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Beyond Silenced Voices: Class, Race, and Gender in United States Schools—Revised edition.

Michelle Fine and Lois Weis (Eds.)

Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005, 330 pages

\$86.50 (hardcover, ISBN 0-7914-1285-7), \$25.95 (softcover, ISBN 0-7914-1286-5)

Weis and Fine's edited text explores class, race, and gender within the current system of education in the United States. While a noble endeavor, the conclusion of these reviewers is that this was too broad of scope to adequately cover in a single text: the discussion should have delved deeper into these three central topics. This book is actually a revision of a 1993 work by the same editors. While similar in design and overall topic, the authors and essays are totally different.

The word that came to mind at the conclusion of this book, and after subsequent reflection on all the essays, was *critical*. Similar to their previous works (Fine & Weis, 1998; Weis and Fine, 2000), these editors effectively used a critical lens to examine the cultural and social aspects of K-12 and higher education while examining the relationships between education, class, race, and gender. This book's multifaceted purpose was to examine marginalized voices present in the United States' educational system. It was also apparent that a secondary purpose of the editors may have been to effect change: they sought to direct the reader toward their conclusions.

To explore such diminished voices, the authors appeared to cast too wide a net, one which allowed initial review of class, race, and gender, but in-depth discussions and implications

were only sporadically present throughout the text. The book did not live up to the promise of the title. Despite this shortcoming, the text was refreshing in its willingness to tackle social, political, and cultural concepts that impact a student's pursuit of education and amassed strong links between socio-economic class, race, and gender and missed opportunities for and in education.

The editors organized the text in three sections. The first section addressed how educational policies, politics, and practices structured exclusions within K-12 and higher education. Gary Orfield and Chungmei Lee reviewed segregation 50 years after Brown, and Walter Haney and associates considered trends in attrition, retention, and graduation rates in the United States' educational pipeline. Susan Yonezawa and Amy Stuart Wells explored reform as redefining the spaces of school, Angela Valenzuela analyzed U.S.-Mexican youth and how subtractive schooling affected their opportunities, and George Smith chronicled the experience of gay students. One of our favorite chapters in this section was written by Janice Bloom where she addressed the hallowing promise of higher education and the political economy of access to change.

The second section, which began to interweave the metaphor of silence and the marginalized, explored topics from popular culture's portrayal of students to femininity. For example, Cameron McCarthy and associates reported on the representation of the inner city in contemporary film and television, and Stacey Lee explained the experiences of Hmong American high school students. An analysis of the cultural practice of talking was suggested by Heejung Kim and Hazel Rose Markus, and "girlhood" as defined by social class, schooling, and white femininities was explored by Lyn Mikel Brown. The culture of Black femininity and school success of first generation college students was presented by Carla O'Connor, L'Heureux

Lewis, and Jennifer Mueller. This section embodied the difficulty the editors had in maintaining a singular focal point for the text and began showing the book's lack of cohesiveness.

The final section revealed the editors' desire for change in the way that education is understood in the United States. It called for democratic education that embraces the changes they desire in society. Palestinian American identities were presented by Thea Renda Abu El-Haj, teaching about the confederate flag in South Carolina was discussed by Dennis Carlson and Susan Schramm-Pate, popular culture, pedagogy, and urban youth were explored by Greg Dimitriadis, and the alchemy of integrated spaces was explored by Mariá Elena Torre.

With such a broad scope it is no wonder this book was difficult to read. However, when read as individual essays, it pulsed with social, cultural, political, and educational problems and dilemmas. While it wearied the reader, it simultaneously encouraged the feeling that change in education is still necessary to include the marginalized populations of our society.

Though the focus of this book was on current trends, it is difficult to understand the present without further exploring the past—particularly in higher education. For this reason, the authors could have benefited their readers by including more than just the past thirty years trends in higher education and its relationship to the marginalized populations. This could have been accomplished in a more thorough introductory chapter which would have also made this text much more cohesive and less striated in its triad of topics. While these topics need interwoven discussion to highlight the issue of marginalization in higher education, this text's approach provided a thought-provoking exploration of issues, and a slight frustration at the lack of clear direction and overall depth relating to the issues of class, race, and gender in education today.

This text provides an overview of education's marginalized populations and an understanding of issues of gender, class, and race as they relate to education. Well-written and

willing to tackle tough issues, its critical lens is refreshing and intriguing. However, it is not a text best suited to singularly exploring any one of the three topics individually because it falls short of thorough, in-depth examinations relating to true problems in education in the United States today.

References

- Fine, M., & Weis, L. (1998). *The unknown city: Lives of poor and working-class young adults*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Weis, L., & Fine, M. (Eds.). (2000). *Construction sites: Excavating race, class, and gender among urban youth*. New York: Teachers College Press.