

New Brooklyn art exhibit explores segregation and racism in America's public schools

By Kelly Macias



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A new study shows that most black students in the South attend intensely segregated schools and a new art exhibit is committed to exploring segregation within the U.S. school system.

It's been 63 years since the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in which the Supreme Court declared that separate schools for black and white children were unconstitutional. But a report (<https://www.dailykos.com/story/2017/5/31/1667600/-School-segregation-rises-as-black-and-Latino-kids-attend-intensely-segregated-high-poverty-schools>) released last month showed that school segregation is actually on the rise—stating that “more than one in three black students attended a school in the South that was intensely racially segregated.” The number of Latino students attending segregated schools in the South is also increasing, rising from 37 percent in 1980 to 42 percent in 2014. Despite some folks’ sadly misguided assertion that the election of Barack Obama meant that America had now become a post-racial utopia, it appears that we have hard evidence that things are getting worse and not better (and let’s not even start in on what the election of Trump means for race relations).

While researchers and educators explore systematic racism and the impact of school segregation on student learning and society in general, artists are also investigating what it means in their own lives and work. A new exhibition at Smack Mellon, a non-profit organization and art gallery in Brooklyn, New York, presents a series entitled *Race and Revolution: Still Separate-Still Unequal* (<http://smackmellon.org/index.php/exhibitions/race-revolutionrace-revolution/>) that is dedicated to exploring the “prevalence of segregation in the United States school system.”

“Since the inception of #BlackLivesMatter in 2012, the American population is reflecting on what happened after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s-60s. That word “after” is part of the conundrum that surrounds our present-day conversation around race and racism. What exactly came to an end? The exhibition *Still Separate-Still Unequal* seeks to examine ongoing racial and economic disparity in the U.S. public school system.”

The exhibit runs from June 24 to August 6 and along with images on display includes several discussions and performances that are meant to evoke a meaningful conversation among visitors about race and racism. They include:

Wednesday, July 19, 6-8pm Restorative Justice: An interactive workshop with The Morningside Center for Teaching and Social Responsibility equipping all stakeholders in the community with the tools necessary to transform the relationship between students and authority.

Wednesday, July 26, 6-8pm Teaching Artist Roundtable: A discussion with Michael Paul Britto, Uraline Hager, Clare Kambhu, jc lenochan, Shaun Leonardo, and Kameelah Janan Rasheed reflecting on how their experience in the classroom informs their practice and their practice informs their teaching.

Thursday, August 3, 7-9pm Rap on Race with Rice: An interactive performance with Dominique Duroseau inviting participants to separate black and white rice from each other as they discuss issues of race and racism.

Saturday, August 5, 12-2pm Open Book Test: An engaging performance with Dennis Redmoon Darkeem questioning how much we really know about “American History” and whose narratives are behind US history.

Katie Fuller, who curates the exhibit along with her co-curator Larry Ossei-Mensah, says, “My hope is that using art as a tool to access history can reach people in a way that words and protest has not.”

The importance of using art to reach people at this particular moment in time cannot be overstated. Activism has many meanings and can be varied in how it is practiced. While lots of enthusiastic members of the resistance think the only way to bring change is through taking to the streets, protest is only one tactic in a much larger strategy for transformation and change.

Cultural production is vital for education, innovation, and helping people tap into their resilience. We need artists to use their talents to reflect what is currently happening. We need writers to write, singers to sing, poets to create. This helps us to make sense of the world. And in a world that doesn't seem to make much sense right now, we need this more than ever.

Check out the exhibit [here](http://www.racerevolution.org/) (<http://www.racerevolution.org/>).