Instructor's Guide

Nothing Less Than Equality

The Battle over Segregated Education in the Nation's Capital

Tikia K. Hamilton

Introduction · Chapters 1–7 · Epilogue · Additional research

Discussion questions

Introduction: A “Model” System

1. According to the introduction, what are the author’s overall objectives in chronicling this history? Why does the author title the introduction “A ‘Model’ System”?

2. Why does Washington, D.C., represent a unique case in the history of African American social justice movements centered on education?

3. What factors contributed to a shift in how African Americans perceived their educational experiences in the nation’s capital?

4. How did African Americans view and/or debate meanings of equality?

5. What sorts of obstacles did Black residents face in their efforts to obtain educational equality?

Chapter 1: “Optimal Autonomy”

1. What is the overall arc of Chapter 1? Why does the author title it “Optimal Autonomy?”

2. Specifically, what was at stake during the debate over school board consolidation? Who supported consolidation, and why? Who opposed it, and why?

3. Describe African Americans’ efforts towards literacy and education in the antebellum period. Identify some of the educators and leaders who spearheaded these efforts, including African American women. What were some of their signal achievements? What sorts of obstacles did they face? How did they overcome these obstacles?

4. Describe the political context surrounding the Congressional mandates that established public education in Washington, D.C. Why were these mandates so significant? How did the Congressional acts advantage and/or disadvantage African Americans?

5. What were the ultimate results of the school board consolidation debate? What sorts of conflicts did the debate foreshadow going into the twentieth century?

Chapter 2: “Jim Crow Capital”

1. What is the overall arc of Chapter 2? Why does the author title it “Jim Crow Capital?”

2. How does this chapter advance the book’s broader arguments? How does Chapter 2 mark a departure from the previous chapter?

3. Describe Black public educational experiences in Washington, D.C., during the 1930s. Cite specific examples, and also consider the author’s quantitative evidence.

4. Why did the 1930s represent a pivotal moment for public education in general and in D.C., specifically?

5. What sorts of obstacles did African Americans face in their efforts to address educational inequities during this time? How successful were they in overcoming these obstacles?

6. Specifically, what does Chapter 2 help to reveal about the nature of coalition-building around educational disparities?

7. According to the author, what sort of essential groundwork did Black residents establish for their future educational campaigns?

Chapter 3: “A Blessing in Disguise”

1. What is the overall arc of Chapter 3? Why does the author title this chapter “A Blessing in Disguise”?

2. Who was Marian Anderson and what did her experiences help to reveal about Washington’s educational disparities?

3. What specific role did Howard University play in the early stages of this conflict?

4. Specifically, what was MACC, and what role did the organization play in the Marian Anderson affair?

5. What were MACC’s objectives? Who were some of MACC’s principal leaders, and what roles did they each play? Specifically, who was Charles Hamilton Houston, and what was his role?

6. What sorts of organizations supported MACC? What did their support help to reveal about the evolving nature of coalition-building around public education? Desegregation?

7. What sort of contextual and legal arguments did MACC’s leaders make with regard to segregation? How did distinct elements of the DC community respond to MACC’s efforts?

8. What role did New Deal officials play in this local campaign? How did distinct elements of the D.C., community respond to government intervention? What were some of the limitations of white liberals’ involvement?

9. What were the ultimate results of MACC’s campaign? In what ways did MACC’s campaign represent a victory? A failure?

Chapter 4: “Make DC Mean Democracy’s Capital”

1. What is the overall arc of Chapter 4? How does this chapter advance the book’s broader arguments?

2. Specifically, why does the author focus on recreation in this chapter? What direct links does the author make between segregated recreation and segregated schooling?

3. What sort of broad and/or local contextual shifts provided the basis for African Americans’ increasing politicization in their demand for educational equality?

4. Who was Alice Hunter? Edwin B. Henderson? What specific role did each play during local campaigns against segregation?

5. Which organizations contributed to the local campaign to desegregate recreation? What were their individual objectives, and did they always align? How so/not?

6. Who opposed anti-segregation in Washington, and why?

7. What was ironic about seeking the school board’s intervention during this campaign?

8. What were the ultimate results of this desegregation campaign? In what ways did this campaign represent a victory? A failure?

9. What does Chapter 4 help to reveal about the complicated nature of government in Washington, DC., and more importantly, the government’s role in D.C.’s educational affairs?

Chapter 5: “100 Percent Cooperation!”

1. What is the overall arc of Chapter 5? What are the chapter’s principal arguments?

2. Describe the educational conditions that resulted in the Browne campaign.

3. How did the Browne campaign unfold? Who helped to lead it? Who supported their efforts? Who opposed them? Why?

4. Who was Leon Ransom, and what specific role did he play in local educational campaigns? How did his approach to the question of equality differ from previous leaders?

5. Up until now, what role did Black school board members play in the broader educational campaigns? Specifically, how did they respond to parents’ efforts during the Browne protest?

6. Up until now, what specific role did African American women play in the local educational movement? Cite specific examples. What do their contributions suggest about the nature of leadership within DC’s Black community and the expanding civil rights movement more broadly?

7. What does the author identify as some of the principal geographical (quadrant-specific) differences within the city ? What accounted for these differences, and why are these differences important for understanding the broader movement to secure educational equality in Washington?

8. How did the Browne campaign end? In what ways did the protest prove a success? A failure? What essential groundwork did the Browne protest help to establish for their future educational campaigns?

Chapter 6: “People Can Never Lose When They’re United”

1. What is the general arc of Chapter 6? What are the chapter’s principal arguments?

2. Describe the conditions that resulted in the “Central for Cardozo” campaign.

3. How did the campaign unfold? Who spearheaded it, and what were their objectives?

4. Identify the campaign’s competing factions. What accounted for their strategic and ideological differences? (Also be sure to discuss competing their meanings of equality.)

5. Specifically, who was Paul Cooke? Gardner Bishop? What role did each play during the campaign?

6. What sorts of coalitions formed out of this campaign, and how did these coalitions differ from previous protests?

7. Describe the nature of white opposition during this campaign. Why did some white residents support this specific school transfer? Why did others oppose it?

8. What were the ultimate results of the “Central for Cardozo” battle? In what ways did this campaign represent a victory? A failure?

Chapter 7: “Give the Child a Fair Chance!”

1. What is the general arc of Chapter 7? What are the chapter’s principal arguments?

2. Specifically, what lay at the center of conflict in Chapter 7? How did this conflict result in an expanding desegregation campaign?

3. How did Washington’s various factions respond to the expanding movement around desegregation?

4. Describe Chapter 7’s shifting leadership patterns. (Be sure to identify specific leaders and their backgrounds.) What accounted for these shifts?

5. Who was Margaret Just Butcher, and what was her principal role in the expanding desegregation movement? What challenges did she and other anti-segregation activists face?

6. Describe the various legal arguments that African Americans deployed in the lawsuits that preceded Bolling v. Sharpe. In what ways did Bolling v. Sharpe represent a shift in their legal argumentation and Black activists’ overall priorities ? What contributed to this shift?

7. What were the ultimate results of the campaign that resulted in Bolling v. Sharpe?

Epilogue

1. Taking into consideration the book's various chapters and the epilogue, was the campaign that resulted in Bolling v. Sharpe and Brown successful ? Which key issues did Bolling v. Sharpe, Brown, and the expanding modern civil rights campaign leave unresolved?

2. Who was Julius Hobson? What strategies did he adopt to secure educational equality in the wake of Brown?

3. In what ways does the book's various chapters and the epilogue speak to contemporary educational disparities and concerns?

Suggestions for additional research

1. Conduct research on Brown v. Board of Education and/or the four other cases that Brown comprised. Compare the individual experiences of parents, civil leaders, and students involved in each of the lawsuits. How did their experiences differ from Washington's Black residents.

2. Conduct more extended research about one (or more) of the principal leaders and/or educators described in Nothing Less Than Equality.

3. Explore Washington's educational landscape in the wake of Brown and/or more recent years and determine the extent to which Washington's educational disparities have improved or stagnated.

4. Conduct historical research on Washington and the role of race in: a) higher education, b) private schooling, and/or c) parochial schools. Determine how the history of each compare to Washington's public school history as outlined in Nothing Less Than Equality.