

Dropped Out or Pushed Out?

Narrator: Recent media reported that only about half of Black, Latino and Native students graduate from Seattle Public Schools. Gayl, who is African American, and her boyfriend, Diego, are raising their child, who they had when they were fifteen. She lives with her parents at Yesler Terrace, a public housing project and attends Garfield High School. Due to occupancy standards, Diego cannot live with them. Diego, who is El Salvadoran, recently dropped out of Garfield. He works evenings at a gas station near her school which allows him to care for his daughter during the day while Gayl continues with school. He meets them at school for lunch each day so they can have family time.

Recently, Diego was arrested for selling marijuana, which he justified as a way to provide necessary income for his family since his job only pays minimum wage. Gayl is struggling to both maintain her grades and keep her attendance up due to childcare needs. Gayl is in a meeting with the school social worker, Jessica, who is white, and her favorite teacher Carlos, who is Filipino. Carlos is one of the few teachers of color at her school.

Jessica: I wanted to start by saying what a strength it is that you have stayed in school, most girls in your position would have dropped out sooner. Unfortunately, we are here today to talk about your violations of the Districts attendance policy. Once again, you have had more than seven unexcused absences this past month. We may have to refer you to Juvenile Court for a truancy petition. This will require you to go to a Truancy Workshop.

Carlos: Gayl, I would love for you to stay in school, but your absences are affecting our classrooms and your grades. It seems like you need to either get your act together or consider dropping out of school. Have you thought about getting a GED instead?

Gayl: I know I need a real high school diploma. How can I attend a Truancy Workshop, I barely have time to make it to school. Diego and I are working hard to make sure I graduate. I just have one more year. Don't you believe I am smart enough to do it?

Carlos: From the recent thing I have heard about Diego, I fear he may be more part of your problem than a solution for you.

Narrator: Gayl leaves the meeting feeling defeated. She runs into Brandon, a white student who is a leader in student government.

Brandon: Wow, I was bummed to hear about Diego! Without him none of us would have access to all that great stuff we get from him. How is he doing?

Gayl: His court date is this afternoon so he will finally get out of Juvenile Detention. Hopefully he will still have his job. It looks like I may have to drop out now, seems I just don't have what it takes to graduate from high school.

Brandon: I am sure you can, it just takes more self-discipline and determination. Try harder, Gayl, it is definitely a lot of work. If I can support you in tutoring, let me know.

Gayl: Thanks, but I am already part of the Youth Tutoring Program down the street at Catholic Community Services. It is great when I can get there, I just need more childcare so I can go.

Narrator: After school Gayl hurries downtown to meet her parents at Diego's court hearing. Afterwards, she and Diego are deciding how to move forward.

Diego: This is impossible. It is my first offense so they say they let me off easy. But they gave me a SODA- it means "stay out of drug area"- and I cannot go to a three block area where I was arrested or I will violate my parole. The three blocks includes where Garfield and my job is.

Analyzing manifestations of racial inequity in high school graduation rates:

Based on the scenario, answer the following questions in order to better understand the different ways racial inequity is perpetuated, and how strategies from a structural lens will better support us in creating racial equity.

What are examples of Individual Racism manifested in the scenario?

(internalized racial superiority, internalized racial oppression and discrimination between people of different races)

What are examples of Institutional Racism manifested in the scenario?

(policies, practices and procedures that work to the benefit of white people and to the detriment of people of color, usually unintentionally and inadvertently.)

What are examples of Structural Racism manifested in the scenario? (the interplay of policies, practices and programs of differing institutions and organizations which leads to the adverse outcomes for communities of color compared to white communities that occurs within the context of the history and culture of racism.)

What are strategies that can be used to counter structural racism and lead to racial equity?