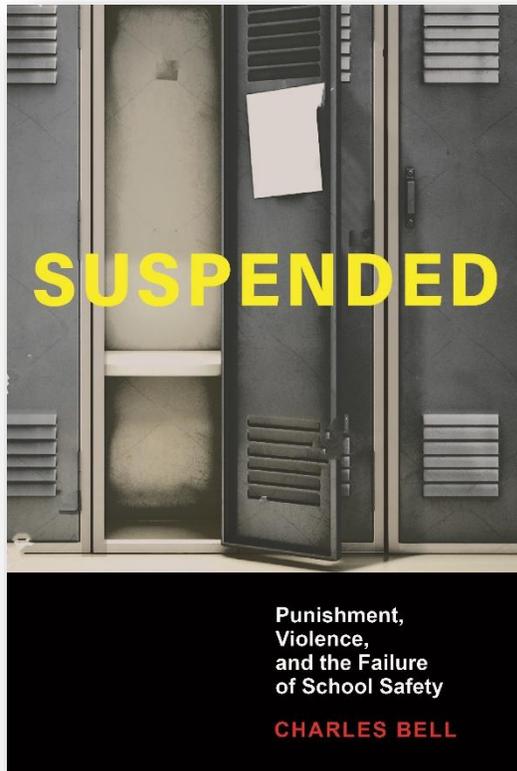


SUSPENDED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



"*Suspended* is a penetrating study that reveals how school suspensions and unfair grading practices target inner-city Black children and set them up to fail in later life—a stinging indictment and a must-read for anyone wanting to truly understand persistent urban poverty."

— Elijah Anderson, Yale University,
author of *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*

"Bell's analysis of students' experiences with anti-Blackness and school punishment is both powerful and gut-wrenching. Educators and student advocates who are serious about reducing violence in schools—especially the violence schools themselves perpetrate—need to read this unique and important book."

— Aaron Kupchik, University of Delaware, author of *The Real School Safety Problem: The Long-Term Consequences of Harsh School Punishment*

"Well-conceived and organized, as well as theoretically and empirically rich, this book holds the promise to impact practice and policy. Adding to the literature on school violence and the many ways it negatively impacts the educational experiences of Black students, it also draws from the ideas of anti-blackness, which make it fresh, timely, and relevant to contemporary conversations."

— Keffrelyn D. Brown, University of Texas at Austin, coauthor of *Black Intellectual Thought in Education: The Missing Traditions of Anna Julia Cooper, Carter G. Woodson, and Alain LeRoy Locke*

The details of the participants' narratives are rich and compelling."

— Bianca J. Baldrige, University of Wisconsin–Madison, author of *Reclaiming Community: Race and the Uncertain Future of Youth Work*

Introduction

1. Early in the introduction, Professor Bell encourages readers to consider whether school-based deprivations, such as the lack of a classroom and consistent teacher constitute “violence.” If you did not have a teacher or classroom on a consistent basis, how would that affect your life? If your school lacked sufficient books, pens, science equipment, etc., how would that impact your K-12 experience?
2. In figure one, Bell provides school suspension data in the Detroit Public Schools (DPS) district across four academic years. The figure shows DPS issued nearly 10,000 suspensions in the 2015-2016 school year and almost 20,000 suspensions in the 2018-2019 academic year. What are the implications of such a sizeable amount of suspensions in a district that primarily educates Black youth?
3. Bell states the 1994 and 2009 bonds amounted to \$2.1 billion with interest. What are your thoughts on how Michigan policymakers handled the bond money?

Chapter 1

1. In addition to school-based deficiencies, Bell characterizes distributing out-of-school suspensions for minor issues or a misinterpretation of the students’ behavior as a form of violence. Given Sandra, Willie, and Marcus’s experiences, do you agree or disagree with Bell’s assertion? Please explain your answer.
2. Imagine you are Sandra or Willie.
 - a. How would you feel if you received a suspension for de-escalating a fight or standing in front of your teachers' class to avoid a fight?
 - b. Also, how would you feel if school officials denied you the opportunity to explain your side of the situation or ignored your statements?
3. Do you agree or disagree with the 30-day suspension Donovan received because of his dress code violation? Please explain your answer in detail.
 - a. Instead of issuing a suspension, what alternative interventions could the administrator implement to resolve this situation? In your response, please keep in mind the district’s financial challenges.
4. As Tangie describes Anthony’s experience, she states Anthony received a suspension for defending himself when gang members attacked him. Do you believe the victim should receive a suspension for defending themselves? Why or why not?

5. Although Anthony was involved in a fight and gang members returned to his school with guns, school officials did not contact his mother, Tangie. Instead, she found out about the fight via Facebook and had to travel door-to-door to inform other parents. What does this tell us about the school's relationship with the parents in this community?
6. Imagine you received a five-day suspension for hugging a boy or girl at school.
 - a. How would you feel about the punishment?
 - b. How would you feel about the school?
 - c. Would you feel comfortable returning to this school?
7. How did school punishment impact Mike and Vanessa's employment?

Chapter 2

1. Professor Bell opens chapter two with an evocative scenario that depicts one of the dilemma's that students encounter daily in public schools. Picture yourself in the circle as students "laugh cheerfully and aim their camera phones at you" and a bully threatens to attack you. If you were in this situation what would you do?
2. In one of Prof. Bell's autoethnographic insights, he shared how it was extremely difficult for him to picture himself being successful. He explained that the violence and lack of protection he received in his community reminded him that he could "die any day." How would you convince a child who was living in an impoverished and unprotected environment that they could be successful?
3. While the dominant narrative characterizes Black boys and girls as violent individuals, Bell notes that many of these students are scared and they project toughness to deter victimization. Why do politicians (**think about the [super-predator rhetoric](#)**) choose to characterize Black and Brown youth as violent, instead of frightened children who are using defense mechanisms to survive?
4. Despite the law enforcement officers at Jerome's school, he was punched, robbed, and attacked by a large group of students. After the massive brawl, school officials asked Jerome to transfer schools. What does Jerome's experience tell us about school official's willingness to protect vulnerable students?
5. What advice would you give your child/sibling/or cousin about protecting themselves in school? If a school guard or teacher is not in the vicinity and someone is about to attack your child/sibling/cousin, what would you expect them to do?

Chapter 3

1. In the school fight video that featured Marston Riley, do you think his actions were appropriate or inappropriate? Watch the video clips below:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKzPX6Eu2Z4>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xviCgdt4kxk>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3RObS8F3-ls>
2. Imagine you are in a similar situation as Mr. Ford. A student threatens you, uses the internet to find your home address, and damages your property. Would you feel safe at school? How would this impact your feelings about being a teacher?
3. Should teachers be allowed to carry guns legally on school grounds?

Chapter 4

1. Critics of Affirmative Action programs argue these initiatives give racial minorities an unfair advantage in college admission despite lower grades and test scores. Supporters of Affirmative Action programs argue the government consistently underfunds schools that serve racial minorities, which places them at a significant disadvantage and necessitates affirmative action programs. Do you support affirmative action programs that allow universities and employment officials to consider race in the admission or hiring process? Why or why not?
2. School violence has become increasingly prevalent in our society. In response, school principals have armed guards with semi-automatic handguns and rifles. Do schools need armed guards? Also, would you send your child to a school that featured guards who possessed assault rifles? Why or why not?
3. The Fox News I-Team report found metal detectors and other security measures only found 50% of the guns that entered school grounds. Would you feel comfortable sending your child to school knowing that the current safety measures only detect half of the guns that enter the premises?
4. Imagine you are the principal of Annapolis High. After searching Atiya's bag, school resource officers discover a knife. Next, they handcuff Atiya and bring her to your office. Although the district has a zero-tolerance policy that mandates expulsion for weapon possession, you are very familiar with Atiya's grades and college ambitions. When you ask her why she had the knife in her bag, she states she has to walk through very rough neighborhoods to get to school and that she fears for her life. Would you suspend or expel Atiya? How would you resolve this situation?

5. Tony and Phillip characterize primarily white high schools as racially hostile institutions. Despite the school safety measures, they do not feel safe. How should schools protect students from racism?
6. Prof. Bell shares Kimberly's tearful response to being stripped searched in school. What are your thoughts about this practice? Is strip searching students a form of violence?
7. While students expressed that guards are often too aggressive, parents indicated the guards were too friendly with the students and needed to take on a more authoritative role in school. How would you explain the differences in students' and parents' opinions of school guards?

Chapter 5

1. School officials banned Michael from Walled Lake Western High because someone randomly shot him in Detroit. Do you agree or disagree with this punishment? Why or why not?
2. Legislators in Michigan, Illinois, and several other states passed school discipline reform policies that mandate school administrators consider a variety of factors prior to implementing a suspension. In chapter five, Prof. Bell discusses how school administrators resisted or refused to implement the reform guidelines because the bills lacked enforcement and there were no consequences for administrators who refused to implement the reforms. Additionally, after schools received students' voucher funds some administrators issued out-of-school suspensions to discourage "problematic" students from returning to school. How would you encourage school administrators to abide by the reform guidelines and refrain from using suspensions as a strategy to push students out of school?
3. Throughout the book, Prof. Bell shared his personal experiences to help readers gain insight into the challenges that students navigate at home, on the way to school, and in school. What did you learn from reading about his experiences?

Chapter 6

1. In 1974 the Children's Defense Fund interviewed Jimmy. Despite conducting the interviewing nearly fifty years ago, his account is identical to the students in *Suspended*. What does this tell us about the longevity of school punishment issues?