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**Teach For America's Paradoxical Diversity Initiative:  
Race, Policy, and Black Teacher Displacement  
in Urban Public Schools**

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**Abstract:** This article examines the paradox of Teach For America's diversity gains and its support for policies that contribute to Black teacher decline in urban communities. TFA has countered claims that its expansion is connected to teacher displacement, but its two-pronged structure—as an alternative certification program and an influential policy actor via its leadership model for education reform—requires a critical analysis of the impact of its policy commitments on Black teachers. I propose steps to better align TFA's policy orientations with its diversity values by leveraging TFA's policy influence to support better working conditions for teachers in urban schools, democratic school turnarounds, and teacher organizing linked to broad social justice movements.

**Keywords:** diversity; Black teachers; displacement; turnover; Teach For America, teachers of color

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### **Teach For America y su paradójica iniciativa sobre la diversidad: Raza, política, y el Desplazamiento de docentes negros en las escuelas urbanas**

**Resumen:** En este artículo se examina las paradójicas mejoras de Teach For America en el área de diversidad en Estados Unidos y su apoyo a las políticas que contribuyeron a la disminución de los docentes negros en las comunidades urbanas. TFA ha negado las afirmaciones de que su expansión se conecto con el desplazamiento de esos docentes, pero su estructura dual—como un programa de certificación alternativa y como actor político influyente a través de su modelo de liderazgo para reformas educativas—requiere un análisis crítico de la repercusión de sus compromisos políticos en docentes negros. Propongo un modelo para entender mejor las orientaciones políticas de TFA y sus valores sobre diversidad mediante el análisis de la influencia política de TFA y su apoyo para mejorar condiciones de trabajo de los maestros de escuelas urbanas, proyectos de mejoras de escuelas, y la organización docente vinculados a movimientos que reclamas una justicia social amplia.

**Palabras clave:** diversidad; docentes negros; desplazamiento; volumen de negocios; Teach For America, Profesores de minorías étnico-raciales

### **Teach for America e sua paradoxal iniciativa sobre diversidade: Raça, política, e o deslocamento de professores negros nas escolas urbanas**

**Resumo:** Este artigo descreve e é examina as paradoxais melhorias de Teach For America na área de diversidade nos Estados Unidos e seu apoio às políticas que contribuíram para o declínio de professores negros em comunidades urbanas. TFA nega alegações de que sua expansão foi relacionados com o deslocamento desses professores, mas a sua estrutura dual—como programa de certificação alternativa e como um ator político influente através do seu modelo de liderança para a reforma educativas—exige uma análise crítica do impacto dos compromissos políticos de TFA sobre os professores negros. Proponho um modelo para entender melhor as orientações políticas de TFA e os valores sobre noção de diversidade, analisando a influência política do TFA e seu apoio para melhorar as condições dos professores em escolas urbanas, projetos de melhoria das escolas e as organização educacionais ligados a movimentos que estão reivindicando uma justiça social ampla.

**Palavras-chave:** diversidade; professores negros; deslocamento; volume de negócios; Teach For America; professores de minorias étnico-raciais

## **Introduction**

In 2016, Teach for America (TFA) celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. As one of the nation's top recruiters of college students into urban schools throughout the country, the organization will likely celebrate a host of accomplishments, including its longevity and expansion over time, its financial growth and political influence in the realm of education reform, and its impact (largely contested) on the educational lives of children in low-income communities of color. One of TFA's taken-for-granted successes will likely include teacher diversity, one of its celebrated core values that is evident in recent gains among corps members from racially diverse backgrounds (TFA, 2014a). While for most of its history the organization recruited from the nation's top, predominantly White institutions and universities, it shifted gears in the mid-2000s to increase recruitment at state colleges and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). These changes improved the percentage of corps members of color, such that the organization reports dramatic growth in diversity, from 27% in 2005 to nearly 40% in 2014 (TFA, 2015, 2014a, 2010). In light of the growing population of students of color in U.S. schools—nearly half of all students in U.S. public schools were students of

color in 2014 while teachers of color<sup>1</sup> (ToCs) represented 17%—a diversity initiative on the part of TFA is timely and important (NCES, 2015). Gains in diversity among corps members, moreover, signal an acknowledgement by the organization of research on the positive impact of racial diversity on student learning experiences and academic outcomes in high-poverty schools (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, 2010; Dee, 2004; Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015; Eubanks & Weaver, 1999; Fairlie, Hoffman, & Oreopoulous, 2011; Gaye, 2005; Villegas & Irvine, 2010).

TFA's celebration of diversity, however, will likely address its numerical gains in the representation of corps members of color, but not the relationship of these gains to the larger realities of teachers of color in regions where corps members are placed. Indeed, the expansion of Teach For America in urban spaces has coincided with high rates of decline among teachers of color, particularly Black teachers (Albert Shanker Institute, 2015). In light of TFA's two-pronged movement to influence educational change from the inside and outside of classrooms, both as an alternative certification program and as an influential policy actor through its leadership model for education reform, it is important to explore whether and in what ways the organization's policy influences have in fact undermined its core values and initiatives for diversity in urban schools. In this article, I use a critical policy lens to review the literature on the policy-related dimensions of teacher turnover and decline among Black educators in urban districts. I consider the implications of this research evidence for TFA's approach to school reform and its commitment to diversity.

Despite national calls for diversity, thousands of Black educators have been displaced from urban public schools in the past decade (ASI, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). I use the term *displacement*, rather than decline, to signal the systemic and involuntary aspects of teachers' departures from urban schools due to federal, state, and district school reforms, including school turnaround efforts. School turnarounds are interventionist school-level reforms tied to national high-stakes accountability policies that are intended to improve low-performing schools through top-down, prescriptive mandates. These reforms often fail to engage community members, parents, students, and teachers in reorganization plans and rely instead on mandatory school closures, mass layoffs, or charter conversions (Trujillo & Rénee, 2012; Trujillo, in press). They have been found to contribute to the racial segregation of some of our most struggling schools and communities (de la Torre & Gwynne, 2009a, 2009b; Journey for Justice, 2014; Lipman & Haines, 2007; Trujillo, in press). These reforms also result in large numbers of teachers being fired or removed from their jobs, particularly teachers of color who work disproportionately in schools serving low-income students and students of color (Buras, 2015; Frankenberg, 2009). In this vein, *Black teacher displacement* refers to an acute racialized impact of policies on Black educators in low-income communities (Cook & Dixon, 2013; Dixon, Buras & Jeffers, 2015; see also Mitchell, 2015 and Chicago Teachers Union, 2012).

Displacement also takes the form of barriers to employment in newly created schools such as charter schools. This type of displacement is evident in the low rates of Black teacher hires in charter schools in several urban cities relative to their existing share of the teaching force in those same cities (ASI, 2015). These trends are often concurrent with disproportionately high rates of White teacher hires in charter schools (ASI, 2015). Not only do these reform trends undermine

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<sup>1</sup>*Teachers of Color* (TOCs) refer to broad categories of teachers identifying as Black/African-American, Hispanic, Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Native American/Alaska Native. White teachers refer to those identifying as White, non-Hispanic. Some studies use “minority” and “nonminority,” and suggest the term “person of color” is less accurate due to large numbers of individuals who identify as both White and Hispanic (ASI, 2015). Mindful of these considerations, I refer to TOCs to indicate all categories of minority teachers, and isolate “Black or African American” when noting specific trends among Black Teachers.

other potential efforts to diversify the teaching force, they have sparked legal battles in several cities between district leaders and Black educators, resulting in early victories for some teachers<sup>2</sup> and losses for others.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, when considered in the context of Black teacher decline and displacement, TFA's diversity achievements appear less dramatic. For example, while 21% of corps members identified as Black or African American in 2014, Black teachers in several cities where corps members are placed represent between 40 to 70% of the teacher workforce (TFA, 2014a; ASI, 2015). Even with declines among Black teachers in several cities, shrinking by nearly 30 percentage points in cities like D.C. (ASI, 2015), TFA's proportion of corps members of color is insufficient to achieve parity between students and teachers in urban schools.

More concerning, however, is that TFA's two-pronged structure, as a recruiter of novice teachers and a policy actor in education reform, may in fact contradict its core values for diversity. Despite its stated value of diversity, TFA leaders and prominent alumni are tied to the same reforms and high-stakes accountability policies that have resulted in displacing teachers of color, such as charter school expansion, turnaround-driven layoffs, and closures of schools where ToCs disproportionately work (see *Chicago Sun Times* in Kavanah & Dunn, 2013 and EduShyster, 2013). In this vein, while the organization brings some teachers of color into urban classrooms through the "front door" by its powerful recruitment and placement strategies, it may also push teachers of color out the "back door" through its partnerships and policy networks that adversely influence the working lives of teachers of color in shared locales. Paradoxically, in light of its unique structure, TFA is poised to function as both a conduit for teacher diversity among novices and an even more powerful conduit for displacement of teachers of color more broadly.

Teach For America leaders have maintained that its expansion is unrelated to the fates of teachers in shared locales; it often directs critics to the technicalities of its placement practices in schools, rather than its role in promoting reforms that negatively impact teachers in shared regions. As described on its website, in response to a frequently asked question: "Do TFA corps members take jobs from veteran teachers?" the organization details its contracts with district partners, including agreements between the organization and districts (rather than between corps members and schools), agreements that prohibit direct replacement of existing teachers, and "open" competition for jobs based on qualifications and standard hiring processes (TFA, 2014d, 2014c; Westervelt, 2014). Observers note however, that hiring processes in district schools are influenced nonetheless by airtight contracts between districts and TFA leaders and leave little room for principals to negotiate whom they hire (see Barbara Veltri in Kavanah & Dunn, 2013, p. 57). Others point to the financial "bargain" of hiring seemingly inexpensive TFA corps members, which undermines regional competition for jobs, as principals look to save money in times of recession and thus favor TFA novices with short term commitments (Cohen, 2015; Hootnick, 2014).

Missing from both the critics of TFA's placement practices and its own defense of its expansion in urban regions, is a consideration of the peculiar and paradoxical fates of teachers of color, both in terms of the rising number of TFA corps members of color and the massive declines of non-TFA teachers of color in urban schools. Researchers and commentators rarely analyze the simultaneity, and possible symbiosis, of diversity gains among corps members and Black teacher displacement broadly. The subsequent void in the discourse on TFA leaves TFA's celebration of its recent diversity uncontested.

In some instances, gains in diversity take on discursive functions, including its mention by

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<sup>2</sup> See Chicago Teachers Union, Local 1 American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO et al v. Board of Education of the City of Chicago.

<sup>3</sup> See Oliver et al. v Orleans Parish School Board.

leaders in response to criticisms about the organization's impact on communities of color and the teachers who serve them. Such stances position corps members of color as rhetorical alibis<sup>4</sup>, as symbolic buffers in discussions about race, marginalization, and the organization's role in reforms that contribute to the destabilization of schools in communities of color (TFA, 2014b, Schneider, 2014). When analyzed from a critical policy perspective, TFA's diversity gains may pale in comparison to the effects of the organization's expansion, its policy commitments, and the role of those commitments in contemporary projects of anti-black racism which siphon jobs, resources, power, and control from teachers, parents, and students in high-poverty communities of color.

In what follows, I first review the expansion of Teach For America and its diversity initiatives. I then discuss patterns of Black teacher decline across the country, highlighting four cities in particular—New Orleans, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. These cities are noted for their dramatic loss in number and proportion of Black teachers since 2002, and for their heavy concentration of TFA corps members. I then consider the dominant policies that are associated with both TFA's expansion and the decline of Black teachers in several cities. Conceptually, the review is guided by a framework for critically analyzing policy, which contextualizes policies within their associated actors, relationships, processes, and historic conditions. This approach moves away from discussions of policy as isolated technical phenomena and recognizes instead the multiple political and economic dimensions of policy development and its effects. With this framework, TFA's expansion and its commitments, and the associated decline of Black teachers in urban spaces, are all viewed as interrelated policy-driven trends. I conclude by suggesting steps for aligning TFA's policy orientations with its stated diversity values by encouraging the organization to support policies that broadly increase the retention of Black teachers. These policies are intended to foster better working conditions for teachers in schools serving low-income children of color, as well as to end arbitrary and racially discriminatory school closings. They are also intended to promote fair hiring practices in charter schools that seek racial and ethnic parity between students and teachers, community-driven, democratic school improvement efforts, and teacher organizing efforts grounded in antipoverty and antiracist initiatives.

## **Teach For America's Origins and Expansion**

While TFA's recruitment practices and stated core values have shifted over time to increasingly welcome diversity among corps members, its mission and model, and its two-pronged structure for influencing educational change from both inside and outside of schools, has remained the same. Twenty-five years ago, Wendy Kopp founded Teach For America based on her senior thesis proposal at Princeton University. The initial corps in 1990 consisted of 500 recent college graduates placed in six regions of the United States. In 2013-14, TFA placed 11,031 corps members in over 46 regions across the country—boasting of approximately 32,000 alumni who have served over 1 million students (TFA, 2014a). Its growth increased rapidly in the past decade, with a record number of applications (48,000) in 2010. The mission twenty-five years ago was to support educational opportunities for low-income children. The first part of its mission includes the

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<sup>4</sup> Similar to "white intellectual alibis," conceptualized by critical theorists Zeus Leonardo and Michalinos Zemblyas (2013), TFA's diversity gains increasingly take on discursive functions that permit White educators and leaders in the organization to forge "personas of non-racism," as a form of image management, rather than address patterns of systemic racial marginalization in the teacher workforce, the relationship of those patterns to the organization's expansion, and thus its responsibility to align with projects of anti-racism in various forms (p. 151).

recruitment of college graduates who commit for two years of teaching in high-poverty schools. The recruits receive five weeks of training before full-time teaching commences, often in unfamiliar cities, districts, and schools and which serve the nation's most vulnerable and underserved children. Pilot programs in a number of regions explore variations with the model, including "pre-corps training" for college juniors who receive classroom training prior to Institute, an effort to place some corps members in communities of their origin, partnerships with local community organizations, and a number of small regional efforts to push corps members to "Teach Beyond Two (years)" (TFA, 2014a). These programs are small, limited, scattered across regions, and little information exists about their impact and replication.

The second part of TFA's mission is to promote change beyond the classroom through leadership and policy. In this regard, the most visible mark of large-scale impact is TFA's political and financial growth across the country. Growth was anticipated in its 2009 annual report, which noted priorities to grow in both scale and diversity (TFA, 2009). In terms of scale, TFA has grown globally and financially. In 2007, Wendy Kopp launched *Teach for All*, a global network of organizations that adapts the TFA model abroad. Financially, between 2000 and 2008, TFA's operating expenditures increased from approximately \$10 million to \$114.5 million, and a third of its operating costs came from the public due to legislation authorizing TFA to receive federal funding in 2008 (Heilig & Jez, 2010). In 2010, TFA also launched a major expansion effort, funded by a five-year Investing in Innovation (i3) scale-up grant of \$50 million from the U.S. Department of Education (Clark, Isenberg, Liu, Makowsky, & Zukiewicz, 2015). Its annual expenditures in 2014 exceeded \$300 million (TFA, 2014a; Westervelt, 2014). While TFA planned to increase in size by more than 80 % by 2014, it fell short of its growth goals in that year (Clark, Isenberg, Liu, Makowsky, & Zukiewicz, 2015). Regardless, the organization has expanded its placements dramatically over time, from 3,500 corps member in 2005 to 8,000 in 2010 and more than 11,000 in 2014 (TFA, 2014a). Most importantly, despite budget cuts in 2008 at the federal, state and district levels across the country, TFA continued to expand, adding six new sites in 2009 (Greater Boston, Dallas, Milwaukee, Nashville, The Twin Cities, and Tulsa) and continued to grow in eight already existing sites (e.g. Mississippi Delta grew by 225%, South Louisiana grew by 150%, and other regions grew by 50% and 70%) (TFA, 2009; Heilig & Jez, 2010).

A less obvious, but no less powerful, mark of TFA's large-scale impact has been its policy network and its "deep bench" (Cersonsky, 2015) of high profile alumni who lead major education reforms in cities like New Orleans, Washington, D.C., Newark, and Denver. In 2007, TFA launched Leadership for Educational Equity (LEE), a 501(c)4 and a spin-off of TFA to provide resources, training, and networking for alumni interested in elected office and other leadership positions (Cersonsky, 2012; TFA, 2014a). In 2014, TFA listed an expanded network of leaders, legislators, reformers, and advocacy leaders, including 670 principals, 150 system leaders, 70 elected officials, and 170 policy/advocacy leaders (TFA Annual Report, 2014a). In New Orleans, for example, and in the wake of termination of its mostly African American teachers after Hurricane Katrina, TFA alumni have played pivotal roles in the blunt overhaul of the city's schools, including its total shift to charter schools run largely by charter management organizations (CMOs) (Buras, 2014). Kira Orange Jones, for example, served as the executive director for TFA Louisiana and later moved to state government as an elected member of Louisiana's Board of Elementary & Secondary Education (BESE; TFA, 2014a). John White, also a TFA alum, served as the former Superintendent of Louisiana's Recovery School District and moved to serve as the State Superintendent for BESE in Louisiana (Kretchmar, Sondel, & Ferrare, 2015). In Newark, Cami Anderson, a TFA alumna and formerly the Executive Director of TFA New York, serves as Superintendent of Newark Public Schools (Kretchmar et al., 2015). In Washington, D.C, Michelle Rhee and Kaya Henderson, both TFA alumni and former Executive Directors for TFA regions, also served as Chancellors of D.C.

public schools (Kretchmar et al., 2015). Though not an exhaustive list, prominent alumni represent a growing cadre of system leaders supported by TFA and who shape contemporary education reforms, each marshaling considerable influence and resources from TFA's networks, including Leadership for Educational Equity (LEE).

While TFA or LEE do not articulate explicit and uniform political agendas for education reform, researchers have noted a common network of actors and reformers among TFA leaders and alumni who articulate particular sets of belief about education reform. Researchers Kerri Kretchmar, Beth Sondel, and Joseph Ferrare (2015) used network analysis methodologies to map an intricate and rather dense web of relationships and partnerships between TFA and its partners, described as an "education entrepreneurial network." The network includes partnerships with a significant number of business executives, investment bankers, corporate foundation leaders, and venture philanthropists, government officials, but primarily national and regional charter management organizations (Kretchmar et al., 2014). The educational entrepreneurial network, in which TFA is described as "central node," endorses a slate of education reforms, most strongly the expansion of charter schools managed by private, nonprofit organizations and high-stakes turnaround efforts. Kretchmar and colleagues (2014) were able to document that over half of the country's largest charter-school networks have ties with TFA and that more than a third of corps members are teaching in charter schools (Kretchmar et al., 2015; see also Beth Sondel in Westervelt, 2015). Several of TFA's primary network partners and donors also endorse policies such as high-stakes testing and accountability, and market-based initiatives tied to choice, competition, and merit-based promotion and pay structures for teachers, most of which are associated with attacks on teacher unions and collective bargaining rights (Kretchmar et al., 2014).

Qualitative data with TFA alumni and corps members also reveal a common set of beliefs about the source and solution of educational inequality, which support common contemporary reforms involving large-scale interventions in several cities. Researchers Tina Trujillo and Janelle Scott (2014) interviewed a representative sample of over 100 alumni and 42 corps members and found that nearly 80% depicted the causes of inequality in technical or managerial terms. Many believed in stricter accountability for teachers and students, and believed that more flexibility in hiring and firing teachers, as well as salary structures tied to test scores, would improve educational quality (Trujillo & Scott, 2014, p. 59). Such views undergird the current dominant, high-stakes policy approaches that have been associated with the displacement of teachers of color.

In annual reports, TFA's values emphasize dynamic management of schools, teachers, and students and extoll individual qualities of exceptional teachers and leaders (TFA, 2011a). While these perspectives are important for institutional change, and are effective for appealing to college graduates, critics warn that TFA-style leaders and their managerialist approaches to educational leadership excludes other important considerations about transformational change. In the shadow of strong messages about the "solvability" of educational inequity, that "poverty is not destiny," and that "high standards, urgency, and a long-term view" is key for change (TFA, 2011b, 2014a), are less frequently acknowledged, but significant messages about the need for material resources in under-resourced communities and systemic structural changes to the funding and organization of schools (Berliner, 2006). For scholars like Trujillo (2014) and Kretchmar et al. (2015), managerialist and technocratic styles of leadership, absent discussions and clear messages about the structural sources of inequality across neighborhoods, schools, and families, are woefully insufficient. Emerging from such advocacy is a discursive neoliberal ideology, which favors individual competition and choice, deregulation (or "flexibility"), and privatization of public institutions as a way to improve public services (Harvey, 2005; Lipman, 2011). As noted earlier, these reforms "neglect expertise of seasoned teachers, grassroots community organizations, and many parent advocacy groups" (Scott, 2011, p 588). Moreover, they routinely downplay social, political, and economic inequalities that

impact communities of color because they are focused primarily on reforming or replacing persons within educational systems (teachers, leaders, and students), rather than the educational systems themselves (Scott, 2011).

Managerialist approaches to educational policy also overshadow (and often collide with) efforts to elevate the status of teachers in substantive ways. These elevating efforts often entail supports for better working and learning conditions inside schools, the political sustenance for which depends on teachers' capacities to organize collectively and democratically (Jones, 2015). These efforts are particularly important in a field populated by women, and women of color, who have faced historic barriers to fair employment and treatment due to gender and race discrimination (Jones, 2015).

In these ways, the second-prong of TFA's mission – to broadly influence educational quality for low-income children – seems to ignore the macro-level policy forces and subsequent structural changes in the racial, economic, and political organization of schools. As a result, TFA's core values for diversity, as well as for teamwork, respect and humility, are outmatched by its overwhelming investment in managerialist leadership approaches and high-stakes reforms that have been documented to exacerbate educational inequities.

### **Black Teacher Decline in Urban Communities**

As found by the trial court 'rather than honoring the vested property interest held by experienced teachers qualified under Louisiana's standard, the State conducted a nationwide teacher search to fill vacancies with the Recovery School District, and, among other things, contracted with Teach for America to hire experienced and non-certified college graduates, thereby preventing the plaintiff class from exercising their legally protected property rights.'

-Dissenting opinion of Chief Justice Bernette Johnson of Louisiana Supreme Court in *Oliver et al. v. Orleans Parish School Board* regarding 7,500 teachers and staff fired post-Katrina (2014)

While nearly half of all students in U.S. public schools were students of color in 2014, teachers of color represented 17%, a modest increase in 25 years from 12% in 1987 (NCES, 2015). National calls to improve the number and proportion of teachers from racially diverse backgrounds is tied to recognition that teacher diversity is a strategy for improving student outcomes and overall school quality, including improved standardized test score outcomes (Dee, 2004; Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015; Fairlie, Hoffman, & Oreopoulous, 2011), increased rates of school attendance and enrollment in advanced courses (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, 2010; Villegas & Irvine, 2009), higher rates of referral and representation in gifted and talented programs (Grissom & Keiser, 2015), and overall reduction in discriminatory practices related to discipline, special education referrals, and tracking (Meier, 1984). Teachers of color have also played important roles in the socio-cultural conditions of learning in classrooms, by serving as role models for all students and as cultural brokers for culturally and linguistically diverse students (Irvine, 1989; Quijoch & Rios, 2000; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). In recent years, moreover, in light of research with ToCs who expressed desire for teaching that was tied to social justice goals, ToCs were identified as unique sources of support for "hard-to-staff" schools (Achinstein et al., 2010). Together these studies undergird recruitment efforts on the part of state departments of education, university programs, districts, and



schools.

Recruitment alone is not the most effective approach to improving diversity, as research demonstrates chronic shortages of ToCs are less a function of weak recruitment and more a function of weak retention, particularly in hard-to-staff schools with poor working conditions (Ingersoll & May, 2011a, 2011b). Indeed annual attrition has undercut dramatic gains in the proportion of ToCs whose growth outpaced White teachers between 1987 and 2007, with 92% growth compared to 42% respectively (Villegas, Strom & Lucas, 2012). Percentage growth of ToCs also outpaced population growth of students of color between 1987 and 2007 with 92% and 73% respectively (Ingersoll & May, 2011a, 2011b; Villegas, Strom & Lucas, 2012). According to researchers Richard Ingersoll and Henry May (2011a), “While minorities have entered teaching at higher rates than Whites over the past two decades, minority teachers also have left schools at higher rates. . . In recent years, minority teachers were more likely to migrate from one school to another or to leave teaching altogether.” (p. 63). As an example, the authors note that while approximately 47,000 TOCs entered teaching at the beginning of the year in 2003-2004, by the following year approximately 56,000 ToCs left teaching (Ingersoll & May, 2011a).

Teacher growth and attrition, however, even among ToCs is not equal across all groups. According to data presented by Villegas, Lucas, and Strom (2012), Latino/a teachers experienced the fastest growth among all teacher groups between 1987 and 2007 with a 260% increase, while Asian American teachers had the second fastest growth during the same period with 130-percent growth. White teachers grew modestly during this time by 42%. In contrast, Black teachers had the slowest growth among all race and ethnic groups with a 27% increase by 2007 (Villegas et al., 2012). Subsequent research on teacher diversity described a more troubling picture for Black teachers, with slow growth giving way to significant decline in several cities by 2012. Research highlighted in Albert Shanker Institute's report *The State of Teacher Diversity*<sup>5</sup> (2015) found dramatic declines in both the proportion and absolute number of Black teachers in particular cities, including Chicago, Cleveland, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. (ASI, 2015). The national report also highlighted the continued and uneven distribution of ToCs across schools, more often concentrated in schools serving high-poverty and minority communities (ASI, 2015). While the study warns of the consequences of teacher segregation across schools, noting the tendency of TOCs to leave teaching at higher rates than teachers in schools with less concentration of low-income students of color, the report rejects student poverty or race/ethnicity of students as factors shaping attrition among ToCs. Instead, the report attributes teacher attrition among ToCs to poor working conditions in high-poverty schools, including lack of collective decision-making, faculty input and voice, and professional autonomy in the classrooms (ASI, 2015).

Studies of teacher diversity in public schools, however, have yet to explore in depth the combination of policies in various cities and urban districts that impact schools where ToCs disproportionately work. In several cities, schools where ToCs work often struggle to meet state standards and are often subject to punitive accountability measures that result in reorganization. Reorganization can take several forms, including school closure, reconstitution, and conversion to charter schools under private management with new leadership and new staffs. In such instances, entire staffs are dismissed and fired with an option to reapply for teaching jobs. Depending on the context and circumstances of reconstitution, anywhere from less than 10% to 50% of teachers are

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<sup>5</sup> Researchers for the Albert Shanker Institute's report analyzed data from the nationally representative Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and its longitudinal supplement, the Teacher Follow-Up Survey (TFS), both administered by the National Center for Education Statistics in the U.S. Department of Education. Their analysis included data from all seven cycles of SASS to date: 1987-88, 1990-91, 1993-94, 1999-00, 2003-04, 2007-08 and 2011-12. See [www.shankerinstitute.org](http://www.shankerinstitute.org)

rehired (de la Torre et al., 2012). In light of the uneven distributions of teachers across schools, the punitive nature and disruptive effects of reorganization fall heavily on ToCs, and Black teachers in particular. In the section to follow, I explore the confluence of reorganization policies and Black teacher decline in four cities—New Orleans, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C.

### New Orleans<sup>6</sup>

As noted in ASI's report on teacher diversity (2015), the most dramatic decline of Black teachers, in both proportion and total population, has occurred in New Orleans. In 2002, approximately three quarters of all teachers and 93% of all students were Black but by 2012, the share of Black teachers dropped to 50% while Black students dropped modestly to 87.9%, leaving a representation gap of nearly 37 percentage points (ASI, 2015). Conversely, the share of White teachers doubled in New Orleans from 23% in 2002 to 42.8% in 2012 (ASI, 2015). The twenty point increase among White teachers contrasted with the steady small share of White students in the city, up three percentage points in a decade to 6% in 2012. Changes in the workforce for New Orleans is due largely to dramatic events associated with Hurricane Katrina in 2005, which displaced thousands of residents, including teachers and students. Changes in the teacher workforce, however, were also due to the wrongful termination of thousands of teachers in the aftermath of the storm, mostly Black/African American teachers<sup>7</sup> (Buras, 2014). The storm's effects are evident in the city's decline in overall teacher population by 44.4% by 2012. Declines, however, were sharpest among Black teachers who experienced not only a 24% drop in the share of teachers, but also a 62% drop in the total population of Black teachers, compared to a moderate increase in total population of White teachers. Researchers at the Education Research Alliance for New Orleans (ERA-NO), however, note that while half of the changes in teacher representation occurred in the immediate aftermath of the hurricane, a steady reduction in the proportion of Black teachers (of an overall smaller workforce albeit) continued from 2007 to 2012, along with a steady increase in the proportion of White teachers (Barrett & Harris, 2015).

### Chicago

Dramatic declines among Black teachers are also evident in Chicago's public schools (CPS). Since 2000, the African American teaching force as a percentage of the teaching population declined from 40.6% to 29.6% in 2010 (*CTU v Board of Education of City of Chicago*). Declines continued in subsequent years to 28.7% in 2011 and down to 26% in 2012 (CTU v Board of Ed, 2012; ASI, 2015). Estimates for 2014-15 indicated that African American teachers continued downward to 23% of the share of all teachers in CPS (Moore, 2015). Indeed while the percentage of Black students in Chicago public schools remained sizeable at approximately 50% in 2002 and 40% in 2012 (ASI, 2015), the number of schools in CPS with fewer than a 10% Black staff jumped from 69 to 223 schools, including an increase of schools with no Black teachers from 10 to 50 (Moore, 2015). The

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<sup>6</sup> The report's findings and analysis draws on city-level data of teachers in district schools (both charter and non-charter) and state-run schools (primarily charter schools). Researchers for ASI's report note: "Prior to Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans consisted almost entirely of district schools run by the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB). Immediately after Katrina, a number of OPSB schools did reopen as non-charters, but most were taken over by the state's Recovery School District (RSD) within a year. Between 2008 and 2012, only a small handful of regular public schools were overseen by OPSB (which also oversees a number of charter schools). Instead, state entities, mostly RSD, assumed control of most of the city's schools, most of which were eventually converted to charter schools . . ." (ASI, 2015, p 62).

<sup>7</sup> See Eddy Oliver, Oscarlene Nixon, Mildred Goodwin, et al. v. Orleans Parish School Board, et al. (2012).

share of White teachers, however, held steady between 2002 and 2011 from 46% to 50% respectively. Charter school expansion in Chicago, moreover, also contributed to larger representation gaps between students and teachers, as 64.4% of teachers in charters were White in 2011 and 22% of Black teachers, compared to sizeable proportions of Black students in charter schools at 59%. Hence the representation gap between Black students and teachers was nearly three times in the charter sector compared to district sector (ASI, 2015).

Changes in Chicago's teacher workforce are due in part to overall declines in the city's total workforce by 13%, due to budget cuts in the past decade. Like New Orleans, however, Black teachers represented a smaller portion of a reduced workforce while White teachers increased their share in a changed workforce. Particularly, the share of Black teachers decreased by 11% in district schools between 2002 and 2011 and the overall number of Black teachers declined by 39% (ASI, 2015). White teachers, on the other hand, increased proportionally and declined modestly in absolute numbers.

### **Philadelphia**

The overall teacher population in Philadelphia increased between 2001 and 2012, but as in other cities, these gains were not evident among Black teachers who declined in this period in both share and population of the city's teacher workforce (ASI, 2015). Indeed, the teaching force in Philadelphia grew by 12%, due to an expanding charter sector that doubled between 2007 and 2012 (ASI, 2015). When growth is disaggregated by race and ethnicity, data show that the population of White and Hispanic teachers grew by nearly 27% each, while the population of Black teachers declined by 19% (ASI, 2015). Dramatic population shifts drove similar changes, however modest, in the proportion of teachers by race and ethnicity in 2012. For example, as Black teachers represented 34% of teachers in the district sector in 2001, this share declined to 26% in 2012. In the charter sector, moreover, Black teachers were less represented and continued to experience declines from 28% in 2007 to 20% in 2012 (ASI, 2015). These trends exacerbated student-teacher parity gaps in race and ethnicity, as the share of students in the city's district schools who identified as Black was 54% and 65% in the city's charter sector in 2012, leaving a parity gap of 28 points and 45 points respectively. Conversely, White teachers in both the district and charter sector increased, respectively, from 61% to 68% between 2001-2012 and from 65.9% to 71% between 2007-2012 (ASI, 2015).

### **Washington D.C**

Dramatic trends were also evident in D.C in both the share of Black and White teachers, but in opposite directions. Black teachers experienced a nearly 28% decline in share of the teacher workforce from 76.9% to 49% between 2003 and 2011, while the proportion of White teachers grew 23% over the same period from 15.8% to 38.8% (ASI, 2015).

As note above, clear trends in Black teacher decline across several cities are problematic, not only because they frustrate efforts to reduce racial and ethnic parity gaps between students and teachers, but also because they weaken the civic and political capacities of communities of color where Black teachers have played important roles historically. Michele Foster, for example, documented the vital role of women of color in her analysis of oral narratives of African American educators from the early to late 20th century and who served as important liaisons between schools, parents, and communities (Foster, 1991, 1997). Their narratives demonstrated the power of connection and constancy in the education of Black children, often in the face of constraints due to race and gender discrimination. Foster's narratives countered negative depictions of Black teachers in literature whose work was maligned in policy discussions about the harms of segregated

schooling, particularly during mobilization efforts to bring about desegregated schools in the 1960s and 70s. In these depictions, advocates of desegregation framed the interests of middle-class Black teachers in contrast to the interests of poor Black children whose educational needs were considered better served in integrated schools (Foster, 1991). Foster's work, however, noted the invaluable social, cultural, and pedagogical contributions of Black teachers in segregated contexts, and the barriers these teachers faced accessing jobs in desegregated schools.

Similarly, historian Vanessa Siddle-Walker (2012) has documented both the political and pedagogical contributions of Black educators in segregated Black communities who organized in the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century for educational equity and desegregation by working with local stakeholders, community groups, and national organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Overshadowed by dominant narratives of famous Black male litigators in the watershed court victory of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the efforts of Black educators helped coalesce important coalitions at local levels in support for equitable schools, even when these efforts meant professional consequences associated with the closing of Negro schools for integration. In a lecture to policy leaders and researchers in the American Education Research Association's Annual *Brown* Lecture entitled, "Original Intent: Black Educators in an Elusive Quest for Justice," Siddle-Walker reminds researchers that Black teachers operated with a broad vision of civil rights, which included pedagogical dimensions of equity tied to critical, race-conscious, and culturally affirming traditions of teaching, ethics of care, and social justice (2012). Despite their efforts, Black teachers experienced significant loss of jobs, including thousands whose schools were closed during implementation of desegregation. While some cities instituted teacher integration programs, barriers to employment in white-controlled schools and districts proved difficult. Opportunities in other professions, moreover, presented expanded choices for Black professionals and further weakened the total pool of Black educators.

### **Recruitment and Retention of Teachers of Color: Old and New Lessons**

Generally, the recruitment and retention of teachers of color has been a concern for policy makers for several decades, since the 1980s and 1990s, particularly in light of demographic shifts among U.S. school children. Sociologists in the 1980s noted the importance of both race and class origins among novice teachers recruited to work in disadvantaged and/or communities of color (Dworkin, 1980; Smith, 1970). In a Southwest region of the U.S., researcher Anthony Dworkin noted that both White and Black teachers from high socioeconomic backgrounds were more likely to leave schools in high-poverty communities compared to Black and White teachers whose family's occupational backgrounds were blue-collar. Policy mandates at the time, moreover, driven primarily by court-ordered teacher desegregation policies, forced southern districts to recruit both Black and White teachers and to replace departing teachers with teachers of the same racial heritage. Dworkin warned, however, that inattention to the intersection of race and class, and the overreliance on teachers from high socioeconomic backgrounds, worked paradoxically to perpetuate turnover in schools already disadvantaged. These trends indeed created a "bifurcated faculty" (Dworkin, 1980), consisting of experienced teachers from "lower occupational origins who were not subject to high turnover rates and a sizeable faculty from high occupational origins who continued in their careers only a year or two" (Dworkin, 1980, p. 72). The author warned that such trends would create "continual and circular staffing crises in urban school districts" (p. 72). Lastly, inattention to race and class origin not only spurred high turnover rates creating bifurcated faculties in urban schools, it

also promoted narrow ideas of role modeling that did not account for differences across race and class. Dworkin (1980) concluded, therefore, that culturally affirming role models were needed, but that these role models should be able to identify with disadvantaged students along lines of race and class.

Historians of education have also contributed to knowledge about the recruitment and retention of teachers of color. Several historians have tied declines in percentage of Black teachers in the workforce to several factors, including expansion of opportunities in the labor market for minorities in the mid-twentieth century, as well desegregation and its implementation in the late 50s and 60s (Foster, 1997; Irvine, 1988; Madkins, 2011). By 1950, according to a review on the history of Black teachers, nearly half all Black professionals working in the U.S. were employed as teachers (Madkins, 2011). After the watershed decision of *Brown vs. Board of Education* and subsequent civil rights victories a decade later, desegregation of schools in the south saw the number of Black teachers in the workforce decline (Foster, 1997, Cecelski, 1995). Due to closure of Black schools, busing of Black children to majority White schools, and decisions on the part of White school boards and district leaders to terminate the jobs of thousands of Black principals and teachers, it is estimated that nearly 39,000 Black teachers in 17 states lost their jobs from 1954 to 1965 (see Ethridge, 1979; Hohnes, 1990; Hudson & Hohnes, 1994 in Madkins, 2011). The decline of Black teachers was such that by 1970s African Americans comprised only 12% of the teaching workforce and has continued a steady decline for decades. Later efforts to regulate entry into teaching, with the use of standardized testing requirements for teacher licensure has also complicated the pipeline into teaching for teacher candidates of color, whose academic preparation for college entrance and graduation have been inadequate (see Irvine, 1988; Murnane et. al., 1991 in Madkins, 2011).

In the 1980s and 1990s, researchers cautioned that a combination of trends would accompany population growth and an increased demand for teachers in public schools, including lower pupil/teacher ratios and smaller class sizes, early retirement plans of veteran teachers (a “graying”<sup>8</sup> of the teacher workforce), and an increase in the total number of young teachers who demonstrate higher attrition rates compared to mid-career teachers (Grissmer & Kirby, 1997). Teachers of color were a policy interest and focus of recruitment efforts by education leaders, given the two-fold issue of the rising proportion and number of students of color and their concentration in disproportionately high-poverty and “hard-to-staff” (Achinstein et al., 2010) schools. Teachers of color were valued for their “humanistic commitments” to work in these schools, as they were less likely to leave such schools (Achinstein et al., 2010; Dworkin, 1980; Haberman, 2000; Kirby, Brends, and Naftel, 1999; Smith, 1970) and would also provide students of color with role models that could promote more favorable academic outcomes.

Current research, however, has identified important changes in attrition patterns among teachers of color. It attributes these patterns to the contemporary underrepresentation of teachers of color in the profession. Sociologists of education, for example, have argued that the lack of representation among ToCs over the past two decades is more closely tied to the organization of schools and the conditions in which teachers work. These issues suggest a more policy-related source of racial representation in schools, not associated with previous emphasis on the academic preparation of ToCs themselves, their performance on licensure tests, or institutional “pipeline” issues into the field. Sociologist Richard Ingersoll and colleague Henry May (2011) have found that the growth in number of ToCs into education has outpaced both the growth in number of White

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<sup>8</sup> Generally, as of 2011-12, the most common teacher, across all schools was someone in his or her fifth year, compared to 1987-88 when the modal teacher had 15 years of experience (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014). Indeed nearly half of the teaching force (1.7 million teachers) has 10 or fewer years of experience (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014).

teachers into the field and the number of students of color. Increases in number of ToCs, despite their under-representation compared to students of color, is attributed to successful recruitment efforts on the part of schools and districts to provide hard-to-staff schools with a diverse workforce.

For Ingersoll and May (2011), the underrepresentation of ToCs is tied to an unprecedented rate of turnover among ToCs who leave the profession (leavers) or their schools (movers) in rates that surpass white teachers. Based on self-reports identifying reasons for departure, ToCs leave or move from schools more often and is most significantly associated with unfavorable social and organizational conditions, such as lack of autonomy and level of collective decision-making among faculty. The less positive conditions in which ToCs work is tied to social factors indicative of their professional status and roles in schools, as opposed to conditions associated with material resources, salary, or student characteristics which have been identified as factors shaping the retention of White teachers in high-poverty schools. As the authors note, “Neither a school’s poverty-level student enrollment, a school’s minority student enrollment, a school’s proportion of minority teachers, nor whether the school was in an urban or suburban community was consistently or significantly related to the likelihood that minority teachers would stay or depart” (Ingersoll & May, 2011, p. ii). These findings are in keeping with research that shows how teachers’ departure from schools is not based on decisions related to their students, but to the organizational context and conditions in which they work, such as leadership, faculty trust and collegiality, and autonomy and decision making (see review of working conditions and turnover in Simon & Johnson, 2015).

This body of research is important in several ways: 1) it locates the policy imperative for diversifying the teacher workforce on issues of retention; 2) it connects the retention of ToCs to working conditions inside schools; 3) it identifies the kinds of working conditions and organizational factors that limit attrition of ToCs, in terms of levels of decision-making and autonomy in classroom teaching; and finally 4) it suggests that educational reformers must heed the policy climate in which schools are organized and its impact on teacher status and power inside schools. If failure to diversify the teacher workforce is policy-related, and not merely a source of demography and retirement patterns (i.e. “exogenous” factors), or solely a reflection of the programmatic and institutional pipelines into teaching, then reforms that influence the power and professional status of teachers require more critical investigation.

## **Evaluating TFA’s Diversity Initiative: A Critical Policy Framework**

Critical policy analysts situate schools, and examinations of school processes, in the social, political, economic, and cultural conditions facing disadvantaged communities and communities of color (Anyon, 1995; Ball et. al, 1994; Kretchmar, 2015; Lipman, 2011). These researchers incorporate a critical analysis of contemporary education policies, such as accountability and neoliberal school reform. They interrogate policies’ impact on relations of power and democratic practices inside schools (Fallabela, 2014). In this sense, heightened rates of teacher decline and teacher turnover among ToCs are part and parcel of broader transformations of public schooling and the changing professional roles of teachers inside new configurations of school. Hence, critical policy perspectives on educational phenomena prompt interrogation of dominant policy agendas, such as high-stakes accountability and market-based reforms, and note disparate impacts of these reforms on schools in high-poverty communities and communities of color (Baker et. al., 2013; Buras, 2015; Clotfelter et. al., 2004; Lipman, 2011; McNeal, 2012; Sass, Flores, Claeys & Perez, 2012). Teacher segregation across schools (Frankenburg, 2009) and the “humanistic commitments” (Achinstein et al., 2010), of ToCs to work in schools serving low-income students of color (Villegas

& Irvine, 2009) have created a set of circumstances where macro level policy-initiatives geared toward restructuring low-performing schools in high-poverty communities of color are acutely felt by ToCs who work disproportionately in such schools.

For critics of neoliberal school reform, in particular, testing and accountability and logics of choice and competition shape not only the management and control of schools, but within-school experiences and expectations of students, as well as teachers' instructional practices and their professional working conditions, including changes in policies related to teacher evaluation, salary, tenure, collective bargaining rights, and layoffs (Jones, 2015; Saltman, 2010; White, 2015b). In a critical policy analysis, therefore, the experiences of ToCs are contextualized in the context of broad policy reforms that have resulted in the reorganization of urban schools, shifting relations of power and collectivity inside schools among teachers and between teachers and leaders. Micro-level institutional practices and professional experiences are part and parcel of system-level policy reforms. The disparate (and adverse) impact of such policies on schools in high poverty communities and communities of color, shape the professional livelihoods of ToCs acutely and their voluntary (and involuntary) departure from schools. A critical framework, therefore, allows for an interrogation of the larger policy climate under which schools have been organized and restructured, the role of TFA in challenging and/or facilitating these processes, and the relationship of these processes to attrition and decline of teachers in high-poverty schools, many of whom are ToCs.

Relatedly, viewed through a "policy ecology" framework, TFA's expansion can be interpreted in terms of its connection to a group of policies and processes in particular contexts and the unintended consequences of the inter-relationship of these policies (Weaver-Hightower, 2008, p. 157). This approach is different from traditional policy analysis, which often focuses on "accomplished" policy, in terms of actualizing intended goals on the part of policy actors. In this sense, TFA's diversity initiative is quite accomplished in achieving its stated goals laid out in 2010 to seek growth and diversity by 2015 and to maintain standards of selectivity. According to an ecological view, "the policy process is created and constructed, and it is always already manipulated by those with the greatest social, political, cultural, and economic resources" (Weaver-Hightower, 2008, p. 157). As such, the historic, economic, and cultural inflections shaping TFA's growth is brought to the forefront (Weaver-Hightower, 2008).

Critical policy researchers also emphasize *relational thinking*, wherein policy formations are connected to other policies and situated in a particular environment which aggravates or mitigates existing social inequality and relations of power (Carspecken & Apple, 1992; Taylor, 1997). Hence, a group of policies shaping TFA's expansion is considered, as are the relationship of those policies to co-occurring policies in a shared context, which work to contract large pools of educators of color, particularly veteran Black educators.

The historic context of policies are also considered, regarded as "extant conditions" of policy development, including existing forces of gender, race, and class, which make policies more or less pliable. This approach is important to illuminate relations of power and inequity within the teacher workforce, particularly for veteran educators of color, often women, who have historically faced discrimination and dislocation during prior eras of school reform, including school integration which resulted in the closing of Black schools in the south and loss of jobs for thousands of Black teachers (Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 2012) or urban restructuring (Lipman, 2011), which sought to improve organizational conditions for learning among Black children yet undermined the professional and pedagogical contributions of Black teachers in the schools. In some regards, the decline of Black teachers today has seeds in a not-too-distant past, as Black teachers are often positioned as "collateral damage" in the mobilization for better schools for minority children and simultaneously reify White privilege via the protection of White district leaders who maintain control of public schools and White teachers who secure employment with fewer barriers. In a sad irony,

systemic declines among Black teachers are reminiscent of extant conditions involving race and gender discrimination, including TFA's capacity to social and political capital to maintain contracts for corps members (historically a White and affluent cadre of teachers) in the face of layoffs and involuntary departure among district teachers, many who are Black women. Hence, well-meaning educational programs geared toward serving Black children fall adversely, yet again, on the shoulders of ToCs.

In addition to extant conditions, policy ecologies allow for a broader set of questions to investigate and thus a broader set of strategies for advocates and activists to resolve if problematic outcomes of an ecology are identified (Weaver-Hightower, 2008, pg. 162). Taking up this critical policy framework, I consider the history and culture of school reform in urban communities as it relates to educators of color, as well as new actors in urban school reforms (such as TFA), their relationships to educators of color, and the larger national movements involved (Weaver-Hightower, 2008, p. 160)

### **Design and Sources of Evidence**

The following research questions guided this literature review: a) In what ways does Teach For America's policy influence support or contradict its stated values and initiatives for teacher diversity in public schools? and b) How can research on the policy-related dimensions of teacher turnover and rates of decline among Black educators inform TFA's approach to diversity? The review was informed, in part, by Borman and Dowling's (2008) meta-analysis and narrative review of teacher attrition, as well as Brown's (2014) more targeted review on pre-service teachers of color informed by critical race theory (CRT). Both studies utilized computerized reference databases and searched articles and research reports published over a period of approximately two decades. The researchers also utilized searches on the World Wide Web for unpublished studies and compilations of data, as well as citation chasing which reviewed reference sections of retrieved articles to identify additional reports (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Brown, 2014).

In order to situate TFA's diversity initiative in the broader context of research on teachers of color and the policy-related dimensions of turnover and decline, I conducted a two-part review of the research literature. I searched the Web of Knowledge and Education Full text databases using the combined primary terms "teachers of color" and "turnover" as well as "minority teachers" and "turnover." I also substituted turnover for similar or closely related terms, such as "attrition" and "retention." I also used more specific terms to denote the various race and ethnic groups that typically make up the category of teachers of color, including 'Black and African American teachers and turnover/attrition/retention', 'Latino, Hispanic, and Mexican American and turnover/attrition/retention', 'Native American and indigenous teachers and turnover/attrition/retention', and 'Asian American teachers and turnover/attrition/retention'. The latter category is quite broad and the author recognized, similar to a recent study involving comprehensive reviews of literature on teachers of color (Brown, 2014), the importance of capturing the various ethnic groups that constitute pan-Asian racial designations, including Pacific Islander and East Indian; Chinese, Vietnamese, Japanese, Filipino and Cambodian.

In addition to primary searches, I conducted a targeted review of the literature on contemporary education policies and its impact on teachers of color. I chose specific policies based on knowledge of existing literature that critically examines issues of race and the disparate impact of policies on schools serving high numbers of low-income students of color. In light of general knowledge regarding the large representation of ToCs in schools serving low-income students of color, I focused on studies that directly examined the relationship of those particular policies to ToCs. Within this review, I examine and synthesize findings related to teacher turnover, as defined



in both traditional terms as “voluntary quits” and more broadly as “involuntary departures.” In this vein, I broadened conceptions of turnover in order to include both traditional notions of turnover, in terms of voluntary “quits” by ToCs, as well as *involuntary* departures among ToCs in urban schools (e.g. layoffs). The former concept is indicative of traditional approaches to research on retention and turnover, designed to disentangle the actions of pre-retirement teachers who choose to stay, move, or leave the profession from the actions of teachers whose choices are associated with, or are the result of, professional misconduct. In a contemporary climate of high-stakes accountability and large-scale restructuring of urban schools, rigid categories of turnover can limit the scope and understanding of real-life circumstances and conditions shaping pre-retirement actions on the part of teachers who stay, move, or leave the profession.

Moreover, a traditional framework of turnover as voluntary quits fails to capture involuntary departures as a policy problem altogether, to be addressed or examined in-depth, and bolstered perhaps by the tendency to view these teachers as undesirable in the eyes of district and school leaders. It is quite probable, however, that high-stakes accountability policies, performance-based evaluations and pay scales, and large-scale restructuring of schools in urban communities of color have led to more frequent and involuntary departures of teachers, in the form of layoffs and dismissals that are not associated with traditional ideas of professional misconduct (McNeal, 2012). The association of involuntary departures, moreover, with professional misconduct, and the consequent exclusion of this category of teachers from research on retention and turnover, further alienates a potentially marginalized group of teachers whose circumstances are not integrated into policy research and subsequent recommendations for change. Nonetheless, within the category of turnover involving “voluntary quits,” the author excluded studies centered on retirement-based decisions and pension policies, while in the category of turnover involving “involuntary departures” the author was vigilant to not include studies based on professional misconduct (i.e. mistreatment of students, etc.). Primary terms for this part of the review included targeted policies, such as “high-stakes accountability and teachers of color”, “performance-based evaluations and teachers of color”, “school closures and teachers of color”, and “market reform and teachers of color.” For each search, the author generated several configurations involving substitutions of the primary term with similar or closely related terms, as well as substitutions of “teachers of color” with similar and closely related terms denoting teachers from specific racial and ethnic groups.

Lastly, the author conducted a review of existing literature on Teach For America using all previously searched and reviewed terms. For this review, the author expanded sources of information to include the organization’s website, extensive online searches of news articles, as well as scholarly journals from the Web of Knowledge and Education Full. The author examined and analyzed findings from this search in light of policy-related themes shaping teacher retention among teachers of color, and other major findings from the two previous searches. Step one of this review, which focused on the particular origins and conditions of teacher turnover among teachers of color, yielded 80 articles, while step two of this review, which focused on contemporary education policies and its impact on teachers of color yielded 13 articles. Step three of this review, which situated literature on Teach For America within the broader review yielded nine peer-reviewed articles, four books and/or book chapters, and several news articles. Themes from the first review, as they relate to policy-dimensions of retention and turnover among teachers of color, are below. In light of these themes, a synthesis and critical evaluation of TFA’s diversity initiative follows.

The present review is also informed by more comprehensive and prominent reviews, such as meta-analyses of quantitative studies of retention and the career paths of all teachers (Borman and Dowling, 2008; Ingersoll, 2001), as well as reviews of studies that have included qualitative analysis of the experiences and perspectives of “minority teacher groups” (Quiocho, 2000) and “teachers of color” (Achinstein et al., 2010; Brown, 2014) in particular. For example, Borman and Dowling (2008) is a

review of 34 quantitative studies that included 12 studies that focused on different patterns of retention between White and non-White, minority teachers. Likewise, quantitative studies on patterns of attrition done by sociologist Richard Ingersoll have included special attention to patterns among teachers of color in particular (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Reviews of teacher narratives are also included, which feature studies that are smaller in scale, but which centered the experiences of ToCs as the primary unit of analysis. Hence, despite the range of interested variables and the methods of inquiry, the guiding criteria of inclusion in the present review was whether the study identified policy-related factors and conditions moderating the retention of teachers of color.

## Findings

### Education Policy and Black Teacher Decline

In light of declining numbers of Black teachers in several cities, researchers have considered common policies adopted across regions that have influenced changes in teacher workforce demographics. Authors of the Albert Shanker Institute's report, *The State of Teacher Diversity*, perhaps the most comprehensive study on Black teacher decline to date, reject seniority-based layoffs as a driver of Black teacher decline and signal opposite trends instead, including layoffs among experienced teachers in district schools, high turnover rates, and insufficient representation of Black teachers among new teacher hires in charter schools (ASI, 2015). In Chicago, for example, rates of new teacher hires and teacher leavers worked counter to teacher diversity, as shares of new hires who were Black, in both district and charter schools, were found to be consistently lower on average than Black representation among the city's teachers the previous year (ASI, 2015). These trends were acute in Chicago's charter schools, which had significantly higher rates of teacher hires and leavers overall compared to district schools. Conversely, the share of new hires that were White in both the district and charter sectors was consistently above the representation of White teachers in the previous year's teaching force (ASI, 2015). Similar outcomes were evident in Philadelphia and New Orleans, as new hires were disproportionately in charter schools but whose racial backgrounds exacerbated race and ethnic parity gaps due to Black hires falling below the share of Black teachers in the teaching force while White hires were well above their share of the teaching force (ASI, 2015). Hence, new hires across cities spotlighted in this review, and in cities with similar interventions, worked often to decrease teacher diversity (ASI, 2015).

A number of key reforms, moreover, were associated with shifts in hiring practices and workforce demographics across the cities. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, for example, several education reforms were enacted by city and state officials including the firing of the city's teachers; the expiration of the city's collective bargaining agreement; eliminating certification requirements for charter schools; eliminating tenure; mandating statewide teacher evaluation; decentralized hiring; a major shift to charter schools (which makes up 93% of schools) and the selection of charter management organizations to operate schools; and closing charter schools due to low test scores (Barrett & Harris, 2015, p 2). Researchers at the Education Research Alliance for New Orleans have documented the effects of these policies on a number of teacher workforce demographics, including race and ethnic representation, levels of experience, rates of certification, and local or out-of- state origin of teachers. Policies have resulted in steady declines of Black teachers, as well as significant drops in the percentage of teachers with "local roots" (measured by proportion of teachers who graduated from New Orleans-based colleges), from 60% in 2005 to 34% in 2014 (Barrett & Harris, 2015). The authors also note considerable declines in levels of teacher experience with the percentage of teachers with 20 or more years of experience dropping by over 20

percentage points while the percentage of teachers with 5 or fewer years of experience increasing from 33% to 54% between 2005 and 2014 (Barrett & Harris, 2015). The percentage of certified teachers also dropped from 79% to 56% in the same period, while turnover rates nearly doubled (Barrett & Harris, 2015).

Advocates of policy changes in NOLA contend that interventions have improved student outcomes on standardized tests (Barrett & Harris, 2015; Public Impact, 2015). Critics question achievement gains, however, noting that students in the Recovery School District placed last and “nearly last” in the state on dropout, push out, and graduation rates (Heilig, 2015). Louisiana also had the largest disparity in student achievement between charter schools and traditional schools in the nation, as charter school students performed significantly less well than students in traditional public schools on tests administered by the National Education Assessment Program (NAEP; Heilig, 2015). Others have noted a range of concerns with comparing student outcomes pre and post-Katrina and policy interventions, including the nearly 30,000 fewer students in the district in 2015 than in 2004 (perhaps the most vulnerable children who did not return to the city after the storm), and multiple and arbitrary revisions to the State Performance Score formula in the past ten years (Buras, 2015; Dixson, 2015; see also Henry Levin in Education Research Alliance, 2015). Unequal access to quality choices have also compromised reforms in the city, as schools with “selective admission” (approximately 8) do not participate in central enrollment practices, leaving racial disparities in enrollment with schools rated C, D, and F overwhelmingly African American and schools rated A disproportionately White (Dixson, Buras, & Jeffers, 2015).

A lack of qualitative data on the impact of policy interventions on families, teachers, and communities is also missing from evaluations of policy interventions (Dixson, 2015). In this vein, little is known about the implications of teacher workforce changes by race and ethnicity associated with policy interventions in New Orleans. Growing parity gaps between students and teachers by race and ethnicity may undermine the maintenance of even the modest of test score gains, by eroding dimensions of school life important for equity, such as relationships of trust between students, teachers, and parents, reducing racial discrimination in discipline, tracking, or referrals to special education, or inclusive practices for linguistically and culturally diverse students. The unintended consequences of test-driven policies that undermine teacher diversity in schools is noted by researchers at ERA when stating:

Among the disadvantages [of changes to the teacher workforce] are concerns that changes in the racial and local composition of teachers may have consequences for students not captured by test scores, that the current teacher workforce model is unsustainable, and that any further school improvement may not be possible with inexperienced teachers with limited formal training (Barrett & Harris, 2015, p. 7).

Similar to NOLA's reform efforts, Chicago experimented with similar reforms in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Under then Mayor Richard Daley, “turnaround” schools were introduced in Chicago in 2004 as part of the “Renaissance 2010” program. Renaissance 2010 called for the closing of low-performing schools and the creation of 100 new schools by 2010, to be established as charter schools, contract schools, or performance schools (*CTU v. Board of Education*, 2012; de la Torre et al., 2012). From 2004 through 2011, the board of education of the city ordered 16 schools to be subjected to turnaround. In a turnaround school, all administration, faculty and staff are terminated and the Local School Council (LSC)—the statutory entity overseeing the administration of the school—is dissolved (*CTU v Board of Education*, 2012). The staff and faculty are allowed to re-apply for positions with schools; however, schools rehire less than half of all teachers under school closure and turnaround (de la Torre et al., 2012).

Over time, Chicago public schools (CPS) have initiated five distinct reforms aimed at improving low-performing schools. The initiatives include *Reconstitution*, *School Closure* and *Restart*, *School Turnaround Specialist Program* (STSP) model, *Academy for Urban School Leadership* (AUSL) model, or placement into the *CPS Office of School Improvement* (OSI) model (de la Torre, et al., 2012). All initiatives rely on changing the school leadership, and three models rely on changing both the leadership and the school staff – *Reconstitution*, *AUSL* and *OSI* models. With these models, schools start the new academic year with dramatic changes to staffing, but the same students remain assigned to the schools. These reforms are similar to the federal *turnaround model*, which includes replacing the principal and at least 50% of the school’s staff, adopting a new governance structure, and implementing a new or revised instructional program (de la Torre et al., 2012). *School Closure* and *Restart* were considered the most comprehensive intervention as it called for closing the school for a year, moving students into other schools, and subsequently reopening the school as a charter school. This reform model also required changes in student enrollment from assignment by neighborhood residence to an application and lottery system (de la Torre et al., 2015; Lipman & Haines, 2007). In most cases, schools under the *Closure* and *Restart* model reopened under management of a charter school operator, a charter management organization, or an educational management organization. The fourth federal model is *school closure*, where schools are closed and students are sent to other schools in the district. In May 2013, the Chicago Board of Education voted to close 47 additional schools, resulting in the largest mass school closing in the nation’s history (de la Torre et al., 2015, p. 5).

In studies on the outcomes of students who attended schools that were closed, findings noted that displaced students in Chicago tended to transfer from one low-performing school to another. Overall, closings had no effect on student learning for displaced students (de la Torre et al., 2012). Generally, elementary and middle schools performed better after reforms, in terms of reduction in test score gaps by half in reading and by two-thirds in mathematics, while reformed high schools did not show significant gains. However, schools under *Closure* and *Restart* model had considerable changes in student demographics, including serving more economically advantaged students, students of higher prior achievement, fewer special education students, and fewer students from the neighborhood around the school (de la Torre et al., 2012).

Of importance for this review, reforms in Chicago yielded considerable changes in teacher workforce demographics, as all intervention models were likely to result in White, younger, less experienced teachers, as well as teachers more likely to have provisional certification than the teachers who were at the schools before the intervention (de la Torre et al., 2012, p. 6). According to a representative for the Chicago Teachers Union, since 2011, Mayor (Rahm) Emanuel and the board of education suspended the careers of close to 5,000 certified teachers and closed and turned around nearly 80 schools, the majority of which impacted students, communities, and staff of color (Skinner, 2015). As such, 213 African American teachers in Chicago filed suit against the board of education, claiming racial discrimination in labor practices and policies (*CTU v Board of Education*, 2012), including ambiguous and discriminatory selection of turnaround schools in the South and West regions of the city where 90% of the city’s African American teachers were employed and despite evidence of similar or worse performing schools in other regions of the city (CTU, 2012). Indeed no schools from the city’s North regions were selected for turnaround or any other school action (CTU, pg. 2012)<sup>9</sup>. According to CTU’s statement, “Since 2004, the Chicago Board of Education has turned around 33 schools. More than 52% of the tenured teachers terminated in the 2012 turnarounds were African-American, although African-Americans made up less than 27% of

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<sup>9</sup> In August 2015, the over 200 Black teachers in Chicago won class-action status and are waiting litigation of their case (Skinner, 2015).

the CPS tenured teaching staff and 44% of the tenured teacher population in other schools meeting criteria for turnaround” (*CTU v. Board of Education*, 2012).

In various cities, therefore, significant decline of Black teachers is associated with school closures, rapid charter sector expansion, and decentralized hiring of teachers. While leaders champion reforms in hopes of improving schools and closing academic achievement gaps, these efforts have worked simultaneously to exacerbate other gaps, including the gnawing parity gap between racially diverse students in the nation’s public schools and teachers of color. Despite common beliefs about exogenous factors driving under-representation of ToCs, such as broad demographic changes among students of color or lack of interest in education among young professionals from racially diverse backgrounds, trends across cities illustrate that some education policies may work *in opposition* to teacher diversity in the form of Black teacher decline and displacement.

### Teacher Turnover and Education Policy

Researchers have noted the acute pressures of accountability faced by teachers who work in disadvantaged communities and communities of color, many who are teachers of color due to teacher segregation across schools: “An unintended consequence of NCLB’s AYP requirement may be that it makes the teaching context for minority teachers more difficult at the same time that minority teachers continue to be underrepresented in the teaching force” (Frankenberg, 2009, p. 33; see also Clotfelter et. al. [2004] in Frankenberg, [2009]). Noting high attrition patterns in her own findings, Frankenberg warns of a troubling irony, whereby the turnover of teachers in schools not making adequate yearly progress (AYP) may further disrupt the school’s educational environment for teachers and students who remain there (p. 33).

Teacher educators Margaret Crocco and Arthur Costigan conducted multiple interviews with 200 novice educators in New York City, over a five-year span, and documented that primary concerns regarding decisions to stay or leave were shaped by satisfaction with working conditions in their school settings (2007). The authors cited teachers’ frustrations with a “shrinking space” for classroom-based decision making, and tied these experiences to patterns related to NCLB and high-stakes testing, such as “curricular and pedagogical impositions of scripted lessons and mandated curriculum” (p. 512). This study, however, did not identify the racial background of its teacher participants.

In her analysis of reconstitution plans mandated by NCLB, legal analyst Laura McNeal (2012) found the impact of reconstitution fell more heavily on teachers of color. Indeed NCLB-reconstitution mandates were tied to the involuntary turnover of ToCs, resulting in disparate impact on ToCs, due to the tendency of such mandates to result in closure of schools where ToCs work. These policies disproportionately disenfranchised ToCs, whose legal entitlements to due process, tenure, and collective bargaining rights are compromised. She notes that the “unanticipated impact that NCLB has on ToCs is one of the many hidden costs caused by the disconnect between NCLB law in action and NCLB law on the books” (McNeal, 2012, p. 1119). McNeal argues that ToCs constitute a “vulnerable population” due to the adverse impact of the law’s mandates. The vulnerability of ToCs, unfortunately, is in keeping with historical patterns of disenfranchisement during earlier periods of school restructuring and the implementation desegregation policies and mandates (see Tillman, 2004 and Siddle-Walker 2001 in McNeal, 2012). In a haunting irony, reflected in current efforts geared toward improving diversity in teaching, McNeal notes that while the *Brown* decision “on the books” was intended to promote diversity and equity in education its

implementation “in action” worked against diverse learning environments due to the dismissal of thousands of ToCs (2012, p. 1120). In many ways, as McNeal (2012) notes, “the unintended consequences of education reform on Black educators in the 1950s mirrors the disparate impact of discrimination occurring in today’s schools through the implementation of NCLB reconstitution” (p. 1120).

### **Socio-Cultural Context of School and Turnover of Teachers of Color**

Qualitative researchers have been better able to explore why and how teachers of color decide to leave their schools. These studies present in-depth experiences of ToCs and the social and cultural dimensions of school working conditions that impact their professional commitments. Researchers find that the professional commitments of ToCs are often guided by both social justice visions (i.e. to provide needed opportunities for disadvantaged students and to promote social mobility through education) and a desire to be culturally affirming (i.e. to respect and value the cultural and linguistic resources of students of color, and with whom many share and identify culturally; Rios & Montecinos, 1999). Studies show, however, that these commitments are often strained in the context and organization of schools where they work. Despite knowledge and skills developed in education preparation programs, teachers’ capacities to enact justice-oriented and culturally responsive visions of schooling are often attributed to the contexts in which they work and not the preparation they have received. In a four-year study of two Latina teachers, researchers Barbara Achinstein and Rodney Ogawa (2011) carried out interviews with teachers and administrators, conducted focus groups, and videotaped classroom observations in order to understand teacher’s background, their cultural and professional beliefs and practices, and the interplay of these factors with the school context in which they worked. The study found teachers’ professional commitments were ‘changed’ by the contexts in which they worked, in ways that limited the enactment of their identities as professional and cultural role models (Achinstein et al., 2011). The authors noted teachers’ frustrations with the absence of ‘multicultural capital’ in their school, in terms of the teachers’ ability to leverage values for culture and culturally responsive approaches to teaching. The authors note the irony of new teachers of color identified by policymakers as “change agents” who will bolster equitable outcomes for students of color, by accessing relevant knowledge and “the cultural and linguistic resources” they share with students in order to produce favorable academic results. However, the ToCs described conditions in their schools as “culturally subtractive.” Hence, while teachers themselves were committed to students and promoted more equitable outcomes for students of color, the context in which they taught worked against their roles as professional and cultural role models (Achinstein et al., 2011).

Similarly, researcher Jane Agee (2004) found that an African American English teacher that she observed over the course of three years as she moved from pre-service preparation to classroom teaching, struggled to negotiate her identity (and her value for multicultural literature) in the context of the school in which she worked. In light of the teachers’ pre-service training, described as progressive, Agee concludes that the teacher “found her imagined teacher identity thwarted by state mandates, mainstream constructions of a teacher role, and ideologies of curriculum and assessment” (p. 44). Agee (2004) argues, moreover, that gaps between progressive teacher education programs and the institutional and curricular policies in the schools where ToCs work, which are strongly shaped by mandated, high-stakes tests, reflect much deeper political and ideological gaps between the orientations and commitments of ToCs and the dominant policy mandates organizing the schools in which they teach. More problematic are the ways in which the ideological dimensions shaping school practices have also constructed views of teachers and their roles in schools in ways

that limit their capacities to make decisions regarding school practices and curriculum, and thus shape the context in which they work in meaningful ways (Agee, 2004).

### **Teacher Placement, Teacher Segregation, and Teacher Turnover**

The contexts where ToCs teach are also shaped by the composition and expertise of the colleagues they have. While the 'humanistic commitments' of ToCs often guides their choices to work in schools serving disadvantaged and/or high proportions of students of color, the professional knowledge-base and racial composition of their colleagues is often constructed by district policies related to teacher recruitment and assignment within and across districts and schools. Teacher assignment policies can work to perpetuate the segregation of teachers across schools (in terms of demographic factors like race and ethnicity, as well as social factors related to teacher experience and professional knowledge). The composition of teachers across schools shape disparate experiences among teachers, the most obvious of which includes salary, tangible resources, and the demographics of the students they teach. However, the composition of school faculties can also shape disparate access to intangible resources, such as mentorship and professional role modeling between novice and veteran teachers. Researchers Pflaum and Abramson (1990) examined district level data, including interviews with district officials, in order to track teacher assignment and hiring practices, and the distribution of minority teachers across New York City's 32 community districts. The authors found that districts with larger proportions of minority pupils had more "emergency" new teachers, fewer fully certified teachers, and fewer experienced teachers. Moreover, the authors found that only 58% of the new Black or Hispanic teachers, compared with 82% of White teachers, indicated they intended to remain in teaching five years (Pflaum & Abramson, 1990). The authors concluded with policy-related concerns to combat the phenomenon of "the marginalized teacher," which referred to the tendency of novice ToCs to be assigned to areas with fewer proportions of experienced and certified teachers. Lack of mentoring from experienced veteran teachers was considered an unacknowledged 'intangible' resource that undermined the retention novice ToCs in the city.

A more current and large-scale study of teacher segregation across the country, in terms of the distribution of teachers by race across k-12 schools and the racial composition of schools where teachers taught—revealed higher attrition patterns among ToCs that were related to the racial composition of their colleagues and the student populations where they worked (Frankenberg, 2009). Using survey results from 1,002 teachers in k-12 schools across the country, researcher Erica Frankenburg found considerable segregation of teachers and between teachers and students. The authors note that African American and Latino teachers were not only more likely to work in schools with higher proportions of racially and ethnically diverse students, but that teacher segregation, like student segregation, was tied to poverty composition of students and the proportion of native English speakers. The authors note limited data to explain why attrition of ToCs was higher, but suggest that such patterns contribute to low numbers of ToCs nationwide and outlines policy recommendations that include district hiring and teacher assignment policies that do not result in the assignment of ToCs to schools where working conditions are more challenging. Even if race-conscious student assignment policies are no longer within the legal purview of district officials, race-conscious teacher assignment policies are: "It seems that the [*Louisville* supreme court decision] condones actions to create a racially diverse faculty in schools, and perhaps districts may focus anew on efforts to more evenly distribute *teachers* of different races if policies to assign *students* are increasingly under legal scrutiny" (Frankenberg, 2009, p. 33).

## Organizational Conditions of Schools and Turnover

The harmful tendency of ToCs to work in schools with less access to veteran teachers as mentors, due in large part to teacher assignment and hiring practices, is captured in a comprehensive review of studies on the major social conditions in schools that lead to turnover. Researchers Nicole Simon and Susan Moore Johnson (2015) reviewed six major studies<sup>10</sup> analyzing turnover as a function of school context, which challenge previous theories of turnover tied to student demographics in schools and teacher characteristics. The components of working conditions valued by teachers included: school leadership that was inclusive of teachers in decision-making and which demonstrated effective management of day-to-day operations in the school; collegial relationships involving an “integrated professional culture” where novices and veterans learned from one another and where neither group’s influence dominated decisions about school practices; and finally school culture involving student discipline, trust among teachers and students, and shared goals and commitments to social justice. In this last dimension of working conditions, the authors note the warning of researchers who cautioned against the harms of punitive accountability policies that punished teachers and schools. The authors summarize this value when noting, “A strong, positive school culture reinforces the sense of community and social trust necessary for school improvement” and that “Principals and teachers need assurance that their serious, though failed, efforts will not result in sudden school closings or job terminations triggered by impatient district or state officials” (see Kardos, Johnson, Peske, Kauffman, & Liu, [2001] in Simon & Moore, [2015]). While the review by Simon and Moore (2015) did not include studies that focused exclusively on ToCs, their conceptual framework—the social and organizational factors of turnover—and their overall findings were in keeping with previous research by Ingersoll & May (2011) on the particular patterns of turnover among ToCs. Ingersoll and May (2011), however, noted distinct aspects of school culture that were important to ToCs, such as level of faculty decision-making and classroom autonomy.

## Teacher Turnover and TFA Corps Members of Color

For the most part, studies on the attrition rates of TFA corps members, both quantitative studies and qualitative studies, have focused on broad patterns across regions and districts, or on the particular characteristics corps members related to age and assignment (Donaldson, 2010, 2011, 2012). While these studies are helpful in understanding the overall levels of attrition compared to other ATCPs and to district teachers, they are limited in helping to discern the causes of turnover among corps members, and corps members of color in particular. A few notable studies have explored these issues and inform the larger question of how the attrition of TFA’s corps members of color fit with national trends and causes of turnover identified in literature. One study involves oral histories with TFA alumni from its inaugural year in 1990. Historians Bethany Rogers and Megan Blumenreich (2013) found that despite initial differences from traditional-entry teachers, TFA teachers who remained in classrooms after their two year service voiced reasons for staying in or leaving the urban classroom that were similar to district teachers at large. These reasons included

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<sup>10</sup> The studies included were: “How Teaching Conditions Predict Teacher Turnover in California Schools” Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak (2005); “The Schools Teachers Leave” (Allensworth et al., 2009); “Teachers’ Perceptions of Their Working Conditions: How Predictive of Planned and Actual Teacher Movement?” Helen Ladd (2011); “The Influence of School Administrators on Teacher Retention Decisions” (Boyd et al., 2011); “How Context Matters in High-Need Schools: The Effects of Teachers’ Working Conditions on Their Professional Satisfaction and Their Students’ Achievement” (Johnson, Kraft, and Papay, 2012); “Who Stays and Who Leaves? Findings From a Three-Part Study of Teacher Turnover in NYC Middle Schools” (Marinell & Coca, 2013).



unsupportive working conditions, resources, and lack of opportunities for new learning (Rogers et al., 2013). The authors conclude with an insight: "Our data echo other scholarship, which suggests that attending to the conditions under which all urban teachers work may be just as important as paying attention to who enters the field" (Rogers et al., 2013, p. 34)

As it stands, turnover among corps members, despite differences in their background, is not similar to existing teachers but far worse. Multiple studies report different rates of turnover for TFA corps members (Boyd, et al., 2008; Darling-Hammond et. al, 2005; Heilig & Jez, 2005). These differences are due mainly to differences in region and cohort year. There is a general consensus nonetheless that rates of turnover are higher for TFA corps members compared to district teachers and teachers in other alternative certification programs (Heilig & Jez, 2010). In a large survey study involving 2,029 corps members across three cohorts and various regions in the early 2000s, researchers Morgan Donaldson and Johnson (2010) found that nearly two-thirds (61%) of TFA teachers continued as public school teachers beyond their two-year commitment, while 56% left initial placements after two years, and 43.6% stayed longer. By year five, however, there were much lower numbers of corps members (15%) who were still teaching in the low-income communities where they were originally assigned.

Donaldson and Johnson's (2010) findings documented what some predicted, in that rates of retention among TFA corps members are lower compared to district rates and therefore an added harm for already troubled schools serving disadvantaged children. On the other hand, findings were moderate compared to predictions of much higher rates in light of common conceptions of TFA corps members as weakly committed and who view teaching as "two years and out" (Donaldson & Johnson, 2010, p. 49). Perhaps most important, the authors noted two emerging groups among TFA corps members, including one group who had pre-determined plans for leaving immediately after their two-year teaching contract and a second group who did not indicate intentions to stay longer in teaching. Attrition among the second group indicated working conditions played a role in their decisions to leave. According to the authors, almost 18% of teachers who left teaching described school-based factors as the primary reason for their departure (Donaldson & Johnson, 2011). Among these factors included poor administrative leadership (10%), lack of collaboration (2.11%), inadequate discipline (3%), and general dissatisfaction with their job description and responsibilities (3%) (Donaldson & Johnson, 2010, p. 50). A limitation of this study, in light the present review, is lack of information on the racial or ethnic background of the corps members or their qualitative exploration of the kinds of school-based conditions identified on the survey.

There are a few qualitative studies on the experiences of TFA corps members that examine their reasons for staying or leaving. In one qualitative study, authors Heineke and colleagues (2014) sought to understand what corps members did after their two-year commitment and what factors affected their professional decisions. The authors noted three groups: "leavers" "lasters" and "lingerers." The final category involved those who, despite remaining in the classroom for an additional year, used the year to plan for career endeavors outside of education. Their flexibility however was greater than the leavers and, like those who lasted, noted the importance of environment factors, such as professional support from mentors and administrators (Heineke, et al., 2014).

Perhaps one of few mixed methods studies that centers on the experiences of corps members of color, Irizarry and Donaldson (2012) identified themes among Latina/o students across three points of teacher development—high school students considering teaching as a career, pre-service teachers, and Teach for America corps members. The authors note that the characteristics and outcomes of Latina/o color corps members were distinct White corps members, in ways that should inform general knowledge about the experiences of teacher development, recruitment, and retention for this group. In survey data of 1,550 corps members, Latina/os in Teach For America

demonstrated a greater interest in entering teaching prior to their initial placement than did their White counterparts. These corps members were also more experienced than their White counterparts, in terms of their exposure to working with children in high-poverty communities of color, and had higher retention rates (20%) in their placement schools compared to all of their White counterparts (12.8%). Their experiences with and perceptions of structural inequality shaped a form of “resistant capital” and “aspirational” capital, and contributed to their “staying power” (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012). A weakness of the study, however, is retention rates were examined in relation to background factors such as age, gender, cohort, urbanicity of school, and college majors. School working conditions, or perceptions and experiences related to organizational qualities of schools, were not accounted for.

Lastly, corps members themselves and alumni from racially diverse backgrounds have also written about their experiences in TFA and in urban schools, and have also documented the struggles of other corps members of color (Lapayese, Aldana & Lara, 2014; White, 2015a). In a study grounded in critical race theory and employing counter-narrative methodologies, researchers Lapayese, Aldana, and Lara (2014) explored the lived paradox of diversity in TFA among 15 corps members of color. Most participants expressed that TFA was effective in developing a “racial know-how” among White corps members due to condensed information about race, culture, and diversity in several sessions throughout summer training. However, participants perceived the overall impact of TFA on economically disenfranchised communities of color and its impact on the education of youth of color as lopsided and mixed (at best), and primarily benefitting the economic interests of Whites (Lapayese et al., 2014). Ironically, these conflicts have led some TFA corps members of color to leave the TFA program and not urban schools.

## Discussion

A strong commitment to teacher diversity requires attention not only to recruitment, preparation, and placement of ToCs, but also to policies shaping the organization of schools where ToCs work. The context of teachers’ working conditions, including their capacity to control those conditions in order to advocate effectively on behalf of their students, influences teachers’ decisions to stay or leave classrooms and are mitigated by a host of policies that affect all teachers, and Black teachers acutely due to the students they serve and the historic conditions that perpetuate teacher segregation across schools and racial discrimination in the teacher workforce (Brown, 2014; Foster, 1997; Frankenberg, 2009; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Madkins, 2011). In this vein, TFA’s diversity initiative offers a paradox, rooted in its two-pronged approach to education reform, involving its double function as a teacher recruitment and placement organization and as a policy advocacy group. Its ties to policies, and policy groups, which institute reforms that disparately (and adversely) impact ToCs contradicts its diversity values.

Policies that undermine diversity include arbitrary and disproportionate school closings in communities of color where students of color and ToCs work (Buras, 2014; CTU, 2012; Journey for Justice, 2014; Lipman, Gutstein, Gutierrez & Blanche, 2015), as well as arbitrary teacher layoffs that fall disproportionately on ToCs in urban districts compared to proportions of White teachers in shared schools or districts (see data presented in *CTU v Board of Education of the City of Chicago*). Charter expansion also undermines diversity, due to insufficient hiring practices found in charter sectors in various cities, whereby new hires in charter schools who are Black are often below representation in the existing workforce of a city or district, and concurrent with opposite trends in hiring among White teachers (ASI, 2015; Barrett & Harris, 2015). Together these practices

undermine diversity and exacerbate parity gaps between students of color and the teachers who teach them.

Policies also shape working conditions inside schools and can undermine retention of ToCs, including lack of teacher autonomy, inclusive leadership, and collective faculty decision-making (Ingersoll et. al., 2011; Simon et al., 2015). The erosion of teachers' political power in several cities via attacks on collective bargaining agreements and union participation also leave little room for teachers to effectively negotiate for control over their working conditions and classroom practices (Jones, 2015). TFA's past indifference<sup>11</sup> to the persistence of corps members as classroom teachers may have discouraged more serious attention to poor working conditions for alumni who did not have pre-determined career plans outside of education once their two year commitments passed. Attention to working conditions also requires TFA to expand its theory of educational change to include contextual and environmental factors that impede or aid success of teachers and students.

Historic practices have also disenfranchised ToCs and contribute to chronic turnover and attrition, such as racially segregative teacher assignment practices and overall patterns of segregation across schools that result in concentrations of ToCs in schools with high-needs students and fewer resources (Frankenberg, 2009; Pflaum & Abramson, 1990). These practices are inequitable not only in terms of differences in tangible resources needed to teach and support students, but because faculty compositions shape disparate access to *intangible* resources, such as mentorship and professional role modeling by experienced and veteran teachers. As it stands, in several cities, TFA's placement policies perpetuate the phenomenon of "the marginalized teacher," which refers to the tendency of novice ToCs to work in areas with fewer proportions of experienced and certified teachers. A lack of mentoring from experienced veteran teachers is an intangible resource for teacher development, the lack of which can undermine the retention ToCs in an urban community.

Community-based organizations and critical scholar-activists, such as *Journey for Justice* and the *Collaborative for Equity & Justice in Education*, suggest that broad education reforms undermine both students of color and TOCs. This is because they have disparate and adverse effects on communities of color and thus the professional lives of teachers who work in these communities (Journey for Justice, 2014; CEPS, 2010; Lipman, Gutstein, Gutierrez & Blanche, 2015). These policies include test-based accountability and punitive school improvement plans that result in arbitrary layoffs among teachers in spite of achieving "highly qualified" status by state standards (Buras, 2015; CTU, 2012). These policies constrain control of teachers' work, the goals and objectives of their work, and relations of power between leaders and teachers. For ToCs who are marginalized outside of schools, an imbalance of power can make working conditions untenable. Hence, diversity efforts must take seriously the contexts in which teachers work and critically interrogate policy imperatives associated with less favorable conditions in order to support the retention of targeted groups from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds.

In light of these concerns, and given its unique position to advocate for policies broadly while also recruiting and preparing teachers, TFA's approach to diversity misses an opportunity. It fails to reach adequate levels of diversity that compensate for national and local trends of decline among Black teachers in several cities. The structure of its initiatives ignores the context of school working conditions altogether, and it is linked to policies that undermine the retention of ToCs broadly. A policy mindful approach to diversity that benefits all ToCs appears to be ignored by TFA leaders and rarely discussed in public forums, newsletters, website content, annual reports, or in strategic goals and values. Instead, the organization boasts that 88% of corps members return for their second year, and that 86% of its alumni work full time in education or within low-income communities (TFA, 2015). Independent researchers, however, estimate significantly higher rates of

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teacher turnover among corps members after their two-year commitment. In a study on the impact of TFA's scale-up initiative, part of its Investing in Innovation Scale-Up (i3) grant, researchers noted that more than 87% of TFA teachers reported they did not plan to spend the rest of their career as a classroom teacher, compared with only 26% of comparison teachers (Clark et al., 2015). Researchers also found that TFA teachers were less likely than comparison teachers to anticipate pursuing another education-related career and more likely to anticipate pursuing a non-education-related career (Clark et al., 2015). Even withstanding a majority of corps members who report plans to leave teaching after their two-year commitment, studies indicate a sizeable portion of corps members, many corps members of color, who report not having pre-determined departure plans after their two-year commitment (Donaldson & Johnson, 2010). These teachers indeed make decisions based on experiences in schools related to working conditions, salary, and professional status (Donaldson & Johnson, 2010).

Absent a broader commitment to teacher diversity, one that heeds broad policy trends and their impact on teachers' working conditions, TFA stands to contribute little to the retention of ToCs. More attention to schools' contexts may present challenges for TFA's approach to change, which stakes its theory for reform on the individual qualities and strengths of teachers themselves or the managerial strategies of leaders (Kretchmar, 2015; TFA, 2009; Trujillo & Scott, 2014). The contexts or conditions of urban schools under which teachers teach are largely ignored in its framework. This is problematic, as survey findings suggest ToCs value inclusive forms of leadership permitting levels of collective decision-making among faculty (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Desire for inclusive, bottom-up and democratic forms of decision-making signals tension with technocratic forms of managerialism promoted in TFA's leadership model (TFA, 2009; Trujillo, 2014; Trujillo & Scott, 2014). The relationship between recruitment initiatives geared toward expanding the pool of teachers of color into schools and the maintenance (and intensification) of adverse working conditions that perpetuate the exodus of teachers of color from schools must be examined.

Generally, in light of its role as an incubator of leaders and policy advocates, TFA's diversity initiative, ironically, amplifies the organization's failure to leverage its policy influence in support teachers of color broadly. In an ecology of policies, contradictions are quite evident, between TFA's efforts to recruit corps members of color and the simultaneous disfranchisement of educators of color in the very communities to which TFA places its recruits. Placed in context, TFA's diversity initiative functions narrowly as a politics of representation that ignores, or fails to challenge, a politics of *redistribution* (Apple, 2013) involving power and control within overs schools and its functions in communities of color. A politics of representation commodifies diversity as an appeal to corporate donors and foundations interested in human capital development and workforce preparation. More critical approaches to diversity engage issues of redistribution; related to remedying discrimination, power imbalances, and contemporary projects of structural racism that disenfranchise racial minorities. As it stands, TFA's approach to teacher diversity functions as representation and does not broaden its diversity commitments to challenge policies that marginalize non-TFA teachers of Color, and which siphon jobs, resources, power and control from teachers and students in urban communities.

### **Conclusions: Toward Black Teacher Retention and Empowerment**

TFA's diversity initiative, while potentially praiseworthy, neither negates nor redresses the harms of its policy commitments that have disrupted the professional lives of Black teachers broadly and undermined their pedagogical contributions to children. A growing and active network of

alumni of color, called The Collective, hosts a number of events each year to support new school leaders from racially diverse backgrounds (2014e). The group, however, does not publicly challenge, the actions or commitments of the larger organization. Instead, it works within the organization's framework of transformational change and leadership, a managerialist paradigm of school transformation disconnected from broader struggles for systemic change, including struggles against anti-democratic and privatizing forces gripping urban schools in communities of color. The Collective is also largely silent about the systemic displacement of non-TFA teachers of color. In this way, The Collective signals *fragmentation* of traditional collectivities among Black educators and leaders whose commitments historically involved broad political and pedagogic visions of equity, anti-racism, and social justice (Siddle-Walker, 2012).

Community organizers, both old and new, are apt to remind those who cling to ideas of neutrality of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's timeless insight, that "not to speak is to speak" and "not to act is to act." In the spirit of action, a more just commitment to teacher diversity on the part of Teach For America requires action in the face of practices and policies that undermine racial inclusion, not only for students but the teachers who serve them. As it celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and recounts its knack for setting long-range goals using its two-pronged approach to change, including its capacity to recruit a more diverse corps, TFA should consider extending its prowess and value for diversity to its organizational ties, its partners and networks, and its policy commitments, and to work against contemporary forms of racial discrimination and marginalization facing Black teachers, in both everyday practices inside schools and in the teacher workforce at large. Its capacity to reform its approach to recruitment signals capacity to reorient its role in a host of urban school reforms that have undermined the longevity of teachers of color in urban communities.

Several steps are possible to position TFA within an ecology of policies that strengthen racial diversity in teaching, both for TFA and non-TFA teachers of color. These policies include an end to arbitrary and racially discriminatory school closings, and support for democratic, community-driven improvement plans (Trujillo & Rénee, 2012). These plans—also called Sustainable School Transformation plans (Communities for Excellent Public Schools, 2010)—center a cross-section of community stakeholders including teachers, students, parents, and community organizations to plan and implement turnaround strategies that are contextualized to meet the needs and interests of those in the school and district (Trujillo & Rénee, 2012). These plans require wraparound supports to meet a range of needs of students and families, multiple indicators of effectiveness, culturally relevant practices among teachers, and an increase in federal and state spending (CEPS, 2010). For teacher retention and sustainability, several plans consider important working conditions and support for optimal learning conditions for students, including strong leadership, an emphasis on staff collaboration, job-embedded collaboration, and research-based teacher evaluation programs developed in conjunction with parents, students, teachers, and administrators (CEPS, 2010). Generally, these plans are supported by national and state community organizations, which seek to restore democratic and locally controlled visions of schooling, particularly in communities of color.

Also of importance is support for community-based charter schools that reject "No Excuses" models of teaching and learning and which engage in hiring practices that seek race and ethnic parity between students and teachers (White, 2015b). Support for better working conditions is important for diversity as well, and for all teachers who serve low-income children of color. Better working conditions require restoration of teachers' political rights to due process, protection from retaliation when speaking against practices in schools that marginalize children or adults, and which allow teachers to organize and collectively bargain to negotiate optimal work and learning conditions (Jones, 2015). TFA's core value for diversity can be strengthened when supporting teacher organizing efforts led by educators of color, and tied to multi-city education justice movements grounded in antipoverty and antiracist initiatives in communities of color.

TFA leaders can also attend to the research on racial diversity that marshals historical, contextual, intergenerational, and cross-sectional perspectives on race, policy, and practice. They can leverage this work to challenge discrimination in the field and inconsistencies in rhetoric about diversity, and policies and practices at institutional and programmatic levels. Indeed, research that examines TFA's commitment to diversity should build on prior investigations of the systemic barriers into the profession, as well as policy-related barriers within the profession that hinder power and status, and thus longevity of teachers of color.

Ultimately, the paradox of TFA's diversity initiative is part of a larger policy paradox in the country. On one hand, race-conscious discussions by national leaders about the parity gap in schools between teachers and students have bolstered some support for innovative recruitment initiatives led by many reputable organizations. On the other hand, these same leaders have deployed largely punitive and so-called "colorblind" reforms that fall disproportionately on schools in low-income communities of color, and that in fact displace their teachers of color. The contradiction of a hyper-focus on racial representation and a chronic inattention to the racially discriminatory and marginalizing effects of these heavy-handed education policies is disconcerting, as the latter routinely undermine the former. This article suggests that in order to make sustained and meaningful progress to diversify the teaching force, contemporary policy initiatives that undermine diversity must be challenged. TFA can and must do this work.

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