

Gifted and Advanced Black Students in School: An Anthology of Critical Works edited by T. C. Grantham, D. Y., Ford, M. S. Henfield, Scott, M. Trotman, D. A. Harmon, S. Porchèr, & C. Price. Waco, Texas: Prufrock Press, 2011. 384 pp. ISBN-13: 978-1593637002

The history of American schools is littered with well-documented examples of unequal access to educational opportunities for various targeted groups, most notably students who identify as non-white. Black students, in particular, have historically encountered — and continue to face — both overt and covert forms of racism that marginalize them at all levels of the educational pipeline. For example, educators perpetuate stereotypes about the abilities of Black students by continuing to deny them access to advanced learning opportunities (e.g., Strayhorn & Terrell, 2010). Tarek C. Grantham and colleagues have compiled a comprehensive anthology that seeks to challenge this underrepresentation of Black students as gifted and advanced students. In *Gifted and Advanced Black Students in School: A Critical Anthology*, the editors present a collection of carefully selected narratives and original research that reframe the discourse associated with advanced and gifted students. As aptly stated in the text’s prologue, “*Everyone* suffers when gifted Black students are overlooked or denied, regardless of the reason — *all* students should be given an opportunity to reach their potential and to participate in high-quality gifted programs” (p. xvi). This philosophy clearly guided the editors as they compiled a volume of seminal works that is as powerful as it is practical.

The text is a collection of twenty-six works that demonstrate remarkable span in terms of focus and content. Organized in seven sections, a unique and useful feature of the book is the introductory essay to each section that provides context for the pieces included within each section. In the foreword, Dr. Alexinia Y. Baldwin commends the editors on the “organization of the anthology, which gives the reader a chance to select the time, author, and area of concern without having to go through the entire publication” (p. xii). Indeed the breadth of topics covered, which includes historical context, issues with intelligence testing, and challenges to deficit thinking, could overwhelm a novice scholar seeking a basic understanding of the challenges encountered by Black advanced and gifted students. This possibility is minimized by the editors’ care to organize the text and provide meaningful introductions to each section. Arguably the text could be presented in multiple volumes; however, the text does not suffer from its current form because of the attention to detail described above.

The first section appropriately provides readers with a historical context and background of issues associated with developing inclusive gifted education. In this section’s introduction, Ford, Grantham, and Henfield unapologetically express their “frustration [which] rests with the conviction that

underrepresentation is unnecessary, preventable, *and* solvable,” (p. 1). The three chapters that follow support the editors’ frustrations, with extensive literature reviews and original research that demonstrates educators should have been quicker and more effective in their responses to the underrepresentation of Black students in advanced and gifted education. While all three chapters present meaningful support, Ford’s chapter titled “Desegregating Gifted Education: A Need Unmet” details a set of critical and practical recommendations that is particularly beneficial for connecting theory to practice, including a call to redefine underachievement and intelligence, and more frequent use of multidimensional assessments.

Sections II and III focus on identifying and supporting Black advanced and gifted students with particular attention paid to the culturally relevant traits that distinguish Black students from their peers (e.g., creativity, community values, and leadership). In the introduction to Section II Grantham celebrates the contributions of E. Paul Torrance’s work on creativity and innovation exemplified by Black youth that are typically overlooked by educators. Subsequent chapters, three of which are publications written by Torrance, detail the issues associated with establishing creativity as a “valid” means of identifying talented and gifted students. Overlooking creativity that is uniquely embodied by Black students is one way in which educators perpetuate disparate representation in advanced and gifted courses. Additional oversights are the focus of Section III, which presents five chapters that challenge traditional constructions of advanced and gifted students as those who perform well on intelligence tests (e.g., Stanford-Binet exam) and embody individualistic personality traits. These five treatises call on educators to consider the role that cultural constructions of giftedness play in the identification, inclusion, and support of targeted students in advanced programs. The purpose of these works is best summarized by Frasier and Passow’s declaration that “strategies need to be employed that consider a variety of factors... within and across cultural groups and diverse environmental contexts... [so] that *educators will better understand how to identify and nurture talent potential among all learners* (italics original)” (p. 135).

Some of the most compelling support for the claims made by the authors in the previous sections is found within Sections IV and V, which challenge the traditional tools for measuring intelligence and stereotypes that marginalize Black students’ intellectual acumen. The nine chapters contained within these two sections are especially critical, and rightly so, of IQ tests and standardized assessments of intelligence that are culturally biased, thereby perpetuating the negative myths and stereotypes of Black students. Section IV focuses on the contributions of Martin D. Jenkins, whose work is heralded by Henfield as “scholarship [that] reminded readers — supporters and nonsupporters — of where we were or have been, where we are, and where we need to go for the better good

of *all* citizens” (p. 155). The editors then provide reprints of four works by Jenkins that, indeed, demonstrate his commitment to challenge an oppressive system by calling attention to those Black students who are “highly intelligent” as defined by I.Q. scores. The section that follows provides more contemporary evidence of the validity of Jenkins’ work. Chapters such as “Assessment and Identification of African-American Learners with Gifts and Talents” and “Nondiscriminatory Assessment: Considerations for Gifted Education” implore the reader “to consider the extent to which: (a) there are systemic differences in the meaning of test scores... (b) people from two groups who have the same observed score do not have the same standing on the trait of interest, and (c) a test predicts some criterion of interest in the systemic over- or underprediction based on group membership” (Ford, Henfield, & Grantham, p. 202). Readers seeking empirical support for the ways in which standardized assessments marginalize Black students will find that this section provides the psychometric evidence needed to support such challenges.

While notable strengths in terms of content and coverage have been presented thus far, the final sections of the anthology provide more experienced scholars and educators with the most “food for thought.” The three chapters included in Section VI focus on issues related to the retention and recruitment of Black advanced and gifted students, and provide numerous recommendations to improve both. In Chapter 23, Moore III, Ford, and Milner introduce multiple theoretical perspectives and offer recommendations for practice that align with each model. Scholars seeking to continue this line of research and practitioners seeking possible “solutions” to issues encountered in the field will find numerous suggestions within this section.

The last section of the volume (VII) includes two thought-provoking chapters that address the future of Black advanced and gifted students in schools. Among the many questions posed by Ford, Moore III, Whiting, and Grantham in the conclusion of the final chapter are: “Will we continue to profess that scientists are neutral, value-free professionals? Will we continue to be overly generous with generalizations, assessing external validity, and making universal assumptions? Will we continue to conduct research on White gifted students and apply the findings to racially diverse gifted students?” (p. 373).

Given the crisis that exists today for Black students in higher education, what obligation do our post-secondary institutions, administrators, and faculty members have to learn from the literature on Black advanced and gifted students to improve the educational opportunities and experiences of these students? Although surely not the first time these questions have been asked, I wonder: How can (and should) we revise our admission criteria to open access for Black students? How can (and should) we adapt our curriculum and pedagogy to demonstrate value for “other” forms of intelligence (e.g., creativity, innovation,

and community engagement)? Overall, *Gifted and Advanced Black Students in School: An Anthology of Critical Works* provides a useful context for understanding the marginalization of high-achieving Black students in secondary education. Although the editors acknowledge that they could not include all works on the subject, it may have been useful to expand the final section and provide additional pieces that examine the future of Black students that extends from schools to colleges to post-graduate education. An extended examination of the critical issues raised throughout this text is needed and a useful next step.

References

Strayhorn, T. L., & Terrell, M. C. (2010). *The evolving challenges of Black college students: New insights for practice and research*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Reviewer

James M. DeVita, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Counselor Education-College Student Affairs at the University of West Georgia. James earned his doctorate in Higher Education Administration from the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, where his dissertation included three research projects on the experiences and development of gay male college students. He currently serves as a co-chair on the program committee for the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) and on the editorial board of the *Journal of Student Affairs and Research and Practice*. James has presented at various national and international conferences, including the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA). He has also published several book chapters and research articles in journals such as the *Journal of African American Studies* and *NASAP Journal*. His current projects examine the experiences of targeted populations in higher education, particularly LGBT and racial/ethnic minorities.