BUILDING UNDERGROUND SCHOOLS TO SURVIVE NUCLEAR WAR AND DESEGREGATION IN THE 1960S

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In the 1960s federal agencies in the United States encouraged the building of protected schools designed to survive a nuclear attack. A number of designs, including underground schools, were constructed. In order to promote the building of protected schools, the US government produced a number of propaganda films for school boards and governors. In addition to promoting post-nuclear survival, these films considered that protected schools were beneficial in terms of progressive and child-centred education as well as racial assimilation. This paper considers how securitisation and progressive education found a common purpose at this time and considers the implications of this for race equality.

The two research questions are to consider how conceptions of security and progressive education are related, and to examine the implications of this for race equality.

The data is based upon rare, archival film from the US National Archives in College Park, Maryland on school protection during the Cold War. These films, intended for wider public consumption, were intended as promotional shorts for schools boards. Each film was viewed multiple times at the archive, transcribing text and making still photographs. This dual data was then used to form a narrative account of the argument structure of the films to identify how securitisation and progressive education were used as distinct, and complimentary, discourses.

The discussion uses conceptions of ‘flexible whiteness’ to examine how securitisation, a discourse identified with white hegemony, can additionally contain conceptions of race equality and progressivism. The paper also discusses historical understandings of progressive education and security.

The primary finding is that there is a complimentary relationship between progressive education and the protected school in official discourses in the 1960s. This includes a historically situated conception of race equality. Although this could be seen to be supportive of Bell’s conception of ‘interest convergence’ it could also be seen as reflecting the increased political power of black and minority ethnic groups in school boards during this period.