commitment to equal opportunity — of rights to upward mobility for many who have lived in deprivation and poverty.”	To predominantly Black male leadership: “Academically, we have become much too flabby. It’s time to shape up. I hope that we can all make a new commitment to give strong leadership to our Nation’s schools.”	Basic literacy standards meant white mainstream English, traditional family values Basic education as pathway for “rights to upward mobility”
Herbert Zimiles Research report to <i>Excellence Commission</i> : “The Changing American Child” (1982)	“[I]n the interests of gaining a still greater measure of freedom and equality in our society, there is a spirit of emancipating and disclosing, of removing curtains and barriers... Thus, all of society is joined in what is sometimes	“These trends are expressed in the overthrow of tradition, formality, and religion” and “new modes of family functioning and organization [were] being called forth by divorce and/or mother working...”	“Today...young children are shielded less from frightening, discordant, highly stimulating, confusing aspects of reality... If a less strong emotional bond is	Basic literacy standards meant white mainstream English, traditional family values

	a freeing of the selves and sometimes ‘a killing of the father.’ In all of this, there is an investment in neutralizing power, in erasing distinctions between boss and worker, and also, between adult and child.”		formed, if there is less glue between parent and child, there is greater separateness at a very early age.”	
Excellence Commission <i>A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform</i> (1983)	The “curricular smorgasbord, combined with extensive student choice, explains a great deal about where we find ourselves today.”	“Functional illiteracy among minority youth may run as high as 40 percent... For the first time in the history of our country, the educational skills of our generation will not surpass, will not <i>equal</i> , will not even approach, those of their parents.”	“Your right to a proper education for your children carries a double responsibility... You must be a <i>living</i> example of what you expect your children to honor and to emulate.”	Basic literacy standards rooted in White Mainstream English, Western cultural values Rights reserved for respectable parents
Diane Ravitch <i>The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945-1980</i> (1983)	“Schoolteachers were directly affected by...the introduction of bilingual education...by the splitting of history into courses on ethnic groups or women; or by the ethnic revival, which some professional educators joined by declaring that all students have the ‘right to their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style.’”	Advocated for schools to retain their traditional “in loco parentis” role Made the case that, when Black and Brown communities pursued greater political and economic freedom in the 1940s and 1950s, they became “bereft of the sense of family and community that had sustained their counterparts in rural areas.”	“As a lay citizen, [one Black father] took up the family tradition of commitment to public education and agitated for better schools,” leading to a paradigm where “there is a black public school system and a white private academy [in which] schools are not building a new social order but [where] new employment opportunities have opened up for educated blacks.”	“Basic” literacy standards rooted in white mainstream English, Western cultural values Rights reserved for respectable parents

Table B5: Facially race-neutral literacy policy, racialized meanings, culturally responsive alternatives

Literacy frame (facially race-neutral)	Example use in policy text	Example quotation	Racialized meaning	Culturally responsive literacy alternative
Functional literacy	<i>A Nation at Risk</i> by the Excellence Commission (1983)	“Some 23 million American adults are functionally illiterate by the simplest tests of everyday reading, writing, and comprehension. About 13 percent of all 17-year-olds in the United States can be considered functionally illiterate. Functional	Reading and communication skills based on White, middle-class norms for work, productivity, and citizenship	Literacy practices that aim to understand and discuss institutional logics underlying family, education, economy, and government

		illiteracy among minority youth may run as high as 40 percent.”		
Basic skills	Tennessee “Basic Skills First” program introduced by Lamar Alexander (1982)	“A task force of 26 Tennessee educators—mostly master classroom teachers—has picked 1,019 reading skills... They have decided in what order these skills should be taught. Measure each child’s progress in mastering these skills. For this purpose, the task force developed 788 short, mastery tests, to be given every few weeks from kindergarten through eighth grade... These are the skills a child must have to understand high school, live in a modern society, and perform most jobs.”	White Mainstream English, as measured by White government elites and the NAEP	Bilingual education, African American Vernacular or Black English, translanguaging
Cultural literacy	<i>James Madison High School</i> by Secretary Bill Bennett (1987)	“We must jealously retain and guard those goals, the goals <i>James Madison High School</i> pursues: mastery of a common core of worthwhile knowledge, important skills, and sound ideals.” “The [9th grade English] syllabus is...confined to recognized masterworks of Western literature.”	Policy erasure of Black, Latin, Native, and Asian women and queer & trans people Exclusive focus on Western literature and history	Empowerment and inclusion of Black, Latina, Native, and Asian women and queer & trans people Inclusion of non-western knowledge systems
Moral literacy	Letter from Undersecretary Gary Bauer to Congresswoman Debbie Dingell (1987)	“The Reagan administration promotes the view that one of the primary responsibilities of educators is to transmit to students our common culture, which is derived from Judeo-Christian beliefs and teachings. Secretary Bennett and I also urge educators to aid students in achieving moral literacy, an ability to distinguish between virtue and vice. Finally, we hold that students should be taught the omnipotence of God.”	Policy erasure of non-Western religious and moral frameworks	Inclusion of non-western knowledge systems and literacy practices that aim to understand and discuss institutional logics underlying family
Family literacy	Hearing on <i>Even Start Family Literacy Act</i> by Art Ellison, Director of National Council of State Directors of Adult Education	“For many years we have suspected a strong link between illiteracy on the part of parents and potential problems in reading by children in those families. Data to substantiate this link is difficult to locate. However, teachers in basic literacy programs understand that a major motivator	Unidirectional instruction to marginalized families based on White, middle-class norms for productive family life	Bidirectional partnerships between policy actors and marginalized families

		for illiterate adults to return to the classroom is their stated need to be able to assist their children with their school work.”		
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