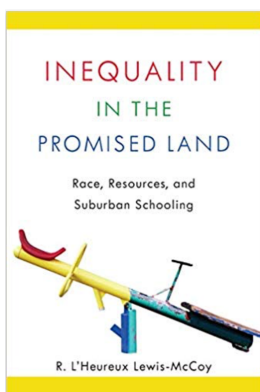


Inequality in the Promised Land: Race, Resources and Suburban Schooling

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Inequality the promised land: Race resources and suburban schooling is a well-written book by L'Heureux Lewis-McCoy, who conducted an ethnographic study in a suburban area in the mid-western United States for his doctoral dissertation. The dissertation evolved as an academic textbook due to its excellent description of the explored culture. He studied the relationship between families and those families' relationships with schools. Through this study, the author explored how invisible inequality and racism in an affluent suburban area became the barrier for minority students to grow up academically. Lewis-McCoy

also discovered the hope of the minority community for raising their children for a better future.

Inequality in the promised land contains eight chapters. The first chapter, "Welcome to Rolling Acres," was the introduction of the whole study. Lewis-McCoy described in brief about the data collection procedures he used, including the description of the community where the study took place. The author conducted about 100 interviews with parents, children, teachers, administrators, and community members and observed two fourth grade classrooms in two elementary schools in the Rolling Acres in the midwestern United States. In this chapter, he also gave some snapshots of his findings. He mentioned how black families experienced significantly different treatment from the schools than those of their white counterparts.

The author said, “This book is not simply about what it means to be black or white in suburban schools; rather it is about how being white provides unearned and pervasive advantages that, in implicit and explicit ways, constrain the black families to harvest the fruits of the suburban frontier” (p. 18).

The second chapter, “From Concern Cultivation to Opportunity Hoarding,” was about the influence of the affluent and white families to the schools. The families who raised their children through the concerted cultivation had a good connection with the schools and the schools always kept in touch with them for any school-related matter. Lewis-McCoy identified these practices as “The squeaky wheel gets the oil” (p. 43). These families influenced not only the schools but also the local school district. The author discovered that the affluent families created ownership over the school and the school district, due to their longstanding relationship, and strong social ties to local media. As a result, not only the poor black but also the poor white people became inferior to the school and the school district.

“Segmented Suburbia,” the third chapter was about the families’ desired educational outcomes in the Rolling Acres. The author identified the difference between the impoverished and affluent families in setting academic goals for their children. Lewis-McCoy has discovered that the majority of the black families “Pushing their children’s pursuit of education was to get a job that was better than their own” (p. 57). The author named it a “utility-focused approach.” On the other hand, the middle class and affluent families thought that education was for “Intellectual exploration and more abstract concepts of social good” (p. 57), which the author named as an “abstract approach.” The author also discovered that the social network of the families has a significant influence on setting their children’s career goals.

The fourth chapter, “Making Your Public School Private,” was about the dominance of the affluent families over the school and how the school was providing undue privileges to these people by the name of parental engagement. Lewis-McCoy found that social networks were critical factors for parental involvement and advocacy. Though the families of color and other low-income families had social networks, these networks did not allow a similar level of information and advocacy as the networks of the white middle-class and affluent families did. When the school provided any program such as a special session with administrators, wealthy white families worked diligently to give access to their similar kinds of families. According to the author, through the black and white families lived in the same location, did not have similar home-school relation.

“A Few Bad Apples Are Racist” was the fifth chapter that described the author’s findings of how people defined racism in the Rolling Acres. The author discovered that the experience and notion about racism were

different among the generations. The school-going black children saw racism differently and commented that those who were “bad apples” thought that race was a matter. Their parents believed that their children would eventually know the truth of racism in their real-life, which existed for generations in a different shape.

The sixth chapter, “Culture as a Hidden Classroom Resources,” was about how the teachers used the white middle-class culture in conducting teaching-learning in the studied schools. According to the author, “Teachers, both intentionally and unintentionally, used toolkits from their culture to develop strategies of interaction” (p. 119). The teachers used to employ white-culturally relevant pedagogy favoring the white and affluent. The students of color were unfamiliar with those pedagogies and could not cope with them; thus, the achievement gap was always visible. Lewis-McCoy also discovered from his observation that the teachers treated the students from the racial and economic minority in a different manner than their affluent counterparts.

“Black Exodus,” the seventh chapter, talked about the class division among the people of color. Many middle-class and affluent black people had their choice of choosing their children’s school. These families had social, economic, and cultural capital; thus, they influenced the school as the white middle-class and affluent had. The author quoted a wealthy black mother who said that “Educational customization was available to black families in public schools if they were able to push their social and cultural capital to work” (p. 152). Lewis-McCoy did not find the unified black community. The poor people of color had no voice and choice, and the affluent people of color did not raise their voice for the economically weak families even for the same race.

The last chapter, “Hope in the Promised Land,” is the conclusion of the study conducted by the author Lewis-McCoy. He showed three significant findings that hindered the people of the impoverished community from getting equal access in the school resources. The first one was “resource provision.” The school authority provided supplementary resources and services, “such as tutoring, enrichment club, and off-campus resources” (p. 162), and the families who had a close connection with the schools got the information first and took advantage. The second one was “resource value.” The people of the minority community failed to understand the value of the programs that the school offered due to the stratification of information among the parents. “Resource utilization,” the third one was about the uses of school services. The author found that the school provided services such as transportation, meal, childcare for siblings, and the minority families always expressed concern about the school’s deliberation of information and giving access to all as they could not enjoy the resources. Though all of the disparities, the author saw hopes in the eyes

of those parents in that community to have a better education and a better future for their children. In the concluding thought, Lewis-McCoy said, “I observed black parents and children with a strong desire to perform well academically” (p. 172).

Conducting an ethnographic study in a suburban area in the midwestern United States, where the best schools located, Lewis-McCoy discovered the real scenario of how economic and social capital of the families became the trajectory to their children’s education. The low-income families, even from the majority white community, found that high-quality education was desirable but not attainable. According to the author, “The disconnect between aspiration and realities was shaped by racial and economic fault lines that too few teachers, families, and scholars have been willing to address” (p. 172). At last, I can say that quality education for all is just a myth and a mere promise of the politicians that never exists in the real field. The findings are a wake-up call for the teachers, administrators, and policymakers to work diligently to ensure the promise of equality in education for all.

Reference

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