

## WHAT YOUR COLLEAGUES ARE SAYING . . .

Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr. and Douglas S. Reed have produced a thoughtful, important, and timely book. It is essential reading for school leaders who value racial equity enough to put it into practice and for policymakers and advocates as well.

—**Jonah Edelman**

Co-Founder and Executive Officer, Stand for Children,  
Portland, OR

*Getting Into Good Trouble at School* is a must-read for anyone interested in the future of American education. Drs. Hutchings and Reed identify six essential steps. If absorbed and applied, these steps will serve as waypoints in the pursuit of critical change supporting all students in constructing an antiracist school system.

—**Robert E. Baker**

Dean and Professor, College of Education  
and Human Development,  
Fairfax, VA

This book is a powerful and thoughtful analysis of the enduring impact of institutional racism upon American education. Hutchings and Reed combine deeply personal reflections and anecdotal narratives about how racism has impacted minority students. The book is a strong endorsement for using strategic planning and the continuous improvement process to build a transformed system that is aligned, mission- and vision-driven, culturally responsive, and personalized.

—**John L. Brown**

Writer and Researcher in Residence, AASA,  
The School Superintendents Association,  
Alexandria, VA

This is a book that every educator and every parent should read. It is clear, comprehensive, and tells the unsettling truth about racism in public schools in America. It lays out specific steps to once and for all dismantle the racism that continues to plague our society and deny BIPOC children their right to an equitable education.

—**Mary-Frances Winters**

President, The Winters Group, Inc,  
Author of *Black Fatigue: How Racism Erodes  
the Mind, Body and Spirit*

Hutchings and Reed offer a direct approach to confronting systems of racism. Through sharing personal experiences, a deep knowledge of the existing literature, and data informed practices, the authors offer a call to action that requires assessing current practices, establishing an intentional strategic plan, and being courageous enough to implement the plan.

—**Tammi Dice**

Interim Dean, Darden College of Education and  
Professional Studies,  
Old Dominion University,  
Norfolk, VA

Here, finally, are authors with the courage to lay out concrete steps school leaders can take to encourage antiracist schools to grow and thrive. Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr. and Douglas S. Reed offer six steps to dismantle systemic racism in American schools while getting into “good trouble” to help Americans live out the full meaning of “all men (and women) are created equal.”

—**James Harvey**

Executive Director, National Superintendents Roundtable,  
Seattle, WA

This courageous text provides testimonies of lived experiences interwoven against a historical backdrop of the impact of racism on our educational system. It takes the reader on a journey to understand how to advance an equity lens and become an antiracist educator. The authors artfully challenge the status quo while the guided questions force you to reflect and act.

—**Dawn Williams**

Dean, Howard University School of Education,  
Washington, DC

As educators are doubling down on efforts to reimagine student-centered, forward-leaning public education, *Getting Into Good Trouble at School* points out why it’s essential to boldly advocate for the vast number of U.S. children who should be receiving the services that they are entitled to. I congratulate the authors for casting a shining light on the principles of educational equity and social justice.

—**Daniel A. Domenech**

Executive Director, AASA,  
The School Superintendents Association,  
Alexandria, VA

# Getting Into Good Trouble at School

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# Getting Into Good Trouble at School

A Guide to Building an  
Antiracist School System

Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr. and  
Douglas S. Reed

Foreword by Pedro A. Noguera

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# Contents

	FOREWORD BY PEDRO A. NOGUERA	xi
	PREFACE	xiii
	ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xix
	ABOUT THE AUTHORS	xxiii
	INTRODUCTION	1
<b>1</b>	<b>REIMAGINING THE TITANS</b>	<b>8</b>
	GUIDING PRINCIPLES	8
	CHALLENGES TO EQUITY AND INCLUSION	12
	SCHOOLS ARE DESIGNED TO PERPETUATE INEQUALITY: A LOOK AT YESTERDAY AND TODAY	13
	BECOME ANTIRACIST	14
	PLAN OF THIS BOOK	18
	REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS FOR GETTING INTO GOOD TROUBLE	21
<b>2</b>	<b>KNOW YOUR HISTORY TO REWRITE YOUR FUTURE</b>	<b>22</b>
	GUIDING PRINCIPLES	22
	THE STORIES WE TELL—AND DON'T TELL—ABOUT OURSELVES	22
	STORIES CONNECT THE PAST TO THE PRESENT	26
	STORIES AS WINDOWS ON POWER	26
	STORYTELLING AND THE FIGHT FOR EQUITY	28
	WHAT KIND OF STORIES NEED TO BE TOLD?	29
	BACKLASH AGAINST COUNTER-NARRATIVES AND CRITICAL RACE THEORY	32
	CONCLUSION	34
	REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS FOR KNOWING YOUR HISTORY TO REWRITE YOUR FUTURE	36
<b>3</b>	<b>COMMIT TO RACIAL EQUITY</b>	<b>37</b>
	GUIDING PRINCIPLES	37
	WHAT DOES COMMITTING TO RACIAL EQUITY LOOK LIKE?	38

RACISM THREATENS THE EDUCATION—AND EXISTENCE—OF BIPOC STUDENTS	40
RACIAL EQUITY LIES AT THE HEART OF EXCELLENCE IN SCHOOLING	44
THE ACTIONS OF INDIVIDUALS MATTER DEEPLY	49
A GROWTH MINDSET AND HUMILITY ARE CENTRAL TO ANTIRACIST WORK	50
FOUR STAGES OF INDIVIDUAL GROWTH AND COMMITMENT	50
THE CHALLENGES OF SELF-UNDERSTANDING	54
THE TRIAD OF RACIAL DISCOMFORT, ANTIRACIST COMMITMENT, AND OVERT RACIAL HOSTILITY	55
BIPOC AND WHITE PERSPECTIVES ON RACIAL EQUITY ARE FREQUENTLY DIVERGENT	58
CONCLUSION	58
REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS FOR MAKING THE COMMITMENT TO RACIAL EQUITY	59

#### 4

### DISMANTLING TRACKING AND WITHIN-SCHOOL SEGREGATION 61

GUIDING PRINCIPLES	61
WHAT EXPLAINS ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT?	64
FROM SEGREGATION TO TRACKING AND BACK TO SEGREGATION AGAIN	67
WHY DOES TRACKING PERSIST?	71
SO HOW DO WE DE-TRACK?	73
CONCLUSION	78
REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS FOR DISMANTLING TRACKING AND WITHIN-SCHOOL SEGREGATION	81

#### 5

### MAKING SCHOOL DISCIPLINE DIFFERENT FROM POLICING 83

GUIDING PRINCIPLES	83
SCHOOLS AND STREETS	83
WHAT IS SCHOOL DISCIPLINE FOR?	84
RACIAL DISPARITIES IN SCHOOL DISCIPLINE	85
LACK OF EVIDENCE ON BEHAVIORAL DIFFERENCES AMONG STUDENTS	87



CLASSROOM EXCHANGES AND THE RESORT TO DISCIPLINE	88
THE ROLE OF ZERO TOLERANCE POLICIES	90
THE CONSEQUENCES OF SUSPENSION: LESS LIKELY TO GRADUATE	93
SUSPENSION LEADS INTO THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM	96
RECONCEIVING SCHOOL DISCIPLINE	97
CONCLUSION	100
REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS FOR MAKING SCHOOL DISCIPLINE DIFFERENT FROM POLICING	101

## 6

### IMPLEMENT STRATEGIC THINKING AND STRATEGIC PLANNING 103

GUIDING PRINCIPLES	103
THE BEST LAID PLANS . . .	103
WAYS TO THINK ABOUT STRATEGIC PLANS	104
START WITH MISSION AND VISION . . . BUT DON'T STOP THERE	105
WHAT A STRATEGIC PLAN MUST <i>DO</i>	108
LINKING STRATEGIC THINKING TO STRATEGIC PLANNING	109
PAY ATTENTION TO ALIGNMENT	110
LINKING STRATEGIC PLANNING TO BUILDING A LEARNING ORGANIZATION	110
KNOW YOUR LIMITS AND KNOW WHAT YOU WANT	111
CONCLUSION	113
REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIC THINKING AND PLANNING	114

## 7

### CHOOSE GOOD TROUBLE: BE A BOLD AND COURAGEOUS ANTIRACIST SCHOOL LEADER 115

GUIDING PRINCIPLES	115
COURAGEOUS AND BOLD LEADERSHIP THROUGH VISION, INTEGRITY, AND PASSION	115
THE REALITY OF CAUSING GOOD TROUBLE	117
THE OTHER SIDE OF WHITE FRAGILITY	119
COURAGE AND BOLDNESS CAN REDEFINE PRIORITIES	120
PLACING RACIAL EQUITY AT THE CENTER IN ALEXANDRIA	120

BOTH SUBSTANCE AND SYMBOLISM MATTER	123
THE VISION FORWARD: THE CONNECTED HIGH SCHOOL NETWORK	127
CONCLUSION	131
REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS FOR BEING A BOLD AND COURAGEOUS ANTIRACIST SCHOOL LEADER	132

## **8** CONCLUSION 133

APPENDIX	135
REFERENCES	143
INDEX	147

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# Foreword

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The global pandemic has confronted educational leaders with numerous unprecedented challenges and controversies, heightening US political tumult while at the same time sharply revealing long-endured inequities in educational resources and opportunities. Throughout the continuing public health threat, superintendents, school boards, and college administrators have found themselves grappling with new, unprecedented controversies and challenges: pushback against mask and vaccine mandates, student learning loss, and an alarming rise in mental health needs. At the same time, the pandemic has created an even greater awareness of the existing and deepening inequities that threaten the well-being of children and families—in particular, persistent and durable racial disparities in education—as well as the emergence of bitter debates over how to teach about the history of race and racism in American society.

To navigate these issues while keeping an eye firmly focused on student support and outcomes, educational leaders must acquire a new set of skills. Resourcefulness, tact, diplomacy, as well as an ability to communicate to an array of constituencies that are more divided than ever before, while still managing the operations of schools and keeping the needs of students at the forefront. When Gregory C. Hutchings became the superintendent of Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) in 2018, he challenged the school district and the community to focus its attention on racial disparities in education, putting racial equity at the center of his work. While doing so, he encountered Professor Douglas S. Reed's work on the historical origins of racial inequality within Alexandria's schools and invited him to serve on Hutchings's 100-day transition team as he took the reins at ACPS. Their partnership eventually led to the publication of this book.

I describe school leaders like Hutchings as “breakthrough” leaders. I use this term because rather than simply treading water and waiting for the controversies to subside, or allowing controversies to result in organizational paralysis, Hutchings confronts the challenges facing his district, his schools, and community head-on. He draws upon the insights he has gained as an experienced educator and the knowledge he has acquired

from others to find a way to continue to make a difference for his students and communities. Armed with the historical insights of Reed's earlier work, Hutchings asked Alexandria to come to terms with the reality of its racial past—and present. This work is not easy and it challenges many accepted practices within education. It requires transformation and deep skills of understanding, planning, and leadership. This book is about how to organize and design that transformation and how to understand, plan, and lead for racial equity in schools.

Gregory C. Hutchings and Douglas S. Reed draw on the lessons of civil rights icon and former member of Congress, John Lewis, to inspire their work. Undertaking the transformations urged by Hutchings and Reed will, undoubtedly, produce trouble, but it is Good Trouble, the kind that Lewis described as essential for advancing racial justice in the United States. Like John Lewis, Hutchings and Reed are guided by values and insights that are critical for “breaking through” during these challenging times. For educational leaders who are seeking ways to breakthrough their own obstacles and challenges, the lessons shared by Hutchings and Reed will be invaluable.

We are in the midst of a “new normal.” Crises such as school shootings, threats against educators who feel students have a right to learn about America's history of racism, and new uncertainties created by political polarization and climate change will test and challenge education leaders in the years ahead. Hutchings and Reed have provided us with a perspective on how we can approach these challenges, both those we have known and those we have yet to encounter. For that, we should all be grateful that we have a guide in how to make “good trouble” in education.

—Pedro A. Noguera  
Emery Stoops and Joyce King Stoops Dean  
Distinguished Professor of Education  
USC Rossier School of Education

# Preface

## GET INTO GOOD TROUBLE, NECESSARY TROUBLE

---

Since 2020, our nation has confronted a dual pandemic. In March 2020, due to COVID-19 schools across the United States closed their doors and pivoted to virtual learning overnight, exacerbating our already severe educational disparities. As schools later transitioned to hybrid learning as well as concurrent teaching in classrooms, the social, emotional, and academic learning of young people across the nation suffered enormously.

In addition to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the United States continues to experience a centuries-long racial pandemic. The brutal murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and countless others whose lives were senselessly taken due to the color of their skin, along with racial tension across the country, intensified and deepened protests of our tightly woven patterns of systemic racism. Harsh racism has been a central feature of the history of the United States for over 400 years, but the events of 2020 and 2021 have brought about a national reckoning with race. Part of that reckoning requires calling out the extremists among us: Americans watched the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the US Capitol by rioters and malicious citizens who irrationally believed that the election of our 46th president of the United States, Joseph Biden, was flawed and somehow stolen from the former president Donald Trump. Covert and overt racism in the United States reached its highest level since the civil rights movement, even as millions protested globally for an end to police violence against communities of color.

This dual pandemic sparked a national conversation about the need to finally dismantle systemic racism in the United States. In spite of these struggles, educators across the country continue to strive for racial equity within schools. Indeed, these ruptures of “normalcy” have generated the momentum for transformative changes in school and society to address the inequities we see around us. The twin crises of COVID-19 and racial injustice afford an opportunity for schools and school systems to begin their journey to becoming antiracist. This is why we were so compelled to write this book. The title of our book

was inspired by a powerful quote from US Representative John Lewis, “Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble.” Therefore, the title *Getting Into Good Trouble at School: A Guide to Building an Antiracist School System*. To eliminate racial inequities in schools and school systems across the country, we must have the boldness and courage to cause Good Trouble at school.

## WHAT SCHOOL LEADERS WILL GET OUT OF THIS BOOK

This book will provide school leaders with a unique perspective of two authors who have led very different walks of life. One author is an African American man who is tired of being forced to overcome adversity while being African American in the United States and the other author is a Caucasian man who acknowledges his White privilege and strives to be a coconspirator for changing the racial equity narrative in the United States. One author grew up in a homogeneous community in the Pacific Northwest while the other author grew up in the city of Alexandria, a metropolitan community near the US capital. Though the authors have different life experiences, both have attained terminal degrees in their fields from prestigious universities and both are obsessively committed to dismantling systemic racism in education. Our goal is to help you build an antiracist school or school system. To do that, we draw on our life experiences, our expertise in diversity, equity, inclusion and the study of race, our working knowledge of school systems, and the passion and common sense needed to achieve racial justice in schools. The result is, we hope, a kind of guidebook that provides encouragement, context, and concrete actions needed for antiracist schools to grow and thrive.

### SIX STEPS TO BUILDING AN ANTIRACIST SCHOOL SYSTEM

1. Know Your History to Rewrite Your Future (Chapter 2)
2. Commit to Racial Equity (Chapter 3)
3. Dismantling Tracking and Within-School Segregation (Chapter 4)
4. Making School Discipline Different From Policing (Chapter 5)
5. Implement Strategic Thinking and Planning (Chapter 6)
6. Choose Good Trouble: Be a Bold and Courageous Antiracist School Leader (Chapter 7)

## SIX STEPS TO BUILDING AN ANTIRACIST SCHOOL SYSTEM

---

In this book, we identify six steps that are integral components of building an antiracist school system: (1) You and your community must know your history as a school system and tell the stories that have been left untold; (2) Your school system needs to understand that committing to racial equity is integral to academic excellence; (3) Racial equity means dismantling tracking and within school segregation that limits the educational experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students; (4) Transforming school disciplinary practices is necessary to break the criminalization of youth, particularly BIPOC youth; (5) You need to engage the project of racial equity through a strategic analysis of your school system and the development of a strategic plan for racial equity; (6) You need to lead with boldness and courage as you undertake the work of racial equity within your school system.

We have identified these six steps through our experiences in school systems and through a deep review of research on schooling, race, and educational transformation. These steps reinforce and support one another and are best seen as cornerstones of the new kind of school system you are seeking to build: an antiracist school system.

## FEATURES AND BENEFITS OF THIS BOOK

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Each chapter follows a schema to support the reader's understanding of the journey to becoming antiracist. The *Guiding Principles* at the beginning of each chapter provide the reader with the key guiding principles of the chapter to set the stage for their reading experience. Because this is a practical book meant to guide busy administrators in implementing antiracist practices, each chapter contains a *Tips* section briefly summarizing an implementable action step. The *Reflective Questions* at the end of each chapter help the reader to develop personal reflections and to identify organizational insights, initial steps, long-range possibilities, and anticipated barriers and challenges. We offer these Guiding Principles, Tips, and Reflective Questions with the conviction that achieving equity in schools begins with a clear understanding of the contexts of schooling as well as concrete and actionable steps that parents, teachers, students, principals, administrators, and school system leaders can take in their own daily work with schools. This is a book for both understanding and action. In the chapters you will also find

examples where these actions steps have worked successfully in school systems across the United States.

## THE TERMS WE USE AND WHY

---

Throughout the book, we use the term Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) to emphasize the injustices that continue to impact both Black and Indigenous people in the United States. In 2020, the term BIPOC became more widely used amidst the nation's protests of police brutality against Black people and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement. We have chosen to use BIPOC throughout the book to refer to Black persons who identify as of African or Caribbean descent; Indigenous persons who are descendants of natives who inhabited North America before it was stolen by European settlers; and people of color (people who are not White). We understand that this term may be unfamiliar to some readers and therefore wanted to provide a clear definition and purpose within this book.

Similarly, we follow the American Psychological Association's style of capitalizing Black and White, when referring to the specific experiences and identities of individuals of those races and the characteristics of institutions. In so doing, we acknowledge the social construction of these categories and the processes by which both individuals and institutions come to possess a racial identity. To speak of "White schools" highlights (albeit subtly) that the racial homogeneity of those schools is not accidental or natural in a way that labeling them "white schools" does not.

We define *antiracism* as a commitment and obligation to recognize and actively challenge patterns of behavior and outcomes that persistently harm Black, Indigenous, or people of color. Integral to this definition is the recognition that these patterns of behavior and outcomes may or may not be the product of individually held beliefs about race, racial identity, or racial supremacy or inferiority. That is, these patterns and outcomes may arise and be maintained even when individuals are not overtly engaging in racist behavior. As a result, we define *antiracist school leader* as someone who embraces a commitment and obligation to recognize and actively challenge patterns of behavior and outcomes that persistently harm BIPOC students; the antiracist school leader recognizes that systemic racism within the educational system emerges even when individuals are not engaged in overtly racist behavior or hold overtly racist views. Moreover, an antiracist school leader takes proactive steps to undo systemic racism within school systems, as well as challenge overtly racist actions and views.



## USE THIS GUIDE TO BECOME AN ANTIRACIST SCHOOL LEADER

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We hope that this book will provide the reader with the necessary guidance and support to enhance their equity-driven and antiracist educational leadership that will transform the lives and well-being of all children, but especially BIPOC students in our schools across the country. The 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision was supposed to transform public education across the United States by integrating our schools and affording Black children the same educational opportunities as their White counterparts. However, the second Supreme Court ruling in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case in 1955 included the phrase “with all deliberate speed” as it addressed the required pace of racial change in Southern schools. Unfortunately, today we are still seeing far too much deliberation and far too little speed in our quest for racial justice in schools. Indeed, the attack on critical race theory within schools is an effort to stop all discussion of race and racial inequities and the ways that schools and school officials create and perpetuate those inequities. Now is not the time to stop talking about race. In fact, the opposite is true: Now is the time to be bold and courageous while unapologetically striving to become antiracist. This is your step to changing the narrative on race relations across the United States of America, and we commend you for starting, continuing, or validating your journey to becoming an antiracist school or school system.

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# Acknowledgments

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While our names may be on the cover, this book has emerged from the encouragement, inspiration, and generosity of so many people in our lives and our work. First and foremost, it is important to acknowledge the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color who have endured tragedy, adversity, struggles, accomplishments, and triumphs over the last few centuries. We stand on their shoulders and reap advantages from their courage and boldness throughout history. We want to acknowledge the late civil rights activist and US Representative, John R. Lewis, for his courageous leadership and famous quote, “Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble,” that inspired us to write this book. Additionally, we would like to acknowledge Corwin for believing in our vision for this book, especially our editors, Ariel Curry and Desirée Bartlett, for their guidance, support, and push when needed throughout the writing process.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS BY GREGORY C. HUTCHINGS, JR.

---

I am so grateful for my God almighty who has literally ordered my steps throughout my life and has given me the gift of servitude and advocacy for those who are not always given a seat at the table. My spiritual faith guides my life and equips me to continue this journey of antiracism. I would like to acknowledge my wife, Cheryl, who continues to be my life partner, best friend, and greatest supporter until the end of my time on this Earth. My wife is the best gift that God has given me and our love is like fine wine that gets better over time. I’ve become my “best self” due to her unconditional love, support, encouragement, and keeping me grounded when the helium from the world tries to lift me into the stratosphere. Our children, Micah and Gregory III, are a product of our covenant and will continue our legacy of spreading love on this Earth. I continue to strive for excellence and will always strive to be a good example for both of them. My life’s work is to ensure that they get the opportunity to live a full life without systemic racism.

I want to acknowledge my first teacher who is my mother, Shari Thomas, who raised me to be my authentic self and taught me one of my greatest gifts, which is selflessness and being proud to be an African American man in America. My mom always believes

in me and encourages me to do my best at all times. Also, I truly want to thank my first public school teacher in kindergarten, Mrs. Dorothy McKenzie, who told me at five years old that I could be the first Black president of the United States of America and I actually believed her. She instilled in me the confidence that started my life's journey of serving others and I'm forever grateful for the seeds she planted at the beginning of my educational journey that afforded the foundation I have in my life today.

Thank you to my coauthor, Dr. Douglas S. Reed, who has literally become one of my best friends while writing this book. Our reflections and discourse on racism has ignited a continuous flame for dismantling systemic racism in schools across America. You are truly a brilliant educator who will be my thought partner for decades to come. I would like to acknowledge one of my mentors, Dr. Pedro A. Noguera, who encouraged me to speak my truth. You believed in my vision for writing this book when I was entertaining the thought and your encouragement truly empowered me to get the book completed. I want to acknowledge my dear friend, Dr. John L. Brown, who takes every call and helps me whenever I need him, especially when I had moments of writer's block while writing the book. Your guidance, support, and assistance throughout this book journey is greatly appreciated. Also, a huge thank you to Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) for helping to mold me into the person that I am today. I'm grateful for the learning experiences that I've had throughout my life in ACPS. I'm so blessed to be able to serve the community that served me during my school days.

I want to acknowledge my spiritual and inspirational leaders who literally give me the fortitude to keep taking action to dismantle systemic racism while fulfilling my life's purpose. Thank you to Dr. Jawanza K. Colvin for being my "forever Pastor," spiritual brother, and dear friend over the years. You continue to be my spiritual leader and I'm forever grateful for you being in my life. Also, Dr. Billy K. Cannaday, for being my "forever mentor" and my self-assigned God-father. You gave me a chance to begin my school leadership journey and have literally been there throughout my entire educational career as a supporter, motivator, and listener. You never tell me what to do and are great at asking me the right questions to help me discover the answers. I continue to admire you and appreciate the love and guidance you've provided throughout my career.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS BY DOUGLAS S. REED

---

This book emerged in the wake of one of the largest social uprisings in US history, arguably in global history, and in the midst of a global pandemic that has taken millions of lives. Both of these events have changed history—and changed my views on many things. I would like to acknowledge the contributions and labor of those who built a democratic movement for racial justice in the 21st century. Their ongoing work has been an inspiration for me. I would also like to acknowledge the work and dedication of millions of teachers who, throughout the pandemic, have sought to inspire and connect with students in incredibly challenging circumstances. Your work and persistence have amazed me and continue to inspire me.

I am a political scientist by training, but over the past decade my work has shifted more squarely into the field of education. Part of the reason for that has been my work with Professor Sabrina Wesley-Nero, here at Georgetown University, first with the undergraduate Program in Education, Inquiry, and Justice and now with the MA Program in Educational Transformation. Much of what I have learned in education comes from my work and collaboration with her and I thank her deeply for sharing that knowledge with me. I also thank her for her friendship and deep wisdom. I would also like to thank my other colleagues in Educational Transformation, past and present: Priya Goel LaLonde, Crissa Stephens, Kristin Sinclair, Christa Pluff, and Anne Musica. Your knowledge and insights have built a remarkable program and have helped me to better understand the landscape of education, race, and equity.

I want to thank Dr. Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr. for suggesting that we write this book together. Little did I know that our collaboration would yield not only the book you hold in your hands but also a deep and lasting friendship. It is said that friendships and coauthorship do not always mix, but for me the act of writing a book together and talking through the challenges of race and racial justice have forged a greater understanding of myself and the world we live in, as well as a friend and writing partner. So, thank you for that gift and for your patience as well when progress slowed. I'm also thankful that I don't work for you so that you can't fire me when I miss a deadline. I want to thank Angel Reed (no relation) and Rashaud Hannah for their outstanding work as research assistants on this project.

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Emily and James, return to live with us for a few months. It was truly a respite from a raging storm to share time with them again, as adults, and see what wonderful human beings they have become. I must also thank those that we turned to when the pandemic forced us all to pull inward: Marybeth McMahon, Ben Simon, Edie Brashears, Charlotte Mooney, and Christopher Jones. Your friendship means more than I can say.

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# About the Authors

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**Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr.** is a nationally recognized educational leader, anti-racism activist, and adjunct professor who unapologetically advocates for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color and racial equity. He has over twenty years of combined educational experience as a teacher, school principal, central office administrator, superintendent, and college professor.

Dr. Hutchings is the chief executive officer and founder of an educational consulting firm, Revolutionary Ed, LLC. His life's work is educational service and dismantling systemic racism in schools across America. Dr. Hutchings was the 2018 recipient of the Joseph E. Hill Superintendent of the Year Award with the National Alliance of Black School Educators.

Dr. Hutchings earned his doctorate in educational policy, planning, and leadership from the College of William & Mary. He currently serves on numerous national boards and is an active member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated. Dr. Hutchings is a native of Alexandria, Virginia, where he currently serves as the superintendent of Alexandria City Public Schools and resides with his wife and their two children.



**Douglas S. Reed** is a Professor of Government at Georgetown University, where he is the founding director of the MA Program in Educational Transformation. His research interests center on the politics of education, educational policymaking, federalism, and judicial politics. His current work focuses on legal notions of race, equality, and colorblindness and how educational policy can improve student outcomes by directly addressing the racial contexts and experiences of students.

He is the author of *Building the Federal Schoolhouse: Localism and the American Education State* (Oxford University Press, 2014) and

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(Princeton University Press, 2001).

He has been a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, an Advanced Studies Fellow at Brown University, and was named a Carnegie Scholar by the Carnegie Corporation as well as a National Academy of Education/Spencer Foundation Post-Doctoral Fellow. He earned his PhD from Yale University.

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