

Inclusive Christian Education



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Introduction

The National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES; 2018) defines Conservative Christian schools as schools that are a part of at least one of four religious school organizations Accelerated Christian Education, American Association of Christian Schools, Association of Christian Schools International, or Oral Roberts University Education Fellowship. These four associations are an extension of predominately White evangelical denominations and can all be identified by their shared view of the supreme authority of scripture above all other sources of truth (Fitzgerald, 2017). Unfortunately, Conservative Christian schools have a sordid history with racism in the United States of America (US) because their exponential growth was due to White communities creating segregationist academies (Nevin & Bills, 1976). These segregationist academies were established after three Supreme Court rulings the 1954 *Brown v. Board of education* which ended legalized segregation in public schools, the 1962 *Engel v. Vitale* which removed teacher led prayer from state-funded schools, and the 1963 *Abington School District v. Schempp* that removed corporate Bible readings during school day (McCluskey, 2018; Nevin & Bills, 1976) Conservative White Christian groups also created these academies because parents felt like they lost power over their child's education with these Supreme court rulings and established schools to counteract the three rulings (Nevin & Bills, 1976; Parsons, 1987; Rose,

1988). These segregationist academies did not integrate until the Internal Revenue Services threatened to remove the tax-exempt statuses of the churches that sponsored these institutions (Greenhouse, 1983). However, their racist legacies persists in the culturally insensitive curriculums that is cloaked in Christian jargon.

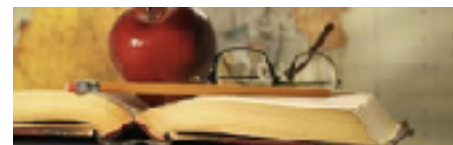
Unfortunately, Conservative Christian schools' curriculums offer a biased perspective that enforce racist stereotypes such as depicting Native Americans as alcoholics and disseminate alternative facts by depicting slave plantations as joyful places (Parsons 1987; Rose, 1988). Conservative Christian schools promote a Puritan approach to education upholding a model that promotes an educational triad which encourages the church home and school working congruently together to educate the child as opposed to government approach to education (Jeynes, 2003; Rose, 1988; Spring, 2018). This position assumes the schooling system under church direction had the best approach to education. However, this ignores the historical evidence that highlights the problematic approaches to education by conservative Christians which endorsed White supremacy.

Background

The conservative Christian schooling system as it exists in the United States of America finds its origins in Puritan thought (Jeynes, 2003; Spring, 2018). Puritan leaders conceptualized a model of education that focused on socializing the student through the church, home, and school (Jeynes, 2003; McCluskey, 2018;

Spring, 2018). Puritan education focused on inculcating the student with the same moral values and beliefs that the Puritan community had come to believe as absolute truth through these three socializing agencies. For example, Cotton Mather a prominent Puritan theologian and an influential contributor to Puritan educational thought believed that Blacks needed to be redeemed through slavery because they were savages, thus slavery was a type of education that could redeem the Black soul in order for it to become White (Jeynes, 2003 Kendi, 2016; Mather 1706; Spring, 2018). Thus, he justified slavery and promoted normative White values of the greater society because conservative White Christians do not like to disrupt racialized societal trends out of fear that it will interfere with their ability to evangelize (Davis, 2008; Emerson & Smith, 2016; Fitzgerald, 2018). Many conservative White Christian churches and educational agencies still do not advocate for social justice and find it better not to discuss race at all (Marchetta, 2018).

During the Antebellum Era 1783-1861, White conservative Christian philanthropist created private schools to educate Black students in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia (Jacobs, 1970; Rury, 1983; Silcox, 1973). However, the education they received emphasized personal piety like no alcohol, gambling, or sexual



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immorality and prepared them to exist in a White-dominated society (Foster, 1975; Parsons, 1987; Spring, 2018). The educators and administrators assumed that Blacks were inferior to the White race due to the effects of slavery and the imorality of their families (Foster, 1975). White educators and administrators attempted to utilize the schools to solve their perceived deficits about their Black students (Foster, 1975; Spring, 2018). These private religious oriented schools typically followed a particular pattern. First, the school would open, then concerned White citizens would want to recruit more Black students, but they did not want to receive insight or direction from the Black parents (Foster, 1975; Jacobs, 1970; Rury, 1983; Silcox, 1973; Swan, 1992). The education that was emphasized in the schools was not about fully developing the Black students, but instead, it was about teaching them to survive in this White world in a subservient position (Foster, 1975).

Conservative Christianity's history of racism, in conjunction with its weaponization of schooling

towards racial minorities offer ample reasons to consider finding a healthier approach to Christian education. In order to accomplish this reform, it requires a critique of the Puritan model that conservative Christian schools and other protestant Christian schools champion as the best approach to education. Conservative Christian schools are not solely focused on academic achievement but with socializing students through the church, home, and school by giving them the values and the messages of the Conservative Christian school's sponsoring church. These Conservative Christian school's curriculums are the brainchildren of the Christian White supremacist and they disseminate their traditions to future generations as unquestionable truths. Susan Rose (1988) depicted the model of Conservative White Christian Education as a triangle in which the church is at the top, and it reinforces its message through the home and the school thus the church's message was disseminated through all three agencies. Figure 1 depicts the church's influence through the home and the school and the school reinforcing the church's message on

the home, but ultimately the home church and schools influence pours out on the student. The arrows demonstrate this influence. Notice that within this diagram the arrows never point at the church. This model does not empower students to critique the church, instead the entities that can be questioned in this model are the home the school and the student. Thus, within this model, there is an imbalance of power that favors the Church and silences the student.

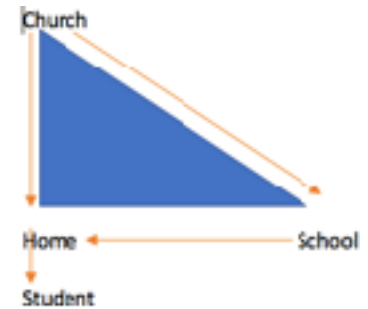


Figure 1. The Conservative Christian Model

Source: Rose, S. D. (1988). *Keeping them out of the hands of Satan: evangelical schooling in America*. New York, NY:

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