The Ones Left Behind: MAKING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN POVERTY AND THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

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THE ONES LEFT BEHIND: MAKING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN POVERTY AND
THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

By

AUDREY A. DAVIS

A master’s thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2015
THE ONES LEFT BEHIND

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

THE ONES LEFT BEHIND

By

Audrey Davis

Adviser: Professor Susan Semel

The achievement gap has been a major issue plaguing the education system in the United States for decades. There has been much research conducted with the goal of identifying the reasons for the achievement gap. One of the main reasons for the achievement gap is poverty. In fact, I argue that there is a direct correlation between academic achievement and poverty, in other words school and society are inextricably connected. The focus of this paper will be the elementary school level as there is an abundance of information on elementary schools in New York City. To further demonstrate the fact that there is a link between poverty and the achievement gap, I will discuss two areas of Brooklyn, Brownsville and Park Slope. For both areas I will provide historical overview of the growth and development as it has a lot to do with the current socioeconomic status of the areas and how education developed in the parallel to the ways that the economy did in both areas.
PREFACE

This Master’s degree thesis is submitted for the conclusion of my Master’s program at the CUNY Graduate Center. The Master’s degree thesis that you find before you is the result of my growing interested in the academic achievement gap, which was fostered at the CUNY Graduate Center.

About midway through my course work I knew that my thesis would be concerning the achievement gap. As a resident of Brooklyn, New York that grew up in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, I have become very invested in doing research on the area and education attainment in the area. In short, I would love to see every young person in the area to become just as successful as me or even more success. I believe that this thesis will shed light on some issues that are known and some that are unknown and hopefully bring fourth some type of change for the area that my parents still call home.

Writing this thesis has been a pleasure. Learning more about the area in which I grew up and learning more about the education system currently in place in New York City has been an experience that I am sure will prove to be useful, not only for my future studies, but also for whomever reads this thesis.

This thesis has been written by myself in its entirety, however it was completed by using a combination of the research of others, who are referenced in this thesis as well as some of my own particular research conducted in a prior semester. In addition to my own experiences as a reference.

I would like to thank Susan Semel, my thesis advisor. First I would like to thank you for fostering my love of learning about all things related to education. If I had not taken courses with you for those two semester I am not sure where I would have ended up. You encouraged me along the way and helped to steer me in the right direction and for that I am forever grateful. Second I would like to thank you for overseeing the writing of this thesis and helping me to put together this topic that means so much to me.

Secondly I would like to thank Nataki Hemmings and Wayne Mims. Both are responsible for the proof reading and editing of this document.
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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

In the last 40 years, the Achievement Gap has been written about more than any other topic in education (Porter, 2014). One might be curious as to why I decided to write my thesis on a topic already heavily studied. With there being a vast body of research on this topic, the question arose in the beginning of my research: what can I contribute to it that is different? My hope is that by the end of this paper, that my contribution will be apparent. For as long as the Achievement Gap has been studied, many people have attempted to provide explanations for the gap (Balfanz, 2006; Barton, 2004; Berliner, 2009; Rothstein, 2008). Within my two years at the Graduate Center, I have read numerous texts providing different reasons; from poor school structure, inadequate teachers, and lack of parental involvement. While I believe that these are factors that contribute to the Achievement Gap, I do not believe they do not explain it the gap. It is my belief that the cause of the Achievement Gap is poverty. By the end of this thesis I will have fully laid out the evidence in support of the argument. The remainder of this chapter will discuss the Achievement Gap as it is today and the differences between the Minority-Majority Achievement Gap (Denslow, 2000) and the Income Achievement Gap (Rothstein, 2008; Barton & Coley, 2009; Reardon, 2013; Berliner, 2009; Gottlieb, 2002) which is the focus of this paper. In Chapter Two I will discuss the issue of poverty in the United States and in New York as it is extremely important to fully understand where we are right now in terms of poverty and the Achievement Gap. In this Chapter I will also, establish the link between poverty and the Achievement Gap by citing research that shows that poverty and low levels of academic achievement are directly correlated. In Chapter Three an example will be provided of how poverty has affected education here in New York City by discussing the Brownsville section of Brooklyn which has a very long history of poverty and crime and comparing it with the Park
THE ONES LEFT BEHIND

Slope section of Brooklyn where there is much economic stability. We will take a look at the history of these areas and analyze income statistics and as they correlate to the levels of academic achievement in the areas. In, Chapter four I will discuss the implications of the data provided on the income and education for both areas. Finally, in Chapter Five I will provide suggestions for closing the Class-Based Achievement Gap.

**Research Question and Methodology**

The purpose of this paper is to examine the connection between poverty and the Achievement Gap. This paper seeks to answer the question, how does poverty effect academic achievement? Including how low income students experience school and how the schools are affected by poverty. Also, I seek to paint a picture of the current state of poverty in the United States and more specifically in New York City because of its effect on the education system.

The methodology used for this project was a secondary analysis. I utilized secondary sources such as data, articles, and research studies on both the current state of poverty and the Achievement Gap. In addition, I also utilized observational research. Being a student that has grown up in poverty, I have experienced what is like growing up in a high poverty neighborhood and what it is like attending school there. Because of my experience I also understand the effects of poverty on education. I use these experiences to inform the text and provide a deeper understanding of the issue at hand.
What is the Achievement Gap?

The Achievement Gap refers to disparities in academic performance between groups of students (Education Week: Achievement Gap, 2004). The type of Achievement Gap most frequently studied is the Minority-Majority Achievement Gap. There are a lot of research that has focused on tracking the race based Achievement Gap for decades (Love, 2004; Cohen et al, 2006; Rivkin & Hanushek, 2008). However, this is not the gap I will be focusing on in this paper. For the purpose of this paper I will be looking at the disparities between low income and middle to high income students in academic achievement. Currently the minority-majority Achievement Gap is still a prevalent issue. However, with the income gap growing a lot faster than we realize, the class based Achievement Gap is reflecting that growth as Figure 1 demonstrates.

![Achievement Gap Graph]

Figure 1. Source: http://www.slideshare.net/DavidHavens/reimagined-2015

Research is indicative that the low income students tend to be minorities and the middle to high income students tend to be White and Asian (Simms, Fortuny, Henderson, 2009). The
The Achievement Gap has been said to have lifelong consequences by “limiting opportunities for minority students in higher education, employment, and earning (Lee, 2007). Over the years the push to close the Achievement Gap has intensified. Closing the gap would not only benefit the education system, but it would also benefit the economy and yield greater social stability. This point was brought up long ago by Horace Mann, but has remained ignored. According to Jaekyung Lee (2007), it was the Coleman Report in the 1960s that brought attention to the Achievement Gap. Into the 1980s there was some progress in closing the gap. Some would argue that since then the gap has stabilized and there has been no growth nor any change. However, others would go as far as to say that the gap has widened and I agree. Based on current statistics on the Achievement Gap it has grown drastically over the last decade or two.

**Research and Assessments**

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is responsible for conducting periodic assessments in the subject areas of math, reading, science, writing, the arts, civics, economics, geography, history, and technology & engineering literacy. The assessments generally stay the same, although minor changes occur. Because of its consistency it is believed that the assessments are a good way of assessing academic progress over time. In most of the assessments the Achievement Gap is very visible. NAEP assesses the gap in terms of the Hispanic-White Achievement Gap and the Black-White Achievement Gap. In 2009, although the scores of White and Hispanic children did rise, the overall Achievement Gap still remained. In terms of the Hispanic-White Achievement Gap, NAEP found that the math gap narrowed for 8

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1 "Achievement Gaps: How Hispanic and White Students in Public Schools Perform in Mathematics and Reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress", 2011
graders that were eligible for the National School Lunch program. The reading gap also narrowed for eligible 4th and 8th graders as did the reading gap and math gap for White and non-English language learners in both grades. While these facts would appear to signify that things are getting better, that is not the case. All the other gaps (for students not eligible for free lunch) remained the same; there were no significant changes.

The findings for the Black-White Achievement Gap were a bit more complicated. NAEP stated that the Achievement Gap varied depending upon the income of student’s families and the sex of the student. In terms of the reading gap the national Black-White Achievement Gap was 27 points in the 4th grade and 26 points in the 8th grade. The assessment did show that six states saw a decrease in the gap, while one state experienced growth in its Achievement Gap. For the math gap, there was a national gap of 26 points in the 4th grade and 31 points in the 8th grade.

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2 "How Black and White Students in Public Schools Perform on the National Assessment of Educational Progress", 2009
Six states saw a decrease in the gap, while four states saw increases. What these statistics demonstrate is that although the size of Achievement Gap varies from state to state, the national gap still exists and cannot be ignored due to the success of some individual states. Although the statistics provided were measured in terms of race, knowing that the class based Achievement Gap is at least twice as large as the race based Achievement Gap (Reardon, 2013), makes these numbers very useful in trying to understand what the current state of education is.
While I believe that it is very important to look at the Achievement Gap on the national scale, for the purpose of this paper I will focus on statistics for the Achievement Gap in New York City. Once again the statistics provided are race-based, but can be applied to the class-based Achievement Gaps. There is a lot happening in terms of education in New York City according to the Achievement Gap results provided by the New York City Department of Education\(^3\) as can be seen in figure 3.\(^4\) Although Blacks, Whites, and Hispanics have improved academically in terms of test scores, in some cases the Achievement Gap continues to widen. Based on New York State test scores for all grades tested, between 2006 and 2010 there was a 22 percent decrease in the Black-White math gap and a 16 percent decrease in the Hispanic-White gap. The English Language Arts results were similar in that based on the New York State tests, the Black-White ELA gap decreased 37 percent between 2006 and 2010 and the Hispanic-White ELA gap decreased 36 percent within that same time range. However, according to NAEP assessment for 4\(^{th}\) grade (2003-2009), the Black-White math gap was reduced by 7 percent and the Hispanic-White math gap neither increased nor decreased. It also revealed an increase of 7

\(^3\) "NAEP National Assessment of Educational Progress Reading & Mathematics 4th and 8th Grade State and National Release", 2011

\(^4\) Figure 3 lists the Asian-White Achievement Gaps, but for the purpose of this paper we did not look at those numbers.
percent for both the Black-White and Hispanic-White ELA gaps. NAEP assessments for 8th grade (2003-2009) showed a reduction of 7 percent for the Black-White math gap and an increase of 15 percent for the Hispanic-White math gap. The ELA gap neither increased nor decreased between Blacks and Whites. However there was a 19 percent increase for the Hispanic-White Gap. There were also many other results provided which would lead one to believe that New York City is doing an amazing job at closing the Achievement Gap. The issue with these results is when it comes time for the students to take the SAT we are shown that the Achievement Gap widened there in every category. Based on SAT scores (2002-2009) the Black-White gap in critical reading had an increase of 24 percent, on the math section a gap increase of 17 percent and in the writing section an increase 16 percent. There were increases in every area for the Hispanic-White gap, a 24 percent increase in critical reading, 13 percent increase in math, and a 15 percent increase in writing. The point of laying out the numbers above is to show exactly what is going on in New York City in terms of the Achievement Gap. Based on the assessment numbers provided by the New York City Department of education there has been some improvement in the Achievement Gap. However, overall New York City is not doing a great job at closing the Achievement Gap. As the NAEP and SAT scores show, the Achievement Gap in New York City is wide and has not seen much improvement. Despite many reform efforts the gap still exists. Many people have spent years studying the Achievement Gap trying to figure out the causes for it. I will discuss this in more detail below.

The National Education Association put together a complete guide on the many contributing factors for the Achievement Gap (NEA, Discussion Guide 2). According to the guide5, there are both factors the school can control and factors outside of the school’s control.

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5 "Identifying Factors that Contribute to Achievement Gaps"
THE ONES LEFT BEHIND

The school wide factors that the school can control are the following. First is low expectations for student achievement. This could lead to the teachers not teaching to the best of their abilities because they believe that the children will not succeed regardless of how they teach. If in the schools both the students and the teachers do not see the why it is important for the students to receive a good education, then there is not much that will be accomplished. This could also lead to the children believing that that are not able to learn. Lack of rigor in the curriculum is another issue. This is problematic because often times both educators and schools have the idea that children from low income communities are unable to learn, so they do not provide the same challenging curriculum they would provide for their higher income counterparts because they do not deem them capable of doing the work. Next is large class size. Large class size is problematic for the very obvious reasons. If a classroom is packed it becomes difficult for the teacher to manage the classroom, have fun and engaging lessons or to asses and meet all the individual needs of the students. Another issue within the schools control is unsafe schools. This prevents some kids from coming to school and prevents all students from having a learning environment conducive to learning. Some schools are becoming so violent that students do not want to attend classes and the parents are reluctant to send them. The guide also states other issues within the school’s control are culturally insensitive environments and poor instructional leadership. On the teacher to student level the reasons include: uncertified and inexperienced teachers and inadequate materials, equipment, and resources, including technology-based resources. These are two big issues in schools located in high poverty neighborhoods. The NEA also pointed out that there were factors at the student and family level that the schools can control as well. Although we know of the in school contributions to the Achievement Gap, I
believe the factors outside of the school’s control are more important as they tend to have a bigger impact on students and their families, all of those outside factors being based on poverty.

At the community level there is a lack of economic opportunities for the student’s families. The families are also often lacking access to healthcare and social services. One thing I have observed is in these neighborhoods there is a tendency for there to be high crime rates, often leaving the people that live there living in fear. In addition, living in low income communities has a tendency to limit outside resources and experiences that hinder the cultural growth and knowledge base of the students. Besides the factors from the community there are many other factors that contribute to the Achievement Gap that are completely out of the schools control. Children that come from low income neighborhoods often have many different health issues that prevent them from regularly attending school. When you add on the fact that most of the families struggle financially and many of them are not English speakers, the impact on student achievement is huge. In addition, they often attend schools that do not receive enough funding and therefore receive a subpar education. Students then go home to parents that cannot help them with their homework because their parents are forced to work multiple jobs to support the family. In short, there are an overwhelming number of factors that impact student academic achievement.
Chapter 2: A Snap Shot of Poverty

The government of New Brunswick (Overview & Background 2008-2009) quoted the World Bank organizations definition and description of poverty:

“What is Poverty”

6 “What is Poverty”
How bad is Poverty in the United States?

Before I begin to discuss the negative effects poverty has on education, it is important that I first provide you with a very clear picture as to what poverty looks like here in the United States. In doing research for this project I have come to realize that the picture you get of poverty depends on the source. For a well-rounded picture of the current state of poverty, I looked at the statistics, some of which are provided below in figure 4. In addition, I looked to local writers for their experiences and observations because the statistics and the real feel of poverty to someone currently experiencing it are completely different. Finally, I consider my common knowledge and experience about poverty. By this I mean what I have noticed in my everyday life having lived in a high poverty area and my parents still live in an area of high poverty, I have experienced it firsthand. Over the course of the last 30 years the upper and upper-middle class have become wealthier as the other have experienced a decline in their economic stability as illustrated in Figure 4.

The top 420,000 households alone accounted for 26.9 percent of United States family net worth, with the top 10 percent controlling 68 percent of it. In 2013, the United States (US) Census Bureau reported that the

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7 Exploring Education: Equality of Opportunity
official poverty rate was 14.5 which was a small decrease from 2012.\[^8\] They also reported that there were 45.3 million people in poverty. The poverty rate for children was 19.9 percent. Among people aged 18 to 64 there was 13.6 percent and among people 65 and older it was 9.5 percent. For the purpose of this paper the statistics I want to focus on the poverty among children.

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty\[^9\], the United States ranks second highest in child poverty among the world’s 35 richest countries. Figure 5 shows child poverty in the United States in 2005.

Children under 18 years of age make up 23 percent of the population and represent 33 percent of all people in poverty. There are more than 16 million children in the United States living in families with incomes below the federal poverty level, which is only $23,550 a year for a family of four. First, I must point out that the formula used to determine the federal poverty level is terribly out dated. It was first created in

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\[^8\] About Poverty: 2013 Highlights

\[^9\] Jiang, Ekono, Skinner, 2015
1960 and does not take into account all the ways in which families have changed within the last 50 years.\textsuperscript{10} It is impossible for a family of four to survive off of $23,550 now. With the average rent for a two bedroom apartment costing $1500 a month in most urban areas, the cost of rent works out to be $18,000 annually. In addition to food and transportation costs on the rise there is no way for these families to live comfortably or to even have the bare necessities to survive.

Research shows that on average in order to survive, a family of four with two children would need $47,248 to be stable. By this federal poverty level standard 45 percent of children in the United States live in low income families. We are currently living in a society where almost half of our children are living in low income families.

To bring this closer to home, I looked at poverty here in New York. It is important to realize how poverty looks here because in the following chapter I will tell the story of two areas in New York City; Brownsville, Brooklyn and Park Slope, Brooklyn. New York has a state rank of 30 for poverty level with an overall poverty rate of 16 percent.\textsuperscript{11} The poverty rate of women is higher than men and sadly the rate of poverty in children is higher than the overall poverty rate at 22.8 percent. The other statistics for New York City are just as alarming. According to the Robin Hood Project, 23 percent of New Yorkers are living below the supplemental poverty line.\textsuperscript{12} That’s one in four people living in New York or 1,934,000 people. 37 percent of people in New York City or 2,325,000 adults in New York City face severe material hardships. What is meant by this is they do not have the funds necessary to have the bare necessities, so this leads to them having to live in a shelter, not being able to pay utilities, or supply clothing for themselves.

\textsuperscript{10} Poverty Tracker
\textsuperscript{11} Interactive Poverty Map
\textsuperscript{12} The Supplemental Poverty line is based on income, but takes into account daily living expenses including, but not limited to: shelter, food, clothing, utilities, variation in living costs depending on the area, and it adjusts income based on government assistance and tax income.
etc. A staggering 53 percent of people in New York City faced at least one disadvantage in 2012 in terms of income, hardship, and health. With all of these people struggling they turn to the government for assistance. Although 52 percent of people needed help, only approximately 44 percent of people sought help in 2012. Of the 44 percent sadly only 23 percent of them got all the help that they needed leaving everyone else struggling to get through everyday life.

For some people it is easy for them to forget just how bad poverty is in New York City. Some people do not have to deal with it because they are living comfortably. Other people just ignore it because they feel that there is nothing that they can do about it. If everyone stopped and looked around they would see the very picture that the above statistics paint. New York City has a very high number of homeless people. As of February 2015, New York City had 60,484 homeless people (Coalition for the Homeless, 2015). If one looks at the sheer number of shelters we have in the city that number may overwhelm you. Furthermore, even beyond homelessness, half of the people you encounter every day are struggling and do not know how they are going to make it from day to day. Why am I so thoroughly painting this picture of poverty to you? I need everyone to think about what all of this means. If most of the adults in New York City are struggling and if the child poverty rate is higher than that of the city and state, then what does this mean for education? If we know that poverty has very adverse effects on children both inside and outside of schools what does this say about the state of education and academic achievement today?
Making the Connection: Poverty as a Direct Cause of the Achievement Gap

There are many factors that contribute to the Achievement Gap. It is undeniable that there is a direct correlation between poverty and the class-based Achievement Gap. I believe that now it is imperative to recognize that as our economic system becomes more and more stratified, more and more children are falling into poverty. As a result of growing income inequality, the Achievement Gap will continue to grow. If we do not deal with the main issue then no matter what we do to fix the factors connected to it, nothing will change.

Education is experienced differently depending on the class of the student (Sadovnik, Cookson, Semel, 2013: Chapter 8). As we all know even public education is very expensive, requiring parental financial support. Sheila Bapat (2012) discussed a study by Sabino Konrich and Frank Furstenberg that showed that upper income families spend nine times as much as much low income families on their children. Parents within low income communities are often unable to provide their children with this support. Because of this, most low income students go through school without the necessities to succeed. Another issue is that many students come into school not speaking any English and without the proper supports such as English Language Learner programs, so they are unable to thrive in school. Furthermore, some studies show that low income students come into school not speaking what is considered to be Standard English. This leads to the children being labeled, not by their ability, but by their social class. This is something that I can identify with. Growing up in a relatively poor neighborhood, I developed a certain way of speaking that would make people, mainly professors in college, automatically think that I was incapable of doing well. On our first few encounters they would talk to me differently and look at me strangely when I would speak. Some would even take it as far as to

13 “Back to School: How Educational Economics is Leading to a Wider Gap Between Rich and Poor”
tell me that perhaps I was in the wrong field and should look into other types of work. The turning point for me, even to this day is when someone reads a piece written by me. They then realize my talent and develop a new found respect for me. Unfortunately, in most low income neighborhoods, no one is interested in seeing children’s talent because of their preconceived notions.

Richard Rothstein is one of the many people that have written on the effects of poverty on academic achievement. He also believes that poverty causes low academic achievement. Rothstein stated that on average low income students’ achievement is below the average achievement of middle class students (Rothstein, 2004). To explain this he starts with an examination of the reading gap. Low income children are more likely to have parents with low educational attainment. As a result, they are less likely to be read to on a daily basis before they reach kindergarten. By the time they make it to kindergarten, they are already behind their middle and upper class counterparts. This is where the Achievement Gap begins. Rothstein referred to an international reading survey of 15 year olds that showed that the gap between the literacy of children of the highest status workers and the literacy of children of the lowest status workers was huge. The next gap examined was the conversation gap. I believe that many people tend to disregard this gap, but it is actually very important. Low income parents are more likely to work a job in which they follow orders and a routine. Therefore they are less likely to teach or encourage their children to negotiate. Rothstein noted that their children are more likely to not be able to handle obstacles in and outside of school. I have seen this in action. Most parents in low income communities shout commands and do not give the children an opportunity to defend themselves or think for themselves. Most parents I know say that they do this for their

14 “Even the Best Schools Can’t Close the Race Achievement Gap” in Exploring Education, p.378
children’s own well-being when in fact it only hinders their growth. Furthermore, lower class parents are unable to afford the fees associated with after-school and outside activities. As a result low income students miss out on opportunities to take part in activities that could possibly help them to develop self-confidence, discipline, and teamwork. With all of that being said, poverty essentially changes the entire education process for low income students. They start school already at a disadvantage and it follows them throughout their schooling. Low income parents often times are unable to provide their children with the tools they need to thrive academically. Lack of reading materials, conversation that does not encourage them to think, lack of involvement in activities and programs that could potentially help them to develop and lack of role models and motivation all caused by living in poverty. This causes the children to not do well academically.

Authors Gary Orfield and Chungmei Lee (2005) wrote a report titled *Why Segregation Matters: Poverty and Educational Inequality.* While the report mainly focused on race, desegregation, and integration, they did touch base on the issues listed above provided by Richard Rothstein. They also provide further insight into how poverty and educational attainment are related. First, they noted is that high poverty schools are usually isolated and cut off from resources. I do believe that this is the case. In most cases, low income communities are tucked away, separate from the nice parts of the city, limiting access to resources such as funding and different programs. Secondly, they address the effects of poverty in the community. This is a very important part that sometimes is not given enough attention. We cannot discuss the issue of poverty and the Achievement Gap without discussing the effects that poverty has on the community as a whole. Community is a big part of the equation. The reason for this is because whatever environment the school is centered in, find its way into the school and have a major
impact on both the students and the staff. Low income communities often experience, “housing inadequacy and decay, weak and failing infrastructure, a critical lack of mentors and a shortage of jobs.”15 In addition to all of the above they also face the issue of high amounts of violence in terms of gang violence and crime. All of this has an effect on not only how well students do academically, but also on what happens in the school. One of the results within the schools is that they tend to have less qualified teachers and less stability in terms of teacher retention. A 2004 New York Department of Education report showed that in schools with 75 percent low income students, there were three times as many uncertified teachers in math and science.16 This leads to children in low income areas receiving a subpar education in comparison to their more well off counterparts. Eventually what all of this leads to is stagnation and unequal opportunity, thus creating a vicious cycle of poverty.

In addition, Virginia Burney and Jayne Beilke (2008) also found that poverty has a major impact on educational attainment in their report *The Constraints of Poverty on High Achievement*. The piece starts with a very strong statement,

“Research studies on school success often focus on the impact of discrete elements such as race, culture, ethnicity, gender, language, or school location on high achievement. The condition of poverty, however, may be the most important of all student differences in relation to high achievement...”17

Although in this quote they only refer to high achievement, I believe that it can be applied to the Achievement Gap in general. Burney and Beilke (2008) pointed out that schools with many low income students are less likely to have a rigorous curriculum or advanced classes. This prevents

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15 “Why Segregation Matters” p. 15
16 “Why Segregation Matters” p.7
17 “The Constraints of Poverty on High Achievement” p.171
any chance of the students becoming high achievers. To further their argument they referenced Abbott and Joireman (2001). In their study they used a multiple regression analysis to study differences in academic achievement based on income and ethnic population. They found that low income explained a much larger percentage of the differences in academic achievement.\textsuperscript{18} They also referenced Lee and Burkham (2002), who agreed with the findings above. The reported that higher performing students tend to come from families with higher incomes. Finally, another important take away was that low income students are less likely to go to college and if they do go, they are significantly less likely to graduate.\textsuperscript{19}

Next, Christine Blazer and Dale Romanik’s, “The Effect of Poverty on Student Achievement,” noted that “childhood poverty poses serious problems for public education” (p.1). They provided a lot of information concerning the link between poverty and the Achievement Gap. First they discussed the non-school factors that affect low income students’ levels of achievement. Like the researchers above they noted: prenatal disadvantages, increased illness and injury nutritional problems, exposure to pollutants, hazardous neighborhoods, struggle to survive, family violence, lack of adult attention, residential instability, and lack of educational activities and materials (pp.3-4). They took their article a step further by summarizing the research of several individuals that have proved the direct correlation between poverty and the Achievement Gap. Blazer and Romanik (2009) cited Gottlieb (2002) report on a study commissioned by the Piton Foundation (p.6). The study showed that low income students received much lower test scores than their higher income counterparts. The study looked at Colorado Student Assessment Program and Iowa Test of Basic Skills reading test scores of 13,245 grades 3-5 students from 89 Denver schools. The scores showed that there is a strong

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{"The Constraints of Poverty on High Achievement"} p.179
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{"The Constraints of Poverty On High Achievement"} p.179
correlation between income level and test scores. Lee and Burkham (2002) were also cited. They analyzed data from the U.S. Department of Education’s Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Cohort (p.6). What they found that children from the lowest income families came to Kindergarten with fewer cognitive skills than their higher class counterparts. Because of this the Math and Reading scores of the lowest income students were 60 percent and 56 percent lower than the students coming from the highest income families. The same study was analyzed by Rowan, Cohen and Raudenbush (2004). They found that the Achievement Gap between “poor and advantaged” students was very large. Blazer and Romanik (2009), also discussed the effects of poverty on the schools. They stated that research shows that as the school poverty level increases student achievement decreases and cited studies by Berliner, 2009; Kahlenberg, 2004; Anderson and colleagues, 1992; Rumberger and Palardy, 2002 and a number of other studies that all show the negative effect that poverty has on schools.

Another researcher that has studied the link between poverty and the Achievement Gap is Sean F. Reardon. He conducted a study of the relationship between academic achievement and family income in the United States over the last 50 years (Reardon, 2011). To do so he used data from 12 different studies. He found that the income gaps in other measures of education success such as college completion which has grown for high income families and has not moved for low income families (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011). Reardon also found that the Income Achievement Gap is already large when students enter kindergarten. He linked this to the outside causes stated above/

All of the issues above are extremely important, but there is still one issue that I still have not discussed. A major issue is the lack of adequate school funding in low income neighborhoods. School funding is something that is out of the control of the communities (or at
least this is the way it may feel, especially to one that is not very knowledgeable about how the school system works) and the schools, but which has a big impact on the both of them. The issue of underfunding schools in low income areas has been noted by many researchers. However, there has not been much done to fix the issue. A 2011 Department of Education article stated that more than 40 percent of low income schools do not get a fair share of state and local funds.\textsuperscript{20} They found that reason for this was school districts across the country were inequitably distributing the funds. An analysis of 2008-2009 school level expenditures showed that the more than 40 percent of schools that received Federal title I money to serve low income students spent less state and local fund on teachers and other administrative staff than schools that did not receive the Federal funds.

Many people do not realize that school funding comes from federal, state, and local sources, but most of that comes from property taxes which leads to unequal school funding. In communities with low property values, it is almost impossible to produce enough funding to support the schools. This lack of funding not only has an effect on the students, but on the teachers and the economy as well. Without the necessary funding, schools lack the necessary books and supplies to teach the students. They also lack things like libraries, computer courses, and extracurricular activities. Furthermore, they are unable to attract qualified and experienced teachers because they are unable to pay them a competitive salary.

What does all of this mean? We have a very big problem on our hands. With poverty on the rise, the Achievement Gap will continue to grow. There has been a lot of research conducted that shows that there is a direct correlation between poverty and academic achievement. There have been many efforts to try to save our education system without trying to address the main

\textsuperscript{20} “More Than 40% of Low-Income Schools Don't Get a Fair Share of State and Local Funds, Department of Education Research Finds”
issue of poverty. There are people that do not agree with this position, but with the state of education not improving even with all of the reform efforts, it is obvious that there is an issue not being addressed. With most of the reforms only pumping money to the schools, they fail to build up the surrounding communities. Hence the reason why things remain the same. In the following chapter we will look at two areas in Brooklyn, NY. One of the neighborhoods is Brownsville, an area plagued by poverty and violence since the very beginning of its history and the other, Park Slope, an area that is rather well off. Their schools and the levels of academic achievement are completely different and I will argue that this is because of the difference in income levels in the two areas. The academic achievement in areas mirror the income levels.
Chapter 3: Case Study: Brownsville, Brooklyn vs. Park slope, Brooklyn- A tale of two Cities in the same City

History of Brownsville

The history of Brownsville is indeed not a very grand one. It has a history of being a very undesirable place to live. It also has a long history of changing faces as the different races moved in and out of the area. In this section I hope to provide you with a picture of how Brownsville developed and how that development has contributed to what Brownsville has become today.

Brownsville has struggled for stability for over 100 years. It has always been the area the poor and working class have called home. This area was once used as a dump, a tenement slum, and it was also where the first public housing units were built. Brownsville was also where the first decentralized education policies were tested and was also a very high crime area.\textsuperscript{21} According to the Weekly Nabe, Brownsville was originally an undesired area because of its distance from Manhattan, because it was flood prone, and because it smelled from being used as a dumping site. Although Brownsville did not attract the wealthy, the working class Jews flocked to the neighborhood as it was a better alternative to living in the slums of the lower east side. The faces

\textsuperscript{21} “Brownsville and the curse of geography”
of the area have changed drastically throughout the years as people have come and gone from the area. In the 1850s Brownsville was occupied by Germans and later by Russians, Italians, and Poles.\textsuperscript{22} Between 1910 and the mid-1940s Brownsville was mostly occupied by Jewish immigrants, but in the 1930s the Jewish immigrants began to leave the area.\textsuperscript{23} The number of African Americans in the area doubled between 1940 and 1950 as they came from the south looking for factory jobs in the garment industry.\textsuperscript{24} By 1970 most of the Jews had moved out of the area and it became predominately African American and Latino.

\textsuperscript{22} “BROWNSVILLE and EAST NEW YORK, Brooklyn”
\textsuperscript{23} “Resurrecting Brownsville”
\textsuperscript{24} “Brownsville”
The area was first used as farm land by the Dutch and was owned by William Suydam, but was later sold to Charles S. Brown. Soon after he purchased it Brown began to build what was then known as Brown’s village and was composed of 250 houses in 1883. Because if it’s undesirable location Brown’s village was marketed to the working class and Jewish immigrants. People did not all flock to Brownsville right away. It definitely took some time to bring people into the area. Elias Kaplan opened a factory and Brownsville’s first synagogue called Ohev Shalom. Shortly after, Brownsville’s population began to boom in the early 20th century. Although the history of Brownsville is a mostly grim one there were some good things that came out of the area. In 1914 the Brownsville’s children’s branch of the Brooklyn public library was created, making it the first children’s library in the United States. In addition Margaret Sanger opened the country’s first birth control center in Brownsville. In 1929 Lowe’s Pitkin (photo to the left) was built by Thomas Lamb and seated 2,827 people. According to the article, Resurrecting Brownsville, by 1930 few of Brownsville’s families had become considered middle class. In 1942 there were 372 stores along Pitkin Ave which employed 1,000 people. For the people of the area, there is where they would go to get their necessities and outsiders would come to get refrigerators, sofas, and jewelry. In the years following everything went downhill.

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25 “BROWNSVILLE and EAST NEW YORK, Brooklyn”
26 “Brownsville’s Resurrection”
From about the 1960s onward, violence in Brownsville began to get out of control and businesses began to shut their doors such as Lowe’s Pitkin. As the African Americans moved into the area, racial tension began to build up between the African Americans and the Jews despite efforts such as integrating the Brownsville’s Boys club. In 1967 there was a riot after a boy was killed by the NYPD. Unfortunately some took this as the perfect opportunity to cause a war and spread rumors that the African American boy was killed by a White officer. Shortly after there was a teacher strike in 1968. What caused this was a Ford Foundation funded experiment in which the community was given control over a handful of schools. Eventually the community board attempted to fire then transfer 13 white unionized teachers to other schools because they had the idea that Black and Brown students would learn better if they employed more colored teachers. The result was three strikes led by the United Federation of Teachers which was predominately Jewish organization. These strikes caused African Americans to be pitted against the Jewish teachers union. During the duration of the strikes the schools were shut down for total 36 days. Ultimately the teachers won their positions back, but the relationship between the Jewish teachers and the African Americans of the community was forever damaged. During the 1970s the area became poorer and even more dangerous. The 1990s appeared to be the peak of violence with the number of crimes soaring into the thousands. In 1990 there were 60 murders, 113 rapes, 2,914 robberies, 1,519 felony assaults, 1,313 burglaries, 1,293 grand larcenies, and 1031 grand larceny autos within the year.

27 “Brownsville and the curse of geography”
28 “New York in the 1960s”
29 NYPD Compstat: Brownsville
Brownsville, Brooklyn Today: A Personal Account

Brownsville looks a lot different today, with there being so many housing projects in the area now. Although a lot of the old buildings are there and the street names sound familiar, Brownsville has changed quite a bit. I would not say that the economy has improved much. Brownsville still remains home to the poorest Brooklyn residents. It currently has the highest number of housing projects within one square mile in the entire country. There are currently a total of 6 housing developments: Brownsville Houses, Van Dyke Houses, Tilden Houses, Langston Hughes Houses, Glenmore Plaza and Seth Low Houses. These housing projects combined are 873 stories in over 100 different buildings.\textsuperscript{30} Brownsville is considered Community District 16. According to Community District 16 data provided by NYC.gov, in 2010 Brownsville had a total population of 86,468. Of that 86,468, 65,930 of the residents were Black, 620 were Asian or Pacific Islander, 287 were American Indian, 280 were another race (non-Hispanic), 17,369 were Hispanic, and 1,124 were two or more races (non-Hispanic). As someone that is very familiar with the area, I was surprised with these numbers because while I always see the Black and Hispanic populations, I hardly ever see the others which is interesting. Brownsville is not a very diverse neighborhood. Of that 86,468, 12,022

\textsuperscript{30} Brownsville: Inside One of Brooklyn’s Most Dangerous Neighborhoods
were on cash assistance, 8,150 were receiving Supplemental Security Income, and 27,584 of the residence received Medicaid. What we have in Brownsville is a major concentration of poverty. Unlike many Brooklyn neighborhoods that have become gentrified, Brownsville remains untouched. The most recent additions to the neighborhood, which you would only know if you live there, were: a Children’s Place Store added to Pitkin Avenue, a Planet Fitness (the area’s first major gym) to Rockaway Avenue, and a Deals Store added to Belmont Avenue.

Despite these additions to the neighborhood the economy is still doing poorly. 42 percent of people living in Brownsville are living below the federal poverty level. According to the City-Data website, in 2011, the median income was $31,252 much lower than the median income of New York which was $55,246. The median rent in the area was $736, which I think may be a low estimate, depending on where you live the can go up to $1000. The percentage of married couples in the family is a low 19.5 percent as opposed New York as a whole with a percentage of 44.1 percent. There were 12.1 percent married families in Brownsville, whereas there were 54.1 in New York at the time. Brownsville also has a high 22.6 percent single-mother households where as New York has 9.5 percent. The jobs held by the people in the area reflect the median income. 40.2 percent of women are in service occupations as are 26.7 percent are men. 29.9 percent of women are in sales and/or office occupations as are 19.4 percent of men. The men in Brownsville also work in construction (11.7 percent) and in transportation (13.1 percent). Unfortunately, less than 1 percent of people in Brownsville hold managerial positions. The value of houses in the area also reflect the poverty of the neighborhood. In 2010 the estimated value of a detached home was $259,952 and for a townhouse/attached house $408,592, which was much lower than the value of other houses in New York.
The poverty in the area is also reflected in it crime rates. Crime in Brownsville is down in comparison to the 1990s. I have seen an increase in police presence. The police now drive through and around the housing projects. There are police towers set up in many of the housing projects. There are a lot of foot officers that patrol the housing projects and keep people from hanging out in the hallways. Also, you can now often find at least one police vehicle parked on a corner every couple of blocks. In addition they have set up huge lamps that illuminate parts of the housing projects that were once very dark and scary to walk through. In addition, the community has also taken part in an attempt to try to decrease violence in the area with by holding events to get guns off of the street. Many churches and other organizations have taken to the area to promote people turning in guns without fear of being arrested. Although definitely not the best crime rates in the area, in 2014 there were 18 murders, 34 rapes, 421 robberies, 608 felony assaults, 275 burglary, 423 grand larceny, and 100 grand larceny autos, which is a great improvement.

According to NYC.gov, Brownsville apparently has a lot of different facilities for many different things. I am almost certain that most people in the area do not know that most of these buildings exist because I did not know most of the existed and I resided in the area for over 20 years. Brownsville has 39 public elementary/secondary schools, 3 private elementary/secondary schools, and 33 daycare/head start centers. It also has 3 libraries/cultural institutions. Brownsville has twice as many parks as it does schools with the total number of parks being 70. There are currently 8 nursing homes, hospitals, hospices, and ambulatory programs. What shows the concentration of poverty in Brownsville is its need to have 26 food programs and drop in centers as well as 13 residential facilities and food programs for adults and families. The area has also become a place to send those with mental and developmental disabilities with its 7
residential mental health facilities, 15 nonresidential mental health facilities, 9 residential
developmental disability facilities, and 1 nonresidential mental health facility. It also serves as a
place to treat people with chemical dependencies with its 2 residential and 2 nonresidential
chemical dependency programs. As you can see Brownsville has a lot going on in the
neighborhood and not much of it is positive. With that being said, the poverty in the area has
definitely taken its toll on education in the area as we will discuss in the next section.

**Education in Brownsville**

The levels of education attainment and academic achievement in Brownsville definitely
mirror the low income of the neighborhood. Upon trying to find ratings for Brooklyn school
district 23, which covers Ocean-Hill Brownsville, Brownsville, and some parts of East New
York I found that there is not an overall district rating on the Department of Education site.
Instead they offer ratings by particular school. In order to get a full picture of the education
crisis in Brownsville, I had to comb through a number of articles. There were numerous articles
available because the issue of low academic achievement in Brownsville has been written about
time and time again. However, I was unable to locate an overall snap shot. The following is
what I gathered on the situation and what I know from my personal experience.

According to Issuu.com, overall, Brownsville has a high school graduation rate of 56.4
percent.\(^\text{31}\) It is important to note that this number may be high as it is for all community district
schools in the area and not all of the students in the school are necessarily residents of
Brownsville. What is alarming about that figure is that only 9.8 percent of those students are

\(^{31}\) Community District 16 Brooklyn Neighborhood Report
college ready. This leads me to believe that there is a culture of just passing the students along even if they do not have the skills to survive in college. The high school dropout rate in Brownsville is 10 percent, which I believe is a little on the low end. 34.5 percent of high school seniors in Brownsville enroll in college, but not very many of them make it through because they were not prepared for college in high school. 21.1 percent of youth in Brownsville ages 16-24 are not in school and are not working. 29.5 percent of people in Brownsville ages 25 and older do not have a high school diploma or GED. Finally, a mere 12.3 percent of people in the area have a bachelor’s degree or higher. What is happening here is at the elementary school level the children are being let down. They are not receiving the best education possible and they are not receiving any encouragement to move forward in their education as a means of getting out of their current situations. As a result, the cycle of poverty in Brownsville continues.

Brownsville is located in Community district 16. According to Issuu.com, in 2009 98.7 percent of children in grades kindergarten thru 5th grade were enrolled in public school and a mere 1.3 percent of them were enrolled in private school. These numbers are completely different from that of the rest of Brooklyn with 75.5 percent of children in grades kindergarten thru 5th grade enrolled in public school and 24.5 percent of them enrolled in private school. The number of children enrolled in private school in Brownsville is so few for several reasons. The first which is a very obvious one, is that the parents simply cannot afford to send their children to private school. Secondly, a lot of parents in the neighborhood do not realize that most private schools offer vouchers and there are some schools that base their tuition off of one’s income. This is not made known in the area, so the children remain in Brownsville’s failing schools. Third, for the parents that do know of the option, the better private schools are not located in the area, so the travel to get there is often too much.
District 23 is well known for being one of the lowest preforming school districts in New York City. It is one of the smallest school districts. According to Inside Schools, the schools in Brownsville consist of 99 percent minority enrollment as opposed to the state average of 52 percent minority enrollment. None of Brownsville’s elementary schools have a rating of over 3 out of 10 in terms of testing. Brownsville has approximately 30 elementary schools. Of the 30, 17 of the schools are failing. 11 of the schools averaged a passing rate of 10 percent or less. Only 6 schools exceeded the 10 percent passing rate, but the highest recorded passing rate was 17 percent.\footnote{The Forgotten Fourth, provided a list of our schools where at least 90 percent are failing by rank. On that list Brownsville schools held the 5th, 10th, 20th, 26th, and 32nd spots.} According to the article, \textit{Brooklyn’s Poorest Neighborhood’s (2013)}, in 2012 only 38.9 percent of students in Brownsville schools scored at or above grade level in Math and only 31.2 percent scored at or above grade level in reading on statewide tests. The author noted that these scores strongly correlate with the median income of the area. Everyone including parents, teachers, and politicians are well aware of the problem. One of the ways in which they have sought to solve the problem of Brownsville’s failing schools are to close them. In one meeting with parents and Chancellor Denis Walcott, parents got to voice what they felt. Most parents were against closing the failing schools. Instead, they wanted the things the schools needed to actually do well from their point of view. Parents noted a lack of supplies and resources within the schools including computers. Some argued that the facilities were run down. Others pointed out overcrowded classrooms. Some parents were concerned about the violence between the students, which usually starts outside of the school, but finds its way into the schools. In short Brownsville schools are filled with disadvantaged children dealing with high levels of poverty and the schools themselves are neglected by not receiving the necessary funding to do well by the children.

\footnote{\textit{“The ForgottenFourth”}}
because of where they are located. It is very clear that the current state of education in Brownsville has everything to do with the poverty in the area.

Having grown up in Brownsville and having a son that is currently attending school there I have witnessed a lot of things first hand. I attended Kindergarten through 4th grade in a school in Brownsville, right across the street from my apartment in the Brownsville public housing project. There I was mistreated by teachers. One incident I can clearly remember is getting my hair pulled by my teacher and one of my family members having to come up to the school to bring it to their attention. I was bullied daily by other students. More importantly I was a bright student, but my grades never reflected that. My parents, noticing that I was clearly being failed by the school, transferred me to private school in another neighborhood in 1997. To this day I feel the effects of my missing the first few years of my education. Because of this, I struggled through middle school. At that time I hardly ever got a grade above a C, unless it was in English. By the time I made it to high school I had become a B student, but still struggled greatly in math. When I made it to college, I was not college ready. I struggled through my first semester of college. I honestly felt stupid, with a first semester GPA of 1.88. It took a lot of encouragement from professors that realized my potential for me to continue. I managed to graduate with my Associates degree with a GPA of 3.1. When I transferred to City College, I again struggled through math, but by then I understood the resources available to me and got a tutor. It was not until I graduated from City College with honors that I realized that I was not this stupid girl I thought I was. The point of my story here is that when schools in high poverty neighborhoods do not provide children with a solid foundation and follows them throughout their entire lives. Some are unable to break the confines of this disadvantage because it is a terribly hard fight. Now it is 2015 and my son attends a community district school in the neighborhood.
The school shares the building with a gifted and talented school for grades 5-8. Within the school I’ve experienced a hand full of very caring teachers among a building full of staff that appears not to care. A lot of the staff seem to have the impression that the students are bad right almost right away and that the parents do not care. From the beginning of this year I have found myself at the school more often than I should have been because of the need to advocate for my child and to let them know that I know, that some of the things that they are doing are wrong. I have had to threaten them with escalation on more than on occasion by informing them that I know the proper procedures and protocols if the issue could not be solved at the school level. Faculty members seemed shocked to learn that I was a graduate school student, working 40 plus hours a week. In this one particular school I watch how they handle the parents and the children. I have seen how quick they are to write the parents and their children off as a lost cause. Not all parents are able to advocate for their children because they do not know how. As a result, there children become trapped in the failing system that is not seeking to help them.

Not all areas of Brooklyn have the same issues as Brownsville because some areas are better off in terms of wealth and poverty is not an issue. As a result the schools thrive, the students do well, and the over-all academic achievement as well as education attainment in those areas are much higher. We will take a look at this in action as we look at the area of Park Slope.

**The History of Park Slope**

The history of Park Slope is a lot brighter than that of the Brownsville section of Brooklyn. Its history is full of wealth and new developments. The area became known for its community activism very early on. Although there were small bumps along the way, overall Park
Slope has a very rich history. Its history shows the importance of having a community dedicated to the same cause. Hundreds of years ago the Native American tribe Lenape lived on the land. In the 1600s Dutch colonist settled in the area and used it as farm land. Park Slope did not really begin to develop until the 1800s.

Park Slope was always known for its great location and distance from Manhattan, but not all was well in Park Slope in terms of politics. In the early 1800s there was a lot of prejudice in policy making. For example, when the famous Montauk Club opened it only allowed membership to a few privileged people. Later with the creation of Prospect Park, it became the place where many immigrant arrests took place. In addition, according to the Brooklynian article, History of Park Slope, the Brooklyn School Board banned foreign languages from its schools because they feared that the immigrants would take over and prevent the children from receiving a good English education. I would say that these policies reflected the time in which they occurred. However, none of the above listed issues took away from the attractiveness of Park Slope.

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33 “History of Park Slope”
34 “History of Park Slope”
All eyes began to be on the area with the development of the ferry service that connected Brooklyn and Manhattan making it easy to access. According to Park Slope Historic District, in the 1850s Edwin Clarke Litchfield began to buy plots of land and sold them to residential developers and this is what began the urbanization of the area. The completion of the Brooklyn Bridge made the area even easier to access and therefore set urbanization into full swing. Prospect Park was designed and built in 1867 by Frederick Law Olmstead. Olmstead also build mansions and row houses with park views (see photo on the left) and this is what attracted the wealthy to the area. Between the late 1800s and early 1900s in the wealthy called the north part of the area home. There were many mansions, horse-drawn carriages, and private clubs, while in the southern part of Park Slope poorer working class Irish immigrants called it home and industrial businesses grew.

Park Slope experienced a decline in the 1950s and 1960s. The wealthier people of the area began to move to Connecticut and New Jersey, but even with the wealthy people leaving the area, there still remained a great deal of prejudice toward the poor and other outsiders. As the Great Depression took hold, in order to aid the jobless the Federal Housing administration was

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35 “Park Slope Historic District”
36 A Walk Around Brooklyn Interactive Map
37 “History of Park Slope”
This administration created jobs by creating projects to build new homes. This was necessary because with many people leaving the area, the houses became abandoned and run down. It was also during this time that crime began to be a problem.

According to Comp Stat data, in 1990 there were 5 murders, 12 rapes, 1,115 robberies, 251 felony assaults, 1,644 burglaries, 550 grand larcenies, and 1,596 grand larceny autos. According to *History of Park Slope*, after World War II, the GI bill made housing more affordable for soldiers and their families. As a result, they moved into the area and the suburbs grew. It was also during this time that the southern part of the area began to see more immigrants from Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Ireland, and the Dominican Republic. In 1960 there was a United Airlines crash. The jet collided with a smaller commuter plane and crashed in the area. 135 people were killed in the crash and 200 homes were destroyed. In response to the devastation to the area the government planned an urban renewal project in which they would level the area and create high rises. However, this project never took place as the residents came together and formed organizations such as the Park Slope betterment committee, the Brownstone Revival Coalition and the Park Slope Civic Counsel. These committees managed to get many of the buildings in

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38 Also from the above
39 A Walk Around Brooklyn Interactive Map
40 South Brooklyn Network: Park Slope
41 “History of Park Slope”
the area landmark status. They also brought buyers into the area and since then it has developed into the Park Slope we know today.

Between the 1960s and 1980s new families and populations began to move into the area. While this created tension, it also created new activists in the area. In the 1970s the Brooklyn Women Marital Arts Organization was created which later became the Center for Anti-Violence education. In 1973, the Park Slope Food Co-op formed, which is the largest member-owned and operated food co-op in the country. Later in 1977 the Fifth Avenue committee was created to help misplaced low-income residents.42

While Park Slope did experience some hardships they were able to overcome the obstacles. The residents of the area managed to do what very few communities have been able to do which was come together for the betterment of the community. This is what has led to Park Slope becoming the grand and desirable area it is today.

Park Slope, Brooklyn Today

Today Park Slope is known for being one of the most desirable areas in New York City. Some consider it little Manhattan. To some, Park Slope is the definition of a perfect neighborhood. I often times find myself in the

Illustration 6. Source: examiner.com

42 “History of Park Slope”
neighborhood because it has one of the best hospitals in Brooklyn, New York Methodist Hospital. I personally enjoy the area because of its numerous shops and restaurants and also its distance to Prospect Park. However, Park Slope is not a very affordable area. In the most expensive section of Park Slope, the brownstones sell for $1 million and up. According to New York Magazines neighborhood profile for Park Slope the neighborhood has excellent public schools, low crime rates, lots of green space, restaurants and bars, a ton of retail options, and a large population of artists and creatives. As perfect as the area may seem, not everyone is in love with what Park Slope has become. Many people in the area that have been there for many years are against the changes and view them as “the death of a small neighborhood”.

For example 7th Avenue used to be known for its small shops, now there is a Barnes & Noble, Rite Aid, and RadioShack near the hospital. Furthermore, because of the rent increases many of the small shop owners have been pushed out of the area. Despite the disagreements as to whether the gentrification of the neighborhood was for the good of the neighborhood or not, Park Slope is a beautiful thriving neighborhood.

Park Slope is considered to be a part of community District 6. According to City-data.com, Park Slope has an area of approximately 0.687 square miles and its population was about 104,709 in 2010. According to NYC.gov, there are 65,691 white non-Hispanic residents, 10,967 African American, 5,563 Asian or Pacific Islander, 19,042 Hispanic, 2,886 Non-Hispanic two or more races, 417 some other race non-Hispanic, and 143 American Indians making Park Slope a rather diverse area. Of those 104,709 residents in 2010, 1,677 were on cash assistance, 3,380 received supplemental security income, and 11,463 received Medicaid. The median

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43 “Park Slope, Reshaped by Money; As Rents and Prices Rise, Some Fear for Neighborhood’s Soul”

45 See above

46 NYC Department of City Planning: Brooklyn Community District 6
income for the neighborhood as of 2011 $94,981. The residents in Park Slope have a variety of different occupations. 15.9 of males and 15.9 percent of females are in managerial occupations, 7 percent of males and 7.9 percent of females are in business finance, 8.4 percent of males are in computer and math, 4.6 percent of men are in architecture and engineering, 7.1 percent of males and 11.2 percent of females are in education, training and library occupations, 15.1 percent of males and 17.5 percent of females are in arts, designs, entertainment, sports and media occupations, 14 percent of males and 14.6 percent of females are in sales and office, and finally 6.3 percent of females are in the healthcare field. As we can see here, the people of the area are very well off in comparison to the rest of the borough minus a couple areas like Brooklyn Heights. The median rent as of 2011 was $1,753, which I also believe has gone up drastically since then. There are many married couples in Park Slope at 42.7 percent, very close to the average for New York at 44.4 percent. There are only 8.1% of single mother households in the area, which is lower than that of New York as a whole. The average estimated value of a detached house in 2010 was $12,984,963 to $1,127,689, which is much higher than much of the borough. As I mentioned above, Park Slope has relatively low crime rates. In 2014 they had no murders, 5 rapes, 98 robberies, 82 felony assaults, 132 burglaries, 569 grand larcenies, and 70 grand larceny autos. While these numbers are not very low, in comparison to an area such as Brownsville they actually are not doing that bad.

In terms of the facilities in the neighborhood, there are many things available to the residents of the Park Slope. There are 28 public elementary/secondary schools and 7 private/parochial elementary and secondary schools, there is even a college in the neighborhood. In addition, there are 55 daycares/head start programs. Park Slope has 4 libraries and cultural

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47 Comp Stat: 78th Precinct
institutions. There are 55 Parklands, all of them well maintained. There are 14 NYPD, FDNY, courts, and correctional facilities, which is much more than many areas. In terms of care for the elderly and the ill, there are 5 senior facilities and 3 nursing homes, hospitals, hospices, and hospital impatient unis and 20 ambulatory facilities and programs. In addition, there are 6 nonresidential chemical dependency programs, 2 residential mental health services, 6 residential developmental disabilities services and 1 nonresidential, there is even 1 foster home residence. Park Slope also has 4 residential food programs for families and adults, as well as, 7 food programs and drop in centers. Finally there are 8 transportation facilities and 21 waste management companies.

The development of the area is amazing. Park Slope is an area of great wealth and it has been since the area was first developed. Its wealth can be seen not only within the income of the residents in the area, but also in the quality of all it has to offer.

Education in Park Slope

The wealth of the area is very much reflected in the levels of education attainment in the area, their schools, and the overall academic achievement of students in the area. Within the community district, 81.3 percent of students in grades K-5 are enrolled in public school, while 18.7 percent of them are in private schools. In 2010-2011, Park Slope had a high school graduation rate of 58 percent. Of those high school graduates, 47.5 percent of them enroll in college. The dropout rate in the area was a relatively low 8.1 percent. In 2007/2009 the area had only 2.5 percent of its youth 16-24 years of age not in school or working. This is significantly lower than other neighborhoods in Brooklyn. Only 13.6 percent of people in the neighborhood
have less than a high school degree or GED. In fact many people in Park Slope have a bachelor’s degree or higher with the percentage of people that possess bachelor’s degrees at 64.6 percent. More than 18 percent of people in the area have a Master’s degree, 8 percent of them possess professional degree, and 4 percent have Doctorate degrees, which is amazing. There is a very high level of education attainment in the area and it shows in how parents and the community invest themselves in the children and the schools within the area. Park Slope is known for having excellent schools. In fact if you type “park slope schools” into any internet search engine, there is not much that is negative written about the schools. At most you will find articles about school overcrowding, not because it has to be that way but because everyone wants their children to attend those schools because they are the very best. There are also stories about the parents and students protesting things that they do not agree with, often to the success of the community.

Park Slope schools are part of school district 15. It is a rather large school district covering Carroll Gardens to Sunset Park and includes Park Slope, Windsor Terrace, and parts of Boerum Hill and Fort Greene. The district is ranked 6 on a scale of 1 to 10, which is great for a New York City public school. The school district is well known for having extremely active parents and innovative programs. District 15 underwent rezoning and there was a creation of new schools to ease overcrowding in the area. Most of the schools are well known. There are 46 schools in the district, which provide an education to 26,304 students. All of the schools in the district do remarkably well on state tests. For example, P.S. 321 had a passing rate of 92.2 percent and P.S. 107 had a passing rate of 88.6 percent. Overall, schools in Park Slope do well

48 Inside Schools: District 15
49 “See How Park Slope Elementary Schools Rank in the DNAinfo NYC Public School Guide”
in terms of testing. According to education.com, 2 out of their 25 schools rank 10 out of 10 in terms of testing. 3 out of the 25 schools ranked 9. Only one of Park Slope’s schools ranked below 4.

In trying to put together this review of the schools in Park Slope, I did spend time trying to find if there was anything lacking in the school system in an attempt to create a complete picture of Park Slope schools. Besides overcrowded classrooms which is fairly common here in New York City and few failing schools there is just nothing negative being said about Park Slope’s schools. The schools are situated in an ideal area with many resources at their fingertips. The entire community appears to be very invested in the schools there and it shows. The area of Park Slope and its schools are nothing short of great.
Chapter 4: Discussion

The reason why I have taken the time to carefully detail the history and the development of each area is because when you look at it and the schools in each area you notice something very interesting. Brownsville is historically poor. It has been a poor area from the beginning of its development. Being such an undesirable neighborhood, only the poor decided to call it home and there the poor remain. The area has a very high concentration of poverty. As a result, the schools here are also poor, both figuratively and literally. The schools are doing the students a grave injustice by not providing them the same quality of education as their middle and upper class counterparts. The schools are underfunded, leaving the schools not having the tools they need to provide the children with a solid education even if they wanted to. Brownsville has simply been neglected from the beginning of its history and the poverty surrounding the schools has spilled into the schools. On the other hand, there is Park Slope which is the complete opposite of Brownsville. A seemingly different place, it is hard to believe that it is located within the same borough. The area has had great wealth from the beginning of its development. The wealthy have always been attracted to the area because of its close proximity to Manhattan. The wealth of the area is very visible in that the neighborhood is well maintained, there are many shops and restaurants. In addition there is plenty of green space and lots of activities and programs available to the residents without them even having to leave their neighborhood. This is also very visible in the schools. The schools do not have a funding crisis. In fact when schools get overcrowded they simply create new ones. The parents and the community are very invested in the schools and as a result the students are thriving.

The numbers provided above for both areas are very telling. In 2007/2009 Brownsville had 46.6 percent of children in the community living in poverty, whereas Park Slope had 12.2
percent of children in the community living in poverty\textsuperscript{50}. That is a difference of 34.4 percent. That gap between the two areas is huge and too often ignored. What is even more telling is the income gap between the two areas. The median income in 2011 for Brownsville was a mere $31,252, whereas the median income for Park Slope that same year was $94,981. The residents of Brownsville were making less than over $60,000 than the residents of Park Slope. While the numbers have changed since then, the income gap between Brownsville and Park Slope is still very significant.

This is major because as previously discussed in the section on the Achievement Gap, the income gap in this country is growing at a very fast rate and with the class based Achievement Gap is growing apace. The case study of Park Slope and Brownsville are proof of this. There is a very large income gap between the two areas. Which is reflected in the overall education situations of the areas. First, the overall education attainment of the areas are very different with many people in Park Slope having bachelor’s degrees or higher, with the percentage provided above being over 64 percent, whereas the percentage of residents in Brownsville with a bachelor’s degree or higher sits at a mere 12.3 percent. That is a gap of 51.7 percent. Now if we take a step back and look at the number of disconnected youth in each area, meaning individuals age 16-24 not working or in school we discover yet another gap. In Park Slope the percentage of disconnected youth was 2.5, while in Brownsville, during the same year it was 21.1 percent; a gap of 18.6 percent. Then if we take a look at the number of high school graduates in each area we find that Park Slope has a high school graduation rate of 58 percent, whereas Brownsville has a high school graduation rate of around 35 percent. This reveals a gap of about 23 percent. Finally, if we take a look at the school performance and how students are doing on the exams we

\textsuperscript{50} Issuu.com
see the problem. Schools in Park Slope are currently doing much better than the schools in Brownsville where over half of the schools are failing.

This issue is so much bigger than just what is going on in Brooklyn. What I have presented here barely scratches the surface. If we have issues with gaps in income and academic achievement here in the borough of Brooklyn, imagine how it must look when a borough to borough comparison is done or when a state to state comparison is done. I am sure that the disparities found would be even more alarming than what I am presenting to you here in this paper. The number of people living in poverty in the United States is on the rise. There is also a smaller number of people at the top holding the majority of the countries’ wealth. What this means is that the income gap is on the rise and since I have established the connection between poverty and the Achievement Gap, then the Achievement Gap is also on the rise. If we do not find a way to counter the issue of poverty then the Achievement Gap will continue to grow.

**Thoughts and Recommendations**

It’s very clear that the Achievement Gap is caused by poverty. As much research shows, areas of high poverty do much worse academically in comparison to their middle to high class counterparts. A good example of this in action is the above comparison of Brownsville to Park Slope. Both areas are located within the borough of Brooklyn. One area is historically poor and the other historically wealthy. Both areas have maintained their poor/wealthy status and their school mirror that. In the wealthy areas the schools do much better than schools in poor areas. They do not experience many financial issues and their test scores are very high. The children have everything they need and then some. In addition, the parents in the neighborhood know
how to navigate the system to get exactly what their children need. The area is not cut off from the rest of New York City. In fact many subway lines, buses, and a ferry system can get you there. It is located very close to Manhattan and everyone has taken interest in the neighborhood. Brownsville on the other hand, is plagued by underfunding of its schools and they are failing miserably. The children are lacking the basic necessities because their parents cannot afford to give to them and most of them have no idea the resources available to them, such as private school vouchers, food programs, and housing assistance; because nobody goes out of their way to make it common knowledge. The area is not in close proximity to any suburbs or any of the nicer areas in Brooklyn. But this problem goes much further than Brooklyn. This problem is widespread. So many of our poor areas are being forgotten. Or perhaps they are not forgotten. Maybe no one knows exactly how to fix the problem.

I do not argue that there is a simple fix. After all if there was then all of the policies that have been rolled out would have fixed the issue. One thing I do argue is that the only way that our schools in poor urban neighborhoods will get the help that they need and the only way to begin to close to the Achievement Gap is to roll out policies that tackle the issue of poverty directly. These areas need to be developed. People need to take more of an interest in the areas and invest in them. While some of the people in the areas may be resistant to change at first, bringing in new businesses not only well known chains, but small businesses that would boost the economies of poor neighborhoods. In addition, instead of bringing in a team of outsiders to work in these companies, bring in the people of the neighborhood and provide them with employment opportunities. Providing employment is only part of the solution. Many people in these areas do not have stability and need a place to live. We need programs to build up the area
and provide housing for low income residents. Now I am not taking about "affordable housing" as it tends to not be affordable to most people in New York City and tends to take into consideration one’s credit when most low income people have bad credit or no credit. The affordable housing could potentially be built where there are vacant lots or old buildings not in use. Furthermore, there should be more community centers. Not just places for after schools and activities for children, but for the adults. These community centers should be welcoming and inviting and utilize people in the community to create a place that is comfortable for the people of the given area. The community center could serve as a hub, connecting the community to outside resources such as activities outside the neighborhood and professional development. There could also be programs such as GED, parenting courses, and teaching them how to get the most of the education system for their children. This would help them to improve themselves and therefore improve the lives of their children.

After we build up the communities, then we can work on the schools. It may sound farfetched to some, but after setting all of the above into action we would have a poor neighborhood whose economy is not as bad, which means increased funds in the area. There would also be more educated individuals, which would lead to them feeling empowered, for there is no greater strength than to possess than knowledge. I believe that this would lead to less crime. The community members would be grateful that people took the time to help and invest in the community will feel valued and in turn invest in the neighborhood themselves. Not necessarily with their money, but with their time. All of this positivity would make its way in to the school, where it would manifest itself in parents being much more involved. In terms of school funding, the parents and staff finally coming together could perhaps now fight together on
behalf of the children and get exactly what is needed as we see parents and staff do in more well-off areas.

Only after we correct the issues of poverty in the area will any reform work. Nothing within the schools will work without the community surrounding it being in a good place in terms of money and in terms of stability.
Conclusion

The Achievement Gap has been an issue here in the United States for decades. There are many people before me that have made the Achievement Gap their main focus. Instead of taking a race based look at the Achievement Gap, in this thesis I've looked that the class based Achievement Gap. I have chosen to do so because the income gap is growing at a very fast pace and research shows that as fast as the income gap is growing, the Achievement Gap is growing at the same rate. There have been many efforts to close the gap, however all of them have failed and this is because none of the reforms have done anything to solve the main cause of the Achievement Gap which I argue is poverty. With that being said, discussing the current state of poverty was very important. It is a discussion that is almost always left out of the conversation when new reforms are created and in conversations regarding past reform efforts. People appear to be almost completely unaware that poverty in the United States is as bad as it is and when taking a look at poverty here in New York City, the numbers are even more alarming. Most of the people living in poverty are children. This says a lot about the current state of education here in a city where many children are currently living in poverty.

In making the connection between the Achievement Gap and poverty there are many works that can be referenced. Richard Rothstein is one of the most heavily cited people when discussing the Achievement Gap. He was one of the individuals that believed that the Achievement Gap is caused by poverty because the ways in which they experience education is different at almost every level. He explored the differences in terms of the reading gap, the conversation gap, and other missing necessities children of low income areas do not receive such as access to after school and outside activities. In addition, Gary Orfield and Chungemei Lee also
agreed stating that low income communities are often times isolated and cut off from resources. They also discuss the affects that poverty has on the community, which in turn affects the schools and the quality of education provided to the students in these areas. Furthermore, researchers Virginia Burney and Jayne Beilke also argue that poverty has a major impact on the Achievement Gap. They demonstrated this through their discussion of schools in low income neighborhood being less likely to offer a rigorous curriculum or advanced courses. In addition they referenced a study conducted by Abbott and Joireman (2011) in which they found that low income explained much of the differences in academic achievement.

In an effort to add my own proof to what was already offered I decided that the perfect example to demonstrate connection between poverty and income would be the areas of Brownsville and Park Slope. Both areas are located in Brooklyn, however when reading the history of how the areas developed, how these neighborhoods turned out, and how the schools are you get two completely different pictures. In Park Slope where the median income is over $90,000 the schools are great. In addition, the students do better than most of the students in the borough in terms of testing. In fact, so many parents want their children in the Park Slope schools that it has led to overcrowding and the creation of new schools to alleviate that stress. The overall level of education attainment in the area is high, with many adults in the area holding bachelor’s degrees or higher. The areas surrounding the schools are beautiful and well maintained and there are very low crime rates. There are many expensive properties, restaurants, shops, and greenspaces in the area making the schools’ location ideal. Then we have Brownsville where the median income is barely over $30,000 and the schools are failing. And it is not just a hand full of schools failing, over half of the schools in the neighborhood are failing. The students are not doing well on state tests. Very few of the schools have a 10 percent passing rate.
The area surrounding the schools is poverty stricken. There are numerous housing projects in the area and most of the residents in the area are dependent upon varies forms of government assistance. These two areas show the relation between income and academic achievement. The large gaps found here are very telling of what is currently occurring within the education system here in the United States.

In the introduction to this thesis I stated that one might ask what my contribution to the study of the Achievement Gap would be. I am hoping that with the submission of this thesis I have opened some eyes to the issue of the class based Achievement Gap. Often times people discuss the Achievement Gap in terms of race, but it is extremely important that we begin to examine the gap in terms of class. I am hopeful that the case study provided has helped to bring the huge issue we have at hand down to a level in which it could be understood by many. I am also hoping that these numbers may encourage others to take a closer look at what is happening with our education system today and what steps we can take to fix it.
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Autobiographical Statement

I was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York to two extremely hard working parents. My mother a Brooklyn native, instilled in me from a very young age the importance of education. She has always been the one to push me to go further and is a huge part of I am reason that I have made it this far. My mother has been one of my greatest supporters thus far. My father, born in Guyana has worked two jobs for as long as I can remember to make sure that my sister and I always received the best educations and experienced all that life had to offer. My parents sacrificed all and settled for the least favorable conditions of raising us in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn. My early education took place in both the Bedstuy and Brownsville sections of Brooklyn. Determined to see that I was successful in life my parents invested all that they could so that myself and my younger sister could attend private school in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn and Downtown Brooklyn.

As a young adult I studied at SUNY Morrisville State College. Underprepared for the college education I received, I began to fail miserably. There were many professors that dedicated a lot of time to me and my education in order to help me succeed. I would argue that they were successful to a degree. Upon receiving my Associate’s degree from Morrisville State College, I returned home to Brownsville, Brooklyn and took a year off of school because I gave birth to my son. To complete my undergraduate education I decided to attend The City College of New York and majored in Sociology. While at City College I was first a member, then the Student Advisor, and later the Vice President of the Caribbean Students Association. Although it was difficult to finish school with a young son, I managed to graduate Cum Laude with high academic achievement awards for each semester I attended school.
I will always consider my time spent at the CUNY Graduate Center the most valuable of my academic career. During my time here I developed my love of Education. It was also here that I got inspired to do something to help fix schools in low income areas. I’ve decided to dedicate my life to helping to improve schools in low income neighborhoods, starting with the area I know best, Brownsville, Brooklyn. This has led to my becoming a part of the Teach for America Corps and I will be teaching in the Brownsville Section of Brooklyn this fall.

For all of those that believed in me, I am forever grateful.