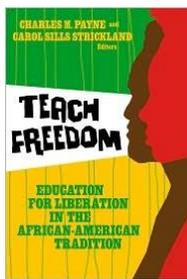


Professional Book Review

Payne, C., & Strickland, C. S., (Eds.). (2008). *Teach Freedom: Education for Liberation in the African American Tradition*. New York: Teachers College Press. 288 pp., ISBN: 978-0807748725 (pbk). \$29.95.

Reviewed by Brian Williams, Georgia State University, U. S. A.



In 2005, Civil Rights activist and former Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee organizer Robert Moses launched a campaign aimed at engaging the country in a conversation concerning the creation of a constitutional amendment that would guarantee a quality public school education for every child in the United States of America. The idea is rooted in traditions that define education as a civil right necessary for participation in the development, transformation, and maintenance of a democratic nation. Furthermore, it challenges current notions that characterize schools as institutional structures responsible for training and credentialing the majority of students for service in the labor market. The book, *Teach Freedom: Education for Liberation in the African American Tradition*, examines the historical and contemporary movements that undergird Moses' idea.

The book, edited by Charles M. Payne and Carol Sills Strickland, is a part of the Teaching for Social Justice Series edited by William Ayers and Therese Quinn. In this anthology, various scholars, activists, and scholar-activists uncover the unique history of liberatory education in the African American community. The book is presented in four parts which highlight different time periods in African American history after the Civil War. Articles in the first part of the book, entitled "Projecting Imagination beyond Circumstance," examine the role of the school and the African American teacher in the education of African Americans in post-Civil War America. While brief, the articles in the part of the book provide the reader with a foundational understanding of the African American community's intimate connection to education for liberation and philosophy which undergirded this type of education.

Part two, entitled "Building the Army of Democracy," introduces the reader to the Citizenship Schools and the work of fundamental women educators like Ella Baker and Septima Clark in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The Citizenship Schools served as a subversive form of resistance to systems of oppression related to voting and democratic participation. The schools educated thousands of African Americans and dramatically increased the number of registered African American voters in the South at the time.

The contributions in part three, "The 1960s: From Freedom to Liberation," focus on the modes of liberatory education that occurred during the 1960s and 1970s. Authors

writing in this section examine the role of the Freedom Schools, the inspired movements and progressive pedagogy of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the emergence of the “Black Power” and the Black Panther Party Schools. These articles build on the book’s theme of education as a political enterprise. They also provide valuable insight into the philosophical differences that distinguished SNCC’s Freedom School from the Black Panther Party Schools. Regardless of the educational movement, however, the authors in the section underscore the value of “movement schooling” in the development of African American students who were aware of the nation’s oppressive structures and prepared to critique them.

The fourth and final section of the book, “Sankofa: Looking Back to Look Forward – Contemporary Expressions of Education for Liberation,” examines contemporary models of liberatory education that are rooted in the African American tradition. The nine articles found in this chapter examine the complex ways in which today’s educator-activists are using the lessons of the past to address the modern needs of the African American community. Each of the examples in this section of the book offers evidence of the resilience of this educational tradition over time. The programs explored in this section include the Sunflower County Freedom Project and the Children’s Defense Fund Freedom Schools.

Teach Freedom is valuable reminder of education’s potential to serve the needs of oppressed people and inspire movements for social justice and active civic engagement. The book offers a much needed counter-narrative to the standardization movement that currently drives educational policy and practice in the United States. This narrative is made even more powerful by the organization of the articles along a historical timeline. By doing this, the book displaces the myth that liberation-inspired educational movements occurred in a disconnected fashion during distinct moments in the nation’s history. Instead, the reader is able to clearly trace the evolution of ideas from Reconstruction to the modern day as well as connect today’s educational movements to those that came before. In effect, it replaces questions regarding *the presence of* educational movements in history with questions regarding *the various models of* educational movements in history. In this way, the book inspires readers to consider the various ways that they might continue to enact education for liberation.