

Conference Contemplates Black Education

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In the waning moments of an all-day conference on black education in New Orleans, a fourth-grade teacher at Harney Elementary School reminded audience members that "education does not start or end with school," succinctly summarizing a theme that recurred throughout the day: that community rebuilding and restoration are essential to educational reform.



Tulane students like Charles Gaspard devote service hours to tutoring and other activities that bolster the education of students in New Orleans. (Photo by Sally Asher)

"Before and After Katrina: Black Education in New Orleans," a program organized by the Tulane University [African and African Diaspora Studies program](#), took place on Wednesday (March 11), bringing together a panel of local and regional educators to contemplate historical, social and cultural considerations relating to the education of African American children in New Orleans.

"Look at the healthcare disparity, poor housing, broken value systems, violence and safety concerns, unemployment rates ? I'm wondering if we are truly surprised that

our public school system is inadequate," said Nicole Carryl, the teacher at Harney.

Earlier in the program, Joyce King, professor of educational policy studies at Georgia State University, voiced her concern that persistent demeaning cultural narratives in the media and public discourse on what it means to be black are impediments to successfully educating black children. She questioned the value of an education that is not rooted in the cultural and social identity of the student.

"You can graduate with the highest test score," said King, "but if you cannot think about your own community, know yourself as a member of a community and feel some obligation and some competence to serve your community, the answer to my question is your education is not [satisfactory]."

Other issues addressed during the session, which was held on campus in the Lavin-Bernick Center for University Life, included those dealing with early childhood education, charter schools, selective admission, self-determination of schools and the lack of federal support in rebuilding the city's post-Katrina educational system.

The conference was made possible through support of the [Scott S. Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives](#) and the [Deep South Regional Humanities Center](#).