

Segregated Schools: Educational Apartheid in Post-Civil Rights America by Paul Street. New York and London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group. 2005. 222 pp. ISBN 0-415-95116-X.

On the campuses of many urban high schools, African American and Latino students are disproportionately sitting in poorly resourced and overcrowded classrooms in which they are taught by unqualified teachers, and where such basic essentials such as textbooks have become a rare commodity (Darling-Hammond, 1998, 2001; Oakes, 2002). Although the United States Supreme Court ruled that segregation was illegal fifty-two years ago, Paul Street makes it irrefutably clear in his book *Segregated Schools* that schools continue to be segregated, and in fact, have become increasingly more so since *Brown v. Board of Education*. Street offers a sobering critique on the state of U.S. schools in which *de facto* segregation, as expressed through persistent inequality in the distribution of educational resources, continues to undermine the educational opportunities of Students of Color. Street's critique also extends to include a discussion on the negative consequences of neoconservative and neoliberal policies, which have spearheaded the accountability movement, increased high stakes testing, and opened the door to the privatization of public schools via charter and voucher programs.

While it has been well documented that schools, particularly urban schools, continue to be segregated (Orfield, 1997; Orfield, Frankenburg & Lee, 2003) Street brings necessary attention to the ways in which macro economic and social policies limit access to jobs, housing, and healthcare, ultimately affecting the quality of education students receive. One of Street's main contentions is that residential segregation leads to school funding inequalities resulting in unequal and inadequate resources, teachers, and facilities that limit opportunity for many low-income students and Students of Color. While Street focuses on the ways in which residential segregation leads to school segregation, he acknowledges that the answer is not as simple as integrating Blacks into white communities. Rather his point speaks to the ways in which living in certain residential communities either limits or enhances the potential for receiving quality learning opportunities.

Street uses the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) as an example of the disparate treatment experienced by Students of Color within an urban school system. Within CPS only 9 percent of students are white, while 74 percent are Black. This, Street asserts, is characteristic of many schools in large cities such as New York, Boston, and Atlanta. Part of the problem with the *Brown* (1954) decision, Street argues, is that the focus by Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP on integration was a mistake because it failed to acknowledge and/or address the issue of equity between white and Black schools. Street cites civil rights attorney, Derrick Bell, who in his analysis of *Brown*, found fault with the decision because

no provisions were made requiring schools to offer Black students educational resources equal to those received by white students.

In addition to his focus on the unjust segregation of US schools, Street analyzes the current political climate and the influence of neoliberalism and neoconservatism on the market driven educational policies of today. In addressing these ideologies, Street focuses on *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) and the impact this legislation has had on one student, Rayola, who lives in a low-income neighborhood on the south side of Chicago. When Rayola's school failed to meet NCLB's adequate yearly progress (AYP) quality threshold, she was given the opportunity to go to a better performing school. Although a transportation subsidy was provided to support the longer commute to her new school, there were many days when her family was forced to use the subsidy for food and rent. Without the support, Rayola missed several days of school, forcing her mother to place the child in a lower-quality school closer to home. The troubling irony of Rayola's story offers a powerful insight into the ways in which educational policies of accountability and efficiency fail to speak to the broader economic and social inequities that persist in the lives of poor Students of Color. Through this powerful example, Street gives a human face to the individual cost of continued segregation created by the neoliberal and neoconservative push for privatization through school accountability legislation.

Under NCLB, many parents with children attending low-performing schools have the *choice* to send their children to better performing schools, while many low-performing schools, predominantly located in low income communities of color, are being shut down for failing to comply with so-called minimum performance standards. Street argues that the conservative ideology fueling the standards and accountability movement is setting the stage for market driven educational policies such as vouchers and charter schools. In making this point Street turns to Asa Hilliard who argues that:

Today's scripted, cookie-cutter, minimum-competency managed instruction...is offered mainly in low-income minority cultural group schools. Affluent public or private schools...rarely if ever use the scripted non-intellectual programs. This is the new segregation (Hilliard quoted in Street, 2005, p. 80).

Consequently, Street argues that while segregation has been outlawed, current ideologies and policies are reproducing segregated schools. Like Jean Anyon (1997), Street believes that true educational reform will occur only with a larger ideological, social, political, and economic transformation. Therefore, in order for educational change in urban areas to be successful it "has to be part and parcel of more fundamental social change" (Anyon quoted in Street, 2005, p. 127). Therefore, there must be "an all-out attack on poverty and racial isolation that by necessity will affect not only the poor but the more affluent as well" (127-128).

In focusing on Rayola's story it is clear that Street does not believe that education alone can ameliorate larger systemic inequalities. As a result, Street turns to the Coleman Report (1966), which concluded that racial differences in school resources were not statistically related to racial differences in test measured academic performance (121). Instead, the study concluded that socioeconomic factors determined the academic performance of Black students more than the resources available in the school. Street also uses the work of Christopher Jencks who believes that students are "much more influenced by what happens at home than what happens in school. They may also be more influenced by what happens on the streets and by what they see on television" (123).

While both the Coleman Report and Jencks recognize the important role that socioeconomic status plays in the academic achievement of students, Street fails to question the culturally deficit argument that underlies the "culture of poverty" (Lewis, 1966) concept. For instance, in the case of Rayola, Street emphasizes her mother's lack of education, the inherent dangers of her neighborhood, the excessive amount of television she watches each day, the absence of books present in the home, and the relative nonexistence of parental control. From this portrayal, it would be easy to conclude that this particular family's struggle with poverty was inextricably linked to their own cultural deficits. While Street is successful in bringing attention to the larger systemic forces that influence the academic achievement of students throughout his book, he misses an important opportunity to contest claims that individual agency is to blame for Rayola's ongoing struggles. In addition, while it is important to recognize and critique the ways in which market driven policies have affected education, it would have been beneficial for Street to have offered specific recommendations on how to challenge current neoliberal and neoconservative policies if fundamental economic, social, and political change is to occur.

While Street does not offer specific ways to ameliorate current socioeconomic disparities, he does argue that students be provided with a counter-narrative through which they might develop a critical framework for questioning current educational inequities, while at the same time, helping to propose egalitarian and democratic alternatives to existing ideology. Enhancing criticality would not only raise awareness about the oppressive contexts in which students and teachers must operate within, but would also encourage the engagement of parents and communities in the struggle for more just schools.

Albeit a landmark ruling for educational equity, Street reminds us that *Brown* has failed to desegregate U.S. public schools. More importantly, he offers a compelling rationale for why tremendous disparities exist between majority Black and white schools. Street convincingly argues that the hegemonic influences of current neoliberal and neoconservative policies, often presented

under the guise of equity reform, only serve to reinforce the current social and racial hierarchy. Consequently, he is ardent in his belief that all stakeholders acknowledge, understand, and attempt to transform the current structural and ideological conditions that allow for disparities to persist. This is a valuable book for policy makers, educators, and students alike, and serves as a stark reminder that fifty-two years after *Brown*, the struggle for equitable schools continues.

References

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Reviewer

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