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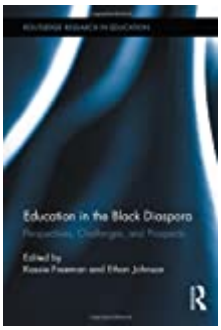

Kassie Freeman, Ethan Johnson, eds. *Education in the Black Diaspora: Perspectives, Challenges, and Prospects.* Routledge Research in Education Series. New York: Routledge, 2011. 214 pp. $125.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-415-89034-2.

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The Black Diaspora: Searching for the Center

Education in the Black Diaspora, edited by Kassie Freeman and Ethan Johnson, consists of a preface by the editors, twelve chapters, a conclusion/concluding thoughts, a listing of contributors, and an index. There are also three tables and three figures (graphs) attached to chapter 10, âEducation and Pasifika Communities in Aotearoa/New Zealand,â authored by Camille Nakhid. In the preface, the editors note the dearth of research on the educational dilemmas facing black populations in the diaspora. To remedy this deficiency, they call for research that includes a strengthened and more central view of Africa and the diaspora within the complex of New World history. So rather than place black populations in the diaspora on the periphery, the editors seek to place them at the center and to emphasize the educational experiences of these groups within the context of their political, social, and cultural histories.

The chapters are divided into three parts. Part 1 examines the similar and dissimilar experiences of black studentsâ schooling from a historical perspective and âsets a transnational context for the debate of Black studentsâ differential schooling experiencesâ (p. xv). The editors affirm that it is not possible to separate the experiences of black students from the actions and attitudes of the dominant population. But although majority-minority populations are interconnected in complex ways, research on black students should not merely stand as a foil to the dominant narrative. In part 2, the contributors analyze the schooling experiences of black populations that have resulted from the vestiges of colonization, the slave trade, and the realization that migration is necessary to achieve economic and social survival. In part 3, the editors discuss future challenges and recommendations for continuing the conversation and suggest a paradigm for research on this topic. Although Freeman contributes a chapter on the historical overview of the topic, Johnsonâs contributions are limited to coauthoring the preface and concluding thoughts.

Reviewing the educational challenges of black populations in the diaspora in chapter 1, Freeman points out that blacks across various societies have had similar experiences. Primarily, there has been an attempt to link

physical characteristics with cognitive and cultural features. The most troubling of such endeavors has been the persistent historical attempt to construct âblack,â or âNegro,â as a descriptor synonymous with inferiority and a lesser evolved human species. Although this attempt was initially done as a ruse to justify the economic motives and ease the consciences of colonizers and slave traders and owners, it soon became a normative belief system designed to demonstrate and perpetuate the superiority of the white race. If the intent was to subjugate and separate the races, however, it was not achieved. Blacks have participated in European societies far longer than in the Americas. By the mid-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in fact, blacks had settled in countries throughout the world.[1] And yet the equation of blackness with inferiority continues to be institutionalized in educational settings in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. An early example was the U.S. governmentâs decision to denote black slaves as property and not as persons. This commodification was followed by policies that made it illegal for blacks to learn to read and write. Freemanâs thesis is that this exploitation has been linked to the lack of educational opportunities that continue to exist today. To put it another way, the denial of access to education was the instrument by which dominant groups accomplished the exploitation of blacks. But the interconnectedness of the races meant that whites also had to be inducted into the whiteness of pedagogy and curriculum in schools.

Freeman reviews incidents when dominant whites tried to eradicate minority cultures altogether–for example, Aboriginals in Australia, Native Americans in U.S. boarding schools, and black Britons in England. As a historical source for the American experience, she relies on the sixth edition of *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* by James Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss Jr. (1988). More current examples include the stratification in education opportunities based on skin color and the importance of social and cultural capital in regard to schooling. Freeman argues that the practice of black exploitation through education remains the case globally.

In chapter 2, Jillian C. Ford and Kaman Bobb discuss the continuing battle for African self worth that can be found in classrooms across âall segments of Africa and the African Diasporaâ (p. 13). While whites and Asians benefit from the assumptions of their success that are made by teachers, black students who are bused to white schools from black neighborhoods and refugee students who attend schools in the United States enjoy support only from their neighborhoods. Metaphorically, the busing of students to schools in predominantly white neighborhoods is a kind of diaspora–a scattering–that denies blacks and refugees the psychological support of their communities that they need to fully succeed as students. The example used is the M-to-M (Majority-to-Minority) program in DeKalb County (Atlanta), Georgia. This program offered black students the opportunity to attend predominantly white schools to foster integration and to get a better education. Due to resistance to busing, however, the program was discontinued after the 1999 to 2000 school year. Other recent examples can be found in Seattle, Washington, and Louisville, Kentucky. In 2007, the U.S. Supreme Court further restricted how public school systems may attain racial diversity by rejecting school integration plans for those cities. The same is true for Charlotte/Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. When the 1971 ruling in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools* was overturned by the U.S. Fourth District Court of Appeals in 1997, the city and county began to resegregate. Previously, Charlotte-Mecklenburg had been considered a model district of racial desegregation based on the use of busing. One might argue that it is inadequate to compare these vastly different scenarios, which are complicated by language barriers. In addition, many of the factors discussed by the authors could be attributed to social class rather than race.

The editors also note conflicts over immigration prompted by state governments that have passed laws to allow police to stop anyone they suspect of being an illegal immigrant. The editors cite the following as three of the most significant challenges faced by these students in the context of such legislation: the sense of being disappointed by oneâs home community (the necessity to leave due to failing schools and a familyâs lack of cultural capital); the long journey and incipient separation from home to school (spending hours on the bus); and the academic and cultural dissonance that often accompany education in the studentsâ new settings. For refugee students, however, the cultural message that it is imperative to get an education serves as a link between the disparate communities of school, neighborhood, and country of origin. There is some room for optimism: despite the odds, some students are able to recognize their own human potential and the role of education to their eventual success.

Part 2 looks at educational populations globally. There are case studies of blacks and people from the Caribbean in Esmeraldas, Ecuador, Canada, the United Kingdom, Portugal, France, Germany, Russia, and Ireland; of black teachers in Sweden; and Pasifika Communities in Aotearoa/New Zealand. As is often the case

with an edited volume, the contents of this section are somewhat uneven. For example, chapter 5, âBlack Students, Schooling, and Education in the United Kingdom,â is a scant four pages in length (not including the references). Some chapters follow a more prescribed outline that includes a historical context, cultural/identity issues, and discriminatory educational practices or experiences. Chapters that reflect a research agenda tend to use qualitative rather than quantitative methods.

In the conclusion, the editors suggest a move away from research reflecting a Black Nationalist Model: âa particularized model where African descendants in each country focus on their challenges in isolation.â Instead they propose a Black Internationalist Model âthat builds on the collective comparative experiences of Black populations globally.â This model is the suggested paradigm for âbetter understanding educational challenges confronting Black populations globallyâ (p. 186).

The editors subscribe to the views of labor economist Martin Carnoy that the labor market–and productivity–suffers from the underutilization of a nationâs citizens due to racism (*Faded Dreams: The Politics and Economics of Race in America* [1994]). There is no question that, in an increasingly global society, a new approach to the education of minorities and refugees is necessary. Although it would seem from the preface that the editors are trying to achieve a comparative method, a discussion of its application in the context of this study of the African diaspora is missing in the volume. For example, the editors cite two works by historians that discuss blacks in the diaspora but not the limited educational opportunities they face. One such book, *Crossing Boundaries: Comparative History of Black People in Diaspora*, by Darlene Clark Hine and Jacqueline McLeod and published in 1999, follows a similar outline by using a comparative approach. Hine and McLeod also suggest a new paradigm for research in this area. They also refer to the book *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities* (1999), by Isidore Okpewho, Carole Boyce Davies, and Ali Al'Amin Mazrui, as an exploration of the historical influence of the diaspora on the identities and experiences of black people. I would have liked to see the volume strengthened with a description of how the comparative method is being applied to this volume. Without that, the individual chapters read more like case studies than a comparative examination of the educational difficulties and marginalization of African students in the diaspora. In other words, it reads more like the Black Nationalist Model disavowed by the authors than the proposed Black Internationalist Model. This caveat aside, historians of education are likely to find the book interesting for placing education front and center within the complex milieu of the diaspora. Freemanâs reliance on the work of James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (1988), reminds historians that when it comes to colonization the results are the same no matter the geography.

Note

[1]. See the chapter âCrazy Soupâ in Charles C. Mann, *1493: Uncovering the New World Columbus Created* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011). It offers an enlightening view of sixteenth-century cultural and racial fusion.

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