Book review

Students of the Dream: Resegregation in a Southern City
by Yow R.C.
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Few Americans would argue with the idea that public education should ensure an equal chance to succeed for children of different backgrounds. However, low-income black students and other students of color remain those of whom most is asked and to whom least is delivered. Their experiences have been an issue of critical concern within the educational research, practice and policy community for several decades, as racially segregated schools of the twenty-first century greatly mimic the profound inequalities of the mid-twentieth century. Despite decades of research demonstrating the dangers of racial isolation for low-income students of color and the benefits of integrated education, the rhetoric and strategies of the education reform act, No Child Left Behind that reshaped the landscape of public education between 2001 and 2012, have done nothing to confront the rapid resegregation of public schools.

Using ethnographic research, Ruth Carbonette Yow follows the students of Marietta High, which for decades was the flagship public school of a mostly white suburban community in Cobb County, Georgia, just northwest of Atlanta, and explores their experiences with desegregation, integration and resegregation. Today, as the school's majority black and Latino students struggle with high rates of poverty and depressing test scores and graduation rates, Marietta High has become a symbol of the wave of resegregation that is sweeping white students and students of color into separate schools across the American South. The author concludes that the failure of local, state or national policies to stem the tide of resegregation is leading activists, including students, parents, and teachers, to reject traditional integration models and to look for other ways to improve educational outcomes among African American and Latino students.

The author's relationship to this study is an etic perspective. Educated at a private school, Yow grew up in Cobb County, which had one of the fastest growing Latino populations in the country and where 40 per cent of children lived in poverty. Yow discloses that as a teenager she could count all the nonwhite kids she knew on one hand, and she knew of no peers receiving government assistance. With a PhD in American Studies and African American Studies from Yale University, Yow is now an ethnographer and historian of justice struggles and public education. Yow researches, teaches and writes about race and ethnicity, activism, citizenship, servant-leadership and community formation. Due to the content provided and level of writing used in this

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book, the author's intended audience includes educational leaders, researchers, policymakers and community members, who are seeking to gain a better understanding of how past and present educational policies and practices affect learning opportunities and experiences of students of color.

This book is concisely organized into four chapters, which is preceded by an introduction and followed by a conclusion and epilogue. Grounded in over one hundred interviews with current and former students, teachers, parents, community members and political leaders, Yow opens with interviews from the first generation of Marietta High desegregators, mandated by the landmark *Brown* v. *Board of Education* ruling, and focuses on football culture as a stage for racial reconciliation and harmony. However, that color- and class-blindness had little traction off the field, where lives unfolded as almost entirely segregated and race and poverty starkly determined the destinies of residents.

Yow proceeds to discuss school choice and structural inequality in Marietta city schools. In 1966, Marietta adopted a school desegregation plan known as school choice, allowing black and white students to transfer at will to any city school regardless of race. Although school choice was seemingly for everyone, the plan typically produced no attraction for white students to all-black schools, which placed the burden of transferring entirely on black students. Therefore, the choice offered to black students by this plan was between isolation in an all-white school or the limited and under-resourced curriculum and facilities of their home communities. School choice obscures structural inequality's impact on black students and segregation's cultural impact on black and white communities by suggesting that all black students had to do was simply choose equal resources, good facilities, and academic opportunities, which ostensibly were there for the taking.

Next, Yow suggests there is perhaps no greater betrayal of the legacy of *Brown* v. *Board of Education* than educational disfranchisement through academic tracking of black students to make desegregation more tolerable for whites. Separating students by academic ability creates distinctions that further stratify social and academic experiences and reinforce damaging individual and collective narratives regarding race, class, and achievement. The Civil Rights Era, and with it the Black Power, Red Power and Chicano Rights Movements, all targeted the unequal education offered to students of color, which manifested in special education, vocational programs, and remedial courses filled with these students, usually without regard to their talents, interests or academic abilities. Interviews with students illustrate how tracked academic programs reserve for a small number of high-income, mostly white students the great instruction, skills, and experiences that should be central to every high school education. Tracking is exacerbated by policies that do nothing to support, and arguably do much to undermine, the achievement of minority students. One student expressed, "there was just no expectations for black students to succeed", and unless they were Friday night football stars or crowd-drawing point guards, they were "worthless" to the city school system. Another student added, "major institutional and culturally constructed obstacles" often deter black students and convince them that they don't belong on an advanced track, among advanced students.

Finally, Yow declares that Latino students are the "new integrators." She further proclaims that the educational reform agenda in Marietta is a neoliberal one whose market-oriented education policy and programs are not designed to open doors for poor students of color or undocumented students. The author concludes that resegregation is a numerical, demographic reality in Marietta. Marietta City Schools are a system, like other resegregating urban districts, where reform has been guided by the goal of luring back affluent families

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and high-achieving children to what was once a predominantly white, flourishing community. However, this free market educational reform has neither drawn middle- and high-income families back nor ensured educational equity for the students who remain. Yow argues for a revitalized commitment to integration, but one that challenges many of the orthodoxies, including colorblindness. Although the integration efforts of the 1960s and 1970s in the Deep South focused on black and white students, the fight for integration today must encompass growing populations of immigrant students, especially those who are undocumented.

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