**Title:** Inequality in the promised land: race, resources, and suburban schooling

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Throughout American society, we have witnessed migrations of races shift from one location to another. In the middle twentieth century of America, we observed white middle-class families depart from the major cities to locations outside of the city to more racially identical areas called suburbs (Evans, 2007). The suburbs provide the same essentials of the city from private to public services. As with time, which always brings with it change, the once white middle-class suburbs are experiencing a shift within their community. According to Frey (2011), over the last 20 years there has been an influx of minorities leaving the city and finding a new beginning in the suburbs. In fact, “a large minority of Americans are living in suburbs. It has risen from, “37 percent in 1990, to 44 percent in 2000, to 51 percent in 2010” (Frey, 2011, p. 2).

One result of the changing suburbs has had a direct impact of public education in suburban schools. The classrooms that were once mainly homogenous white have now begun to change in response to the increase of minorities in the suburbs. Suburban schools are now confronted with meeting the needs of their increasing diverse population with their students of various ethnicity and parents (Evans, 2007).

In his timely book, Inequality in the promised land: Race, resources, and suburban schooling author R. L’Heureux Lweis-McCoy discussed key factors that he observed in the suburbs in midwestern America of the Rolling Acres Public School district( RAPS). This book is an addition to the author’s dissertation, in which, he conducted an ethnography of education in a suburban educational setting. The author is interested in looking at African Americans children attending public school in a suburban school system. The purpose of the book is to discuss inequalities with minorities in suburban school district. To get a deeper understanding of the topic the author states, “as suburban school districts become more racially and economically diverse, understanding how they respond to diverse families is essential to understand future path to equality” (p. 2). The author is interested in answering several questions of quality education, educational disparities, policy changes for equality, and responding to demographic changes. The author discuss topics that contributed to inequalities in the school district like resource hoarding, color blind policy- making, public verse private education, cultural unawareness, and black exodus. At the end of the book the author discuss his finding and provides suggestions to move the topic forward in a positive productive way with inequalities in the suburban school system.

The book provides a significant analysis of the history, beliefs, and impeding structures in the district that contribute to the impeding factors that add to the inequalities of RAPS. The balance of the book is noteworthy that the author was able to not only focus on topics of race (eg. discrimination, and stereotypes). The author discuss external factors that contributed to inequalities in the school district (eg. policy and housing). This gave a reader a holistic viewpoint of the variables that were contributing to inequalities in RAPS. This approach to the balance of the content made the book structure written in a logical context that made it easy to read. The author began with an introduction and gave some relevant information about the school district. This allowed the reader to have a deeper understanding of the culture of the school district and why some of the school district and the community member’s behavior and action were acceptable and understandable. The author gave you are deeper understanding of the beliefs of RAPS.

One of the more challenging topics that the author address is developing a method to gather and evaluate his data. The author explains in detail various theories and literature in the field from social reproduction theorist to raced-based explanation. The author is very methodical in his thinking when he expressed why the aforementioned theories would not work for his study. This gave me as a reader confidence that he really took the time to think out his methodology in how he was going to collect and interpret his data. When the author states that he was going to implement a relational resource analysis, I did not question his motives. The authors chapters were all tied into the title with a clear focus on his initial questions. The book constantly built upon one topic that lead to another. The book had a great alignment of clarity from the beginning to the end.

The greatest strength of the book was the author’s ability, over a one year period to conduct over 100 interviews with teachers, parents, principals, support staff, and educational advocates. These interviews give the author a detailed description on positive and underlining efforts being made in RAPS in the school system. The author is able to observe classrooms over the same time period. This help to support validity in his discoveries.

Politics is a theme that was discussed throughout the book that shaped the school system and community. The author discusses in-depth the politics of the community and how it impacted teachers, parents, and students. For example, information collected from the interviews indicate that the white community members are not aware that there are inequalities in the school system. The author states that the African-Americans did not talk about acknowledging that there are inequalities in the school system but that you have to navigate the system. There are two fundamental ways of thinking that the author overlooked. It was the thought of “denial verse acceptance.” To provide a better understanding, the majority of the white people he interviewed denied there was a problem. They blame any perceived inequality on the few kids. It is apparent to most of the white community their school system was fair and ever student had the same opportunity. In their mind, if a student was not doing well, the student was choosing to make individual decision not to do well. In the African-American community they seem to look past inequality, as if it was a given circumstance, and immediately switch to solution- oriented in how one can maneuver around RAPS to educate their child. Also, to support denial verse acceptance theme, the author discusses how the white parents were very clear with their kids to teach them color-blindness, while the black parents were often observed teaching their kids survival tactics on how to deal with people in their community.

With politics, the author misses an opportunity to develop a deeper explanation of the concept of social hoarding. For instance, He give examples of social hoarding and how the non- working white mothers would get involved in schools to promote their individual kid(s). That left me questions about this practice. The author could have conducted a deeper analysis on this behavior. Why do parent(s) feel like they need to participate in the practice? If this is a well-known phenomenon, why do the school districts allow it? The author may have been able to uncover practices of some underlining agreed upon inequalities that the school district and parents shared. This could have been another belief characteristic shared in the results.

Social class is addressed throughout the book. The author defines social class and the groups that made up the class. The author’s vagueness in not exploring all social classes questions the clarity of his analysis on the contribution of social class in RAPS. For example, the author talks very little about poor white students. It was not clear how poor white students compare to the poor African Americans. The author might have used any disparities to further justify his analysis. The author’s main focus is on affluent and middle-class families and how their tactics and behavior impact the inequality in the RAPS. By not giving equal attention to all the social class in RAPS, he presents a short-sightedness in his thinking. As a reader, it gives me the impression that the author feels that all the problems are from the wealthy white people and everyone else is a victim.

Another vagueness in the book is the culpability of all the social classes in RAPS. The author overshadows in the book that there is an affluent African-American class in the district. The author refers to this social class as implementing tactics of exodus or the private school attendees. There is a connection I made with this black exodus. It reminds me of the movement “with all deliberate speed.” It reminds me of reading articles about middle class and affluent African-American in the late fifties leaving their neighbors and schools (Historically black colleges) to follow other opportunities. This left the poorer African American (who did not have the resources to leave) to fend for themselves and fall further behind in life.

Connection is a topic that the book discussed. The author acknowledges that he had a hard time making connections with the poor Africans in the community. The emphasis on connections were appropriately aligned to the author view on trust in the community. The author made a significant connection when he interpreted a lack of trust within the community made it difficult for people to have positive connections.

One of the most relevant topics that is discussed in this book was the chapter on culture as a hidden classroom resource. The author had the opportunity to observe five teachers classroom over an extended period of time. The themes that emerge from the chapter could read from any scholarly journal about cultural competencies and race in any school across the country. The author witness in the schools topics of self- fulfilling-prophecy, teachers’ inability to make connections with minority students, teacher student misconceptions, teacher pedagogy, inconsistent discipline of minority students, and the achievement gap. What I found fascinating about this section is a reader could develop their own internal bias that could be concluded from this section. A reader could think that the author is saying, “White teachers are the ones struggling with this topic of teaching minority students.” I was pleased that the author had the opportunity to observe a black teacher over an extended period of time and witnessed the same themes of cultural incompetency. It does reminded me that we have to work with teachers and not be afraid to question their individual belief system about culture and race.

The author is forthcoming in his book, Inequality in the promised land: race, resources, and suburban schooling. When we as a society, are consistently fixed on inner-city schools and the inequalities the students endure on a daily basis. At the same moment, in the swell of a tsunami, waves of minority students in suburban schools are being pulled by unfamiliar variables in all different directions that are causing a ripple effect of inequality in their public education. This book helps bring to life the real life dilemmas that suburban school districts are encountering in their school system. It is only when we acknowledge these dilemmas as a crisis that we can honestly take the first real step toward solutions.

References:

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